

Giraffe study may help protect the species

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A U.S. scientist says her research into giraffe dung might hold the secret to protecting the species for years to come.

University of Central Florida doctoral student Jennifer Fewster is studying giraffe excrement at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., in an effort to determine what the animals eat in the wild and how to improve the nutrition of those in captivity.

Fewster says her research could potentially help conserve a wide array of herbivores, including endangered ones.

"I find it fascinating, but I forget people find it odd," Fewster said. "It's not the most glamorous work. In fact, it can be a bit boring at times but the goal is worthwhile and it has applications for the wild and for the better care and nutrition of animals in captivity."

Although zookeepers know generally what giraffes eat, little is known about what else giraffes in the wild eat and the food's nutritional value.

Disney has provided the University of Central Florida with funding for Fewster's research and also supports at least three other university students working on research in areas such as animal behavior and reproduction.

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