

Looking after the health of a very old plant

Investigating correlates of plant health of *Welwitschia mirabilis* in the central Namib Desert

Titus Shuuya

Gobabeb has initiated a study to investigate correlates of plant health of *Welwitschia mirabilis* (Welwitschia) in the central Namib Desert. Welwitschia is endemic to the central and northern Namib. It is a long-lived plant that has adapted to extreme hot conditions, with limited water availability among other factors. However, in spite of these extreme and challenging conditions, it has been able to grow, reproduce and persist here for thousands of years.

Now it is predicted that a number of accumulating anthropogenic drivers resulting from several developments, including mining, might threaten the survival of the Welwitschia. This study will provide information that can be used to understand Welwitschia biology and conservation and devise better management practices that will ensure the continued survival of this iconic plant.

The study is being led by Dr. Theo Wassenaar of Gobabeb and Ms. Barbara Curtis of the Polytechnic of Namibia with Mr. Titus Shuuya as MSc student. The project is conducted in collaboration with Prof. Gert Krüger and Dr. Jacques Berner of the Northwest

University of South Africa, Prof. Kathy Jacobson of Grinnell College, USA, Dr Mary Seely and Dr. Joh Henschel as associates of Gobabeb, and Ms. Michele Kilbourn Louw and Ms. Angie Kanandjembo of Swakop Uranium.

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Masters student and Gobabeb staff member Titus Shuuya investigating a male Welwitschia, part of a population that is close to Gobabeb and that will be an undisturbed comparison for populations near the Husab Mine.

