

REPORT ON THE COLLARING AND SAMPLING OF TARGETED SPECIES IN GORONGOSA

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Carlos Lopes Pereira*, Markus Hofmeyr**, Ken Maggs**, Don English**,

*Veterinary Epidemiology Unit- Animal Health Department, Mozambique

**Veterinary Wildlife Services South African National Parks, South Africa

1. Objectives

Collaring and sampling of several species was carried out with two main objectives in all species except bush pig and warthog: (i) to follow up the herds (ii) to collect blood and tissues samples for several studies. The bush pig and warthogs were immobilized for the purpose of obtaining samples for African Swine Fever and genetic studies.

2. Results

2.1 Gorongosa Mountain visit : We found a poacher with a muzzle loader rifle, simango monkeys and cane rats. He had been in the forests for 3 days and was very friendly (he gave us a demonstration on how the rifle was fired). It was very apparent that this person was poaching for sustenance and it would take some very strong dedication and commitment of both local and national authorities to convince persons like this to stop poaching and rather protect the mountain.

We were all again struck with the incredible beauty and superb biodiversity of the mountain. Its value for the surrounding area, the country and in fact the world should be marketed aggressively so that the mountain gets the deserved protection that it should have. We found numerous signs of poaching and slash and burn agriculture indicating how serious the threat to the mountain is. Urgent and decisive action will be necessary to protect and conserve what is left on the mountain of the natural vegetation and wildlife.

Fig.1 Raging Fires in Gorongosa mountain and local poacher



Fig. 2 Destruction of the pristine Gorongosa forest by slash and burn.



2.2 Immobilization, collaring and sampling

2.2.1 **Elephants** : Two satellite collars (E1 with radio frequency 150.420 and E2 with radio frequency 150.320) were fitted to two adult cows from different herds. The collaring went very well and both animals got up without problems and were also seen with their respective herds the next day. All staff involved in the exercise could take part and were able to see the whole process completed. The movement of these elephant will hopefully provide some important information of where they are moving. This will be important as elephant under these conditions will only move where they feel safe and have access to water. Areas where they do not move to either have no water or have some activity (usually poaching) that deters them from going there. Approximately 200 elephant were seen during our stay in different groups near and SE of Lake Urema.

Fig. 3 Elephants immobilized for collaring and sampling.



2.2.2. **Sable female**, which was part of a herd of approx. 30 sables on the open flats south of Lake Urema, was collared at first light on 5 November. This was a normal radio collar that was fitted with frequency 150.500. She recovered well and moved off. Late that afternoon it was attempted to locate this animal again but due to the coaxial cable not included in the radio tracking pack we could not find the collared animal again. The herd was seen again but the collared animal could not be located due to poor light.

2.2.3 A **buffalo** cow was collared later that morning after a fairly extensive search for the herd that has been seen in an area similar to the elephants. This cow is part of the remaining approx. 40 buffalo in Gorongosa (down from 15000+ from former times when the park was one of the most biodiverse and densely populated in Africa!). The collaring went very well and the VHF frequency of this satellite collar is: 150.110.

2.2.4 A female **zebra** was collared during the middle of the day. Unfortunately the environmental conditions were not good but we feared not finding this small group of zebra (only 5 seen) and we quickly worked to get the collar on. The frequency of the zebra collar (normal VHF collar) is: 150.700. She recovered well and moved off without problems.

2.2.5 A **bush pig** to get samples for the African Swine Fever Welcome research project. This animal proved to be difficult to immobilize from the air due to the size and behavior. Since it took sometime to immobilize, and the bush pig got heated up it was transported to a shade for recovery.

2.2.6 Two warthogs were immobilized from the ground to get samples for the African Swine Fever Welcome research project.

The collaring exercise planned and implemented went a lot better than what we anticipated and we managed to get everything done in an afternoon and a day. The information obtained from the collared animals will be very valuable to determine movements and population increases or decreases of the groups in which these animals are found. We look forward to receiving data on the movements of these animals in the near future.

Fig. 4. Sable immobilized and collared (left) The remaining buffalo herd at Gorongosa (right)



Fig. 5 Buffalo (left) and Zebra (right) immobilized for collaring and sampling.



Fig. 6 . Bush pig being transported to a shaded area (left) and warthog sampling.



3. Other animals observed

Sable in reasonable numbers and widespread in various locations in the park

Lichtenstein's Hartebeest were seen in fair numbers mainly on and around the floodplains south of Lake Urema.

Bushbuck, warthog, bush pig, oribi, waterbuck and reedbuck were seen in large numbers around Lake Urema. Lesser numbers of impala were seen next to the flood plains. Only a few Nyala were spotted from the helicopter.

With a protection most wildlife species should recover very quickly due to the incredibly fertile and water rich plains and surrounding woodlands. It is **not impossible** to visualize vast numbers of animals in two or 3 decades if the right level and dedication of protection is implemented in the park and on the Mountain.

Bird watching is superb wherever you go and that alone is a tourist attraction, which can be used to attract numerous visitors.

The community interface and controlling poaching still remain the biggest challenge on the ground for the immediate efforts to protect this magnificent area. We look forward to seeing the sanctuary completed and hopefully assist with introducing some of the animals into the area. The release of selected groups of animals into the main park will be the yard stick against which the success of the sanctuary project will be measured.

Aknowlegements

Carr foundation, specially Gregory Carr, David Falkner and Laura Brown
Ministry of Tourism, National Directorate of Conservation, Mozambique
Ministry of Agriculture, National Directorate of Livestock, Mozambique
South African National Parks, South Africa
Chitengo Administration and staff.