

REINTRODUCTION OF GIRAFFE TO ANGOLA'S YONA NATIONAL PARK

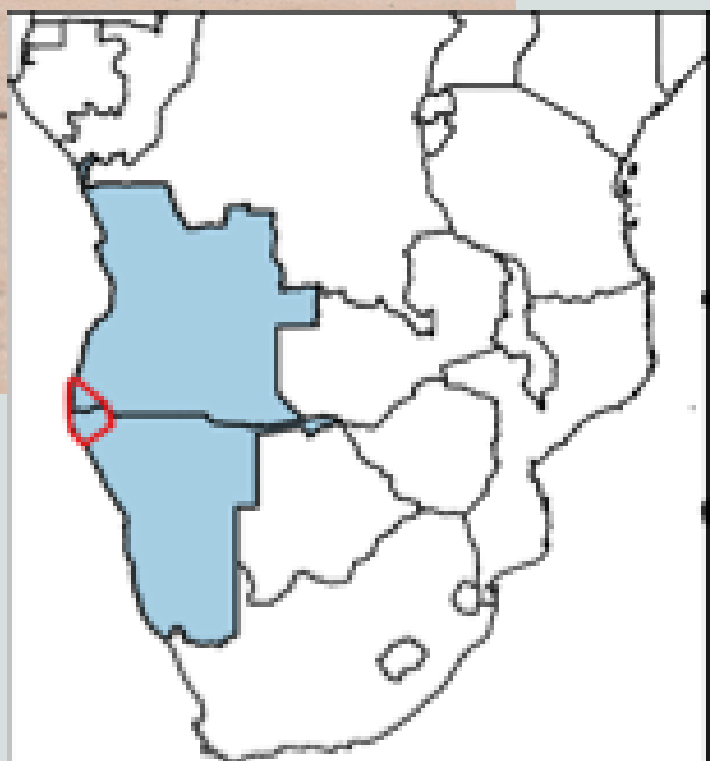


Figure 1: Location of the Iona National Park.

BACKGROUND

Angola has 162,642 square kilometres of protected areas, representing 13% of the national territory, including national and regional parks and integral and partial nature reserves (Lusa, 2018).

Four decades of civil war in Angola, which began after independence from Portugal in 1975, have devastated the country (Green, 2023). The conversion of forests to agricultural land, mining and unsustainable logging practices led to a massive decline in wildlife populations and the local extinction of species (Burca, 2023).

AUTHOR

Lia Silva (2015055)

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INTRODUCTION

The reintroduction of species is an important tool for the conservation of biodiversity and consists of the deliberate release of an organism in a place that belongs to its original range and from which it has disappeared for anthropogenic or natural reasons (ICUN,2013).

It is extremely important that the causes responsible for the local extinction of the species (e.g., hunting pressure, war, deforestation) no longer exist or have at least been mitigated (GCF,2023).

The adaptation of habitat suitability and availability to the needs of the species is crucial for feasibility and design (AP, 2023).

OBJECTIVE

Prior to the operation, a thorough feasibility study was carried out by a Namibian student (GCF, 2023). Various factors were assessed, including the initial population, the suitability of the habitat, the human dimension, the risks during and after the operation and financial feasibility (AP, 2023).

In addition, African Parks conducted a survey of communities in and around the Iona National Park to assess local community perceptions of the proposed giraffe translocation. This revealed that most Iona residents are very open to the presence of giraffes in the park and the associated tourism potential.

METHODS

After their capture in Namibia, the 14 giraffes, seven males and seven females, embarked on the long journey from a private game farm in central Namibia to their historical range in Angola. The journey took 36 hours in a specially constructed lorry from July 3 to 5, 2023 (GCF, 2023).

Each young giraffe was up to 3.5 metres tall. Before they were loaded onto the lorry, some of the animals were given solar-powered GPS satellite ear tags for post-translocation monitoring (GCF, 2023).

DISCUSSION

ECOLOGY AND FORAGE

As part of this habitat suitability, special fieldwork was carried out in Iona NP, using GPS satellite collar technology to determine the home ranges, seasonal and monthly distances and movements of giraffes in north-western Namibia.

Giraffes occur in a variety of habitats ranging from forests, open savannah, woodland and bushland to arid deserts (Hamutenya, 2021).

Giraffes are selective megaherbivores and feed on over 100 plant species depending on their range. As with most herbivores, the foraging capacity of giraffes depends on the available biomass in an area and the abundance of other herbivores with which they could compete (Parker, 2008).

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Bezuidenhout et al. (2010) found that if giraffes are frequently introduced to new habitats, they can easily adapt and do not significantly affect other herbivores.

No studies have investigated the potential forage availability for giraffes in Iona NP (Hamutenya, 2021).

In order to make recommendations regarding the suitability of Iona NP for future giraffe reintroduction, the feasibility study aimed to conduct a habitat survey to assess and quantify the potential availability of it based on a similar environment in north-western Namibia (Green, 2023).

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The communities living in Iona NP and its fringes were positive about the potential reintroduction of giraffes, with 98% of respondents agreeing (Hamutenya, 2021). The positive attitude towards coexistence with wildlife in Iona NP, which understandably favours herbivores over carnivores, underscores the people's symbiotic relationship with their environment. There have been a few negative comments, mainly from farmers.

Small-scale wildlife poaching does occur, so any reintroduced giraffe would need to be monitored, especially if it comes close to villages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Long-term monitoring of the vegetation and primary productivity of the Iona National Park should be carried out after the giraffe reintroduction. Post-monitoring of the resettled giraffes to monitor their socialisation, behaviour and return home. Construction of a translocation boma in Iona NP to temporarily habituate the giraffes (Hamutenya, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The feasibility study concludes that Iona NP is suitable for giraffe reintroduction from an ecological and social perspective. A few points and assessments should be considered for better protection of wildlife.

Conservation planners and managers can use the key findings of this study to drive such an initiative forward. They are a valuable contribution to the future of giraffe reintroduction in southwest Angola (Hamutenya, 2021).

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