

## **CBSG Europe 2008**

### **Giraffe PHVA Niger**

From 29 September till 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2008 a Population and Habitat Viability Assessment (PHVA) was conducted for the last population of West-African giraffes in Niger in the Sahel region of Africa. Kristin Leus from CBSG Europe and Arnaud Desbiez from CBSG Brazil were invited by the “Programme Régional Parc W” of ECOPAS (Ecosystèmes Protégés en Afrique Soudano-Sahélienne) and the Government of Niger to facilitate the PHVA and build a Vortex computer simulation model.

Although in the 19th century the distribution area of the West-African giraffe subspecies (*Giraffa camelopardalis peralta*) still covered a large part of the Sahel region from Senegal to Lake Chad, currently the last surviving representatives live in the “zone of the giraffes”, an area of about 84.000 ha in the Kouré region of Niger (about 60 km to the east of the capital Niamey) which is not classified as a protected area and contains roughly 30 villages with a population of more than 45.000 inhabitants. Threats include among others degradation and destruction of their habitat for firewood collection and agricultural activities, poaching, giraffe-human conflicts due to damages to crops and disease risk through close contact with domestic livestock. Various governmental and non-governmental organisations have already succeeded to bring back the subspecies from an all time low of less than 50 individuals in 1996, to currently about 200 individuals, through actions such as human development programmes, generation of funds and employment for local communities through ecotourism, education and awareness projects and yearly monitoring of the giraffe population with the aid of photo identification. The PHVA was one of the final steps in an ongoing process of developing a “Long Term Conservation Strategy for the Giraffe in Niger”. A total of 35 participants representing all the stakeholder groups worked in five different working groups: 1. agriculture and biodiversity, 2. use of trees/wood and the habitat of “brousse tigré” in particular, 3. science and potential catastrophes for the giraffe population, 4. valorisation of the giraffe and environmental awareness, and 5. harmonisation of all interventions on behalf of the giraffe, its habitat and the human inhabitants. After a plenary session to identify from each of the participants what they felt were the most important challenges for the survival of the giraffes, each working group further explored the finer issues of the challenges in their field and identified goals and actions that they felt were needed to tackle these problems. In addition, during and after the workshop a Vortex computer simulation model was constructed to test the viability of the population under three different circumstances: 1. Status quo, 2. Continued loss of habitat, 3. Management actions undertaken to mitigate the effects of the highest severity catastrophes and/or to create a metapopulation. Both the results of the multistakeholder working groups, and the results of the computer model will serve as the basis for the creation of long term action plan for the Niger giraffe, planned in 2009.