



CONSER

Projects

African passion

WHERE: Namibia and South Africa
 WHEN: Ongoing



THE Australian Geographic Society's conservation and scientific work isn't restricted to Australian soil. Field biologists Kerryn and John Carter, from Edenhope in western Victoria, are living in Namibia and working for the University of Queensland, studying communication between female giraffes.

Giraffe populations worldwide have declined by about 30 per cent in the past decade, to less than 100,000. "These long-lived animals [20–25 years in the wild] retain information about their food, water and environment through the generations, and we wondered how this information is communicated," Kerryn says.

Although their research will continue until 2011, the pair has already seen female giraffes swap social groups, and hope to determine if there are patterns to this behaviour. They have also watched mothers leave their calves with other females so they can go to a waterhole (dangerous places for youngsters due to predation). "We have seen some creche groups in our study site whereby one or two adult females will have up to 10 juvenile giraffes in their care," Kerryn says. In the absence of a creche, mothers will leave their babies in the bushes some distance away from a waterhole. "We are still mystified as to how a mother can tell its calf to stay behind in the protective bushes, while she goes to the waterhole for up to an hour," she says.

Kerryn described one night in Etosha National Park when they were woken up by a hair-raising roar about 50 m from their tent, as a lion walked along the camp's perimeter fence. "We were frozen in our sleeping-bags, petrified that the lion would enter the camp through the gaps in the fence," Kerryn says. "For 10 long minutes the lion roared as it moved along the fence."

Meanwhile, in South Africa, another Victorian, Roan Plotz, is conducting vital research supported by the AG Society to learn more about black rhinoceros reproduction. "Black rhino numbers have declined from 65,000 in the 1960s to less than 3500 today and continue to decline," he says. "Projects such as this one are important to Australia's black rhino conservation efforts as it holds the largest captive-bred population outside of Africa."

» Giraffe research in Etosha National Park, Namibia, is among the international projects supported by the Society.



» Victorian conservationist Kerryn Carter checks the behaviour of an African long-neck.



» Roan Plotz works on saving the black rhinoceros.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY KERRYN AND JOHN CARTER; GETTY; LIANA S. CAHILL



VATION

