

# AFRICA'S GIRAFFE

## Conservation Guide

Thank you to Cindy Armstrong, Billy Dodson and William Walden for providing the images and map.

### Conservation Status

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species<sup>14</sup> currently recognises one species of giraffe and nine subspecies. However, as indicated in the Species & Numbers section, new findings suggest otherwise, and this updated information is currently under the review of a panel of experts convened under the IUCN SSC Giraffe & Okapi Specialist Group.

#### The IUCN Red List

Vulnerable (VU): as one species (*Giraffa camelopardalis*)  
Endangered (2008): *G. c. peralta* (West African giraffe)  
Endangered (2010): *G. c. rothschildi* (Rothschild's giraffe – now subsumed into Nubian giraffe *G. c. camelopardalis*)

Three decades ago, in the 1980s, the total number of giraffe in Africa was estimated at approximately 155,000 individuals. The IUCN SSC Giraffe & Okapi Specialist Group and GCF estimate the current Africa-wide giraffe population to be approximately 100,000 individuals. This estimate includes all four species and their subspecies.

Current giraffe numbers are less than a quarter of African elephant in the wild, with small and/or rapidly declining populations in West, Central and East Africa. In order to curb their decline we need to act now, before it is too late.

### Taxonomy & Populations

**Class:** Mammalia (Mammals)

**Order:** Artiodactyla

**Family:** Giraffidae

#### Genus, Species and Subspecies:

***Giraffa camelopardalis***  
*G. c. antiquorum*  
*G. c. camelopardalis*  
*G. c. peralta*

***Giraffa giraffa***  
*G. g. angolensis*  
*G. g. giraffa*

***Giraffa reticulata***

***Giraffa tippelskirchi***

### Conservation Significance

Giraffe are agents of habitat and landscape alteration. Together with other large browsers such as elephant and rhino, they open up areas and promote the growth of new forage for themselves and other wildlife. On a finer scale, moderate giraffe browsing stimulates shoot production in various flora species, and giraffe are valuable pollinators and seed dispersers throughout the landscape. For example, in areas protected from giraffe and other mega-herbivores, a decline of some *Acacia* species can be observed. This has a carry-on effect on other wildlife.

However, there are not only mutually beneficial relationships between giraffe and many flora, but also with some animals, such as the oxpecker. These birds have the important job of removing parasitic ticks which often infest giraffe and their wounds.

### Economic Significance

The giraffe's primary economic benefit is its evolutionary uniqueness. Images of the unmistakable stature and evocative nature of giraffe are regularly used in advertising around the world to sell anything from children's apparel to wine, or the promotion of social media fads and the FIFA World Cup.

However, it is their role in marketing of African tourism that is their biggest economic asset. Safari operators throughout the world use giraffe to sell Africa as an exciting and unique holiday destination. As undoubtedly the most iconic animal in Africa, giraffe are perfect ambassadors for their home continent.

Unlike the 'Big Five' (buffalo, elephant, leopard, lion and rhino), giraffe are not a significant source of revenue for legal hunting in Africa.

### Management Priorities

- Securing viable – and protecting existing – habitats for giraffe.
- Promoting the importance of giraffe conservation in Africa and internationally by increasing awareness of their plight.
- Supporting targeted and innovative conservation research to better understand giraffe ecology, physiology, taxonomy, conservation and management.
- Establishing and maintaining an understanding of the current status of all giraffe species and their subspecies to support their conservation and management.
- Identifying key threats to giraffe, and innovative ways to mitigate these.
- Developing the skills and capacity of individuals and organisations, in particular those in giraffe-range-state countries, dedicated to securing the future of giraffe.
- Providing and supporting a platform and forum for giraffe related research, conservation and management discussion.
- Promoting and supporting giraffe conservation initiatives by working collaboratively with African governments, local communities and interested stakeholders to develop a sustainable future for both people and wildlife.

### Threats

**The combined impacts of habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, habitat degradation, human population growth, poaching (illegal hunting), disease, war and civil unrest threaten the remaining giraffe numbers and their distribution throughout Africa.**

Many threats to giraffe arise from conflict and competition (direct, indirect or perceived) for resources with humans and their domestic livestock. Habitat degradation and destruction is caused by an increasing human demand for agricultural land, pastoralism, uncontrolled timber and fuel-wood harvesting. Human-giraffe conflict can develop due to crop loss and damage, and potential disease transmission can result from habitat sharing with domestic livestock. Sadly, giraffe are sometimes also struck by vehicles and trains.

Habitat loss and fragmentation caused by human population expansion and encroachment limits gene flow and the exchange of genetic diversity. These threats further restrict the evolutionary potential of giraffe and create the danger of potential inbreeding.

### Limiting Factors

#### Scientific

Our scientific understanding of giraffe has been limited due to a lack of targeted and long-term conservation efforts, as well as a lack of giraffe ecology, physiology and taxonomy research. Until recently, reliable historical and current data of giraffe and their ranges did not exist.

But now, excitingly, giraffe conservation and research efforts throughout Africa and the world have increased, providing invaluable data and findings which, together, can inform and support the conservation and management of giraffe in the wild, as well as in captivity.

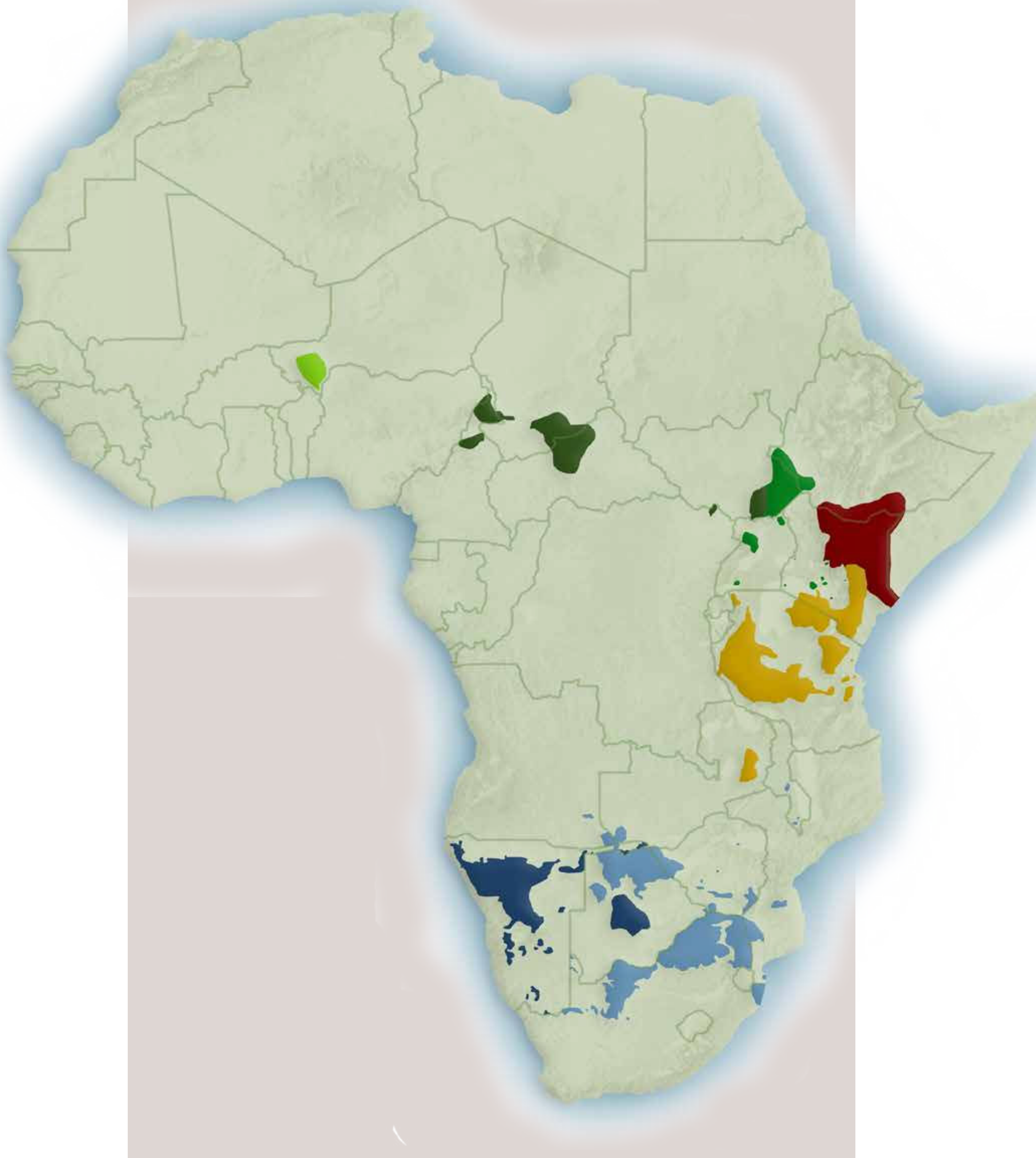
#### Ecological








Giraffe populations are, in part, regulated by natural mortality caused by predation. This factor varies between populations throughout the continent. Although lion are widely recognised as a threat to giraffe, particularly for younger animals, giraffe are also predated upon by leopard, hyena, cheetah, crocodile, and of course, humans.

Although not well recorded, malnutrition, due to limited seasonal food quality and quantity and disease such as anthrax and rinderpest, can play a key role in limiting giraffe population growth.

#### Social

Giraffe compete with many other charismatic creatures for conservation support. The common misconception that giraffe are abundant is exacerbated by a lack of education and awareness, as well as an outdated IUCN conservation status. The extent of poaching (illegal hunting) and its threat to giraffe population numbers and dynamics is poorly understood, and it should be considered a major threat to some key giraffe populations in Africa.



 Masai giraffe	<b><i>Giraffa tippelskirchi</i></b>	<b>32,500</b>
<b>Northern giraffe</b>	<b><i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i></b>	<b>5,195</b>
 Kordofan giraffe	<i>G. c. antiquorum</i>	2,000
 Nubian giraffe	<i>G. c. camelopardalis</i>	2,645
 West African giraffe	<i>G. c. peralta</i>	550
 Reticulated giraffe	<b><i>Giraffa reticulata</i></b>	<b>8,700</b>
<b>Southern giraffe</b>	<b><i>Giraffa giraffa</i></b>	<b>52,050</b>
 Angolan giraffe	<i>G. g. angolensis</i>	13,050
 South African giraffe	<i>G. g. giraffa</i>	39,000



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VU



The Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) is dedicated to securing a future for all giraffe in Africa. GCF is the only NGO in the world that concentrates solely on the conservation and management of giraffe in the wild throughout Africa.

[giraffeconservation.org](http://giraffeconservation.org)