

# AFRICA'S GIRAFFE

## Conservation Guide

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

### Conservation Status

Based on new scientific evidence, the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) and its partners now recognise four distinct species of giraffe: Masai (*Giraffa tippelskirchi*), Northern (*G. camelopardalis*), Reticulated (*G. reticulata*) and Southern (*G. giraffa*) giraffe. With the exception of the Reticulated giraffe, all species consist of two or three subspecies.

However, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ currently still recognises one species of giraffe and nine subspecies. As one species (*Giraffa camelopardalis*), giraffe are currently classified as *Vulnerable* (VU) on the IUCN Red List. Eight of the nine IUCN recognised subspecies have been assessed separately on the IUCN Red List. The Kordofan and Nubian subspecies are now listed as *Critically Endangered* (CR); the Masai and Reticulated subspecies as *Endangered* (EN); the Luangwa (formerly Thornicroft's) and West African subspecies as *Vulnerable* (VU); the Rothschild's subspecies as *Near Threatened* (NT); and the Angolan subspecies as *Least Concern* (LC). Only the South African subspecies has not yet been evaluated (NE) separately for the IUCN Red List.

In the 1980s, giraffe numbers in Africa were estimated at more than 155,000 individuals. Today, GCF estimates the current Africa-wide giraffe population at approximately 117,000 individuals. This is a drop by almost 30%, which is a slightly less bleak outlook than previously portrayed in the 2016 IUCN Red List assessment, which estimated giraffe at less than 100,000 individuals. This updated information is based on a combination of improved data and actual increases in numbers. Unfortunately, in some areas traditionally regarded as prime giraffe habitat, numbers have seemingly dropped by up to 95%.

While the latest population increase news is positive and the fact that some populations have stabilised or are increasing, overall numbers are still relatively low and the time is right to act now!

### 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*

*G. t. thornicrofti*  
*G. t. tippelskirchi*

### Conservation Significance

Giraffe are habitat and landscape changers. Together with other large browsers, such as elephant and black rhino, they help to open up vegetated areas and promote the growth of new forage for themselves and other wildlife.

On a finer scale, giraffe browsing stimulates shoot production in various plant species and often functions as a valuable pollinator. For example, in areas protected from giraffe and other mega-herbivores, a decline of some *Senegalia* and *Vachellia* species can be observed. This subsequently affects the availability of food sources for other wildlife.

Giraffe also provide an essential natural landscape service by eating plant seeds and dispersing them in new areas through their droppings. The seeds' potential to germinate is enhanced once they have passed through the giraffe's digestive tract, and they are deposited with their own little fertiliser power-packs!

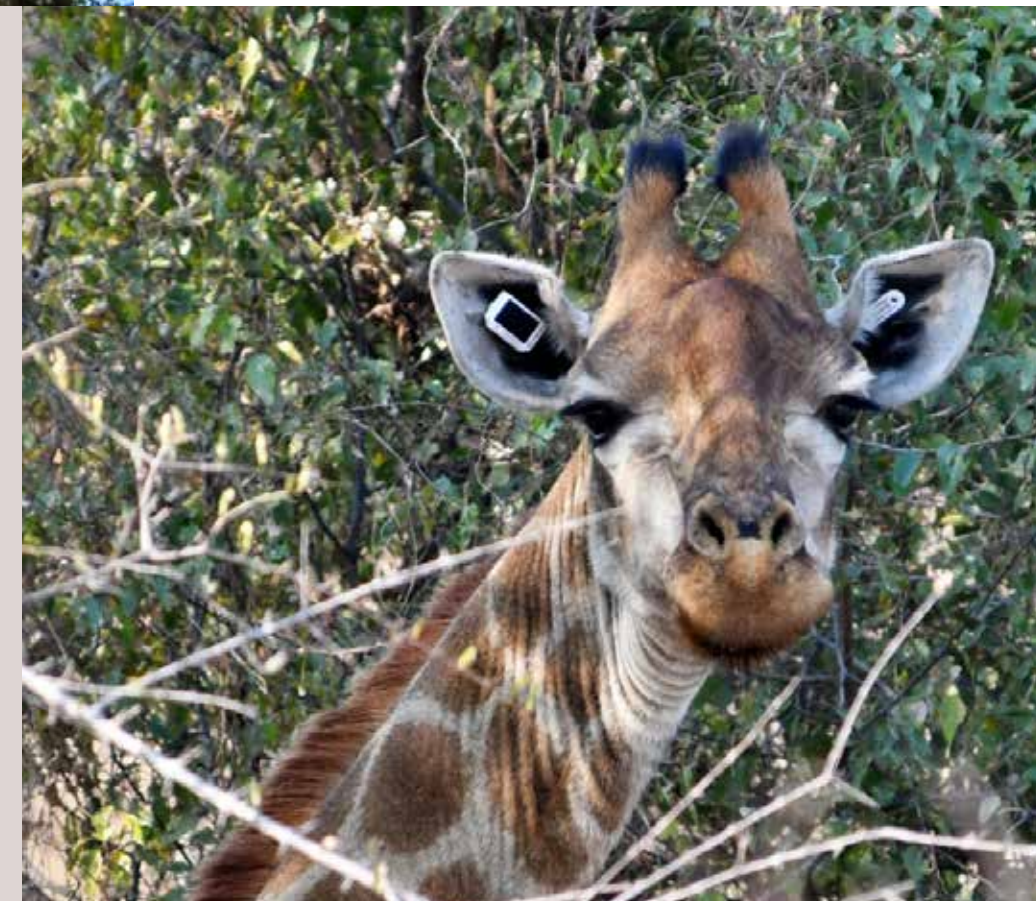
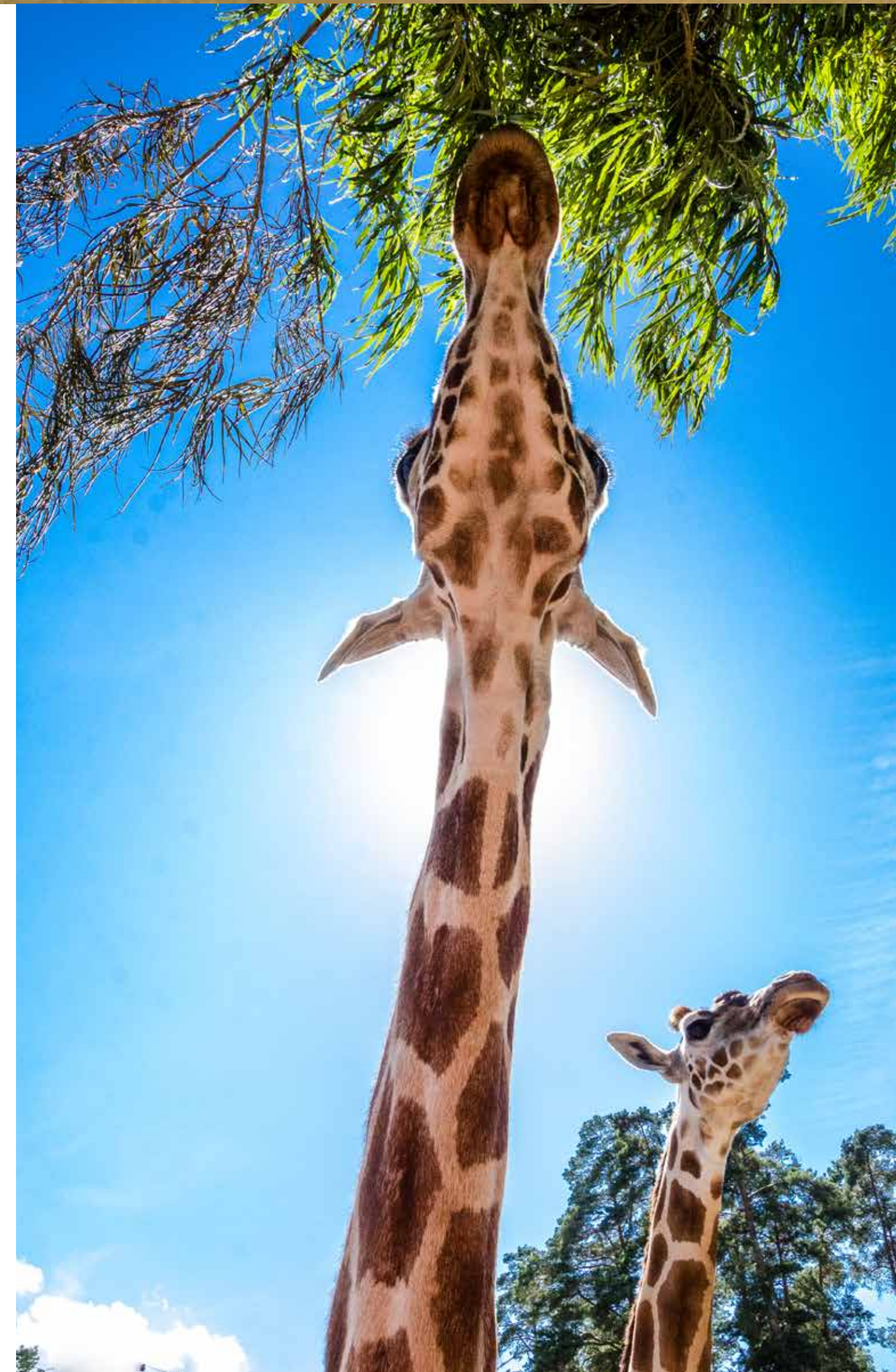
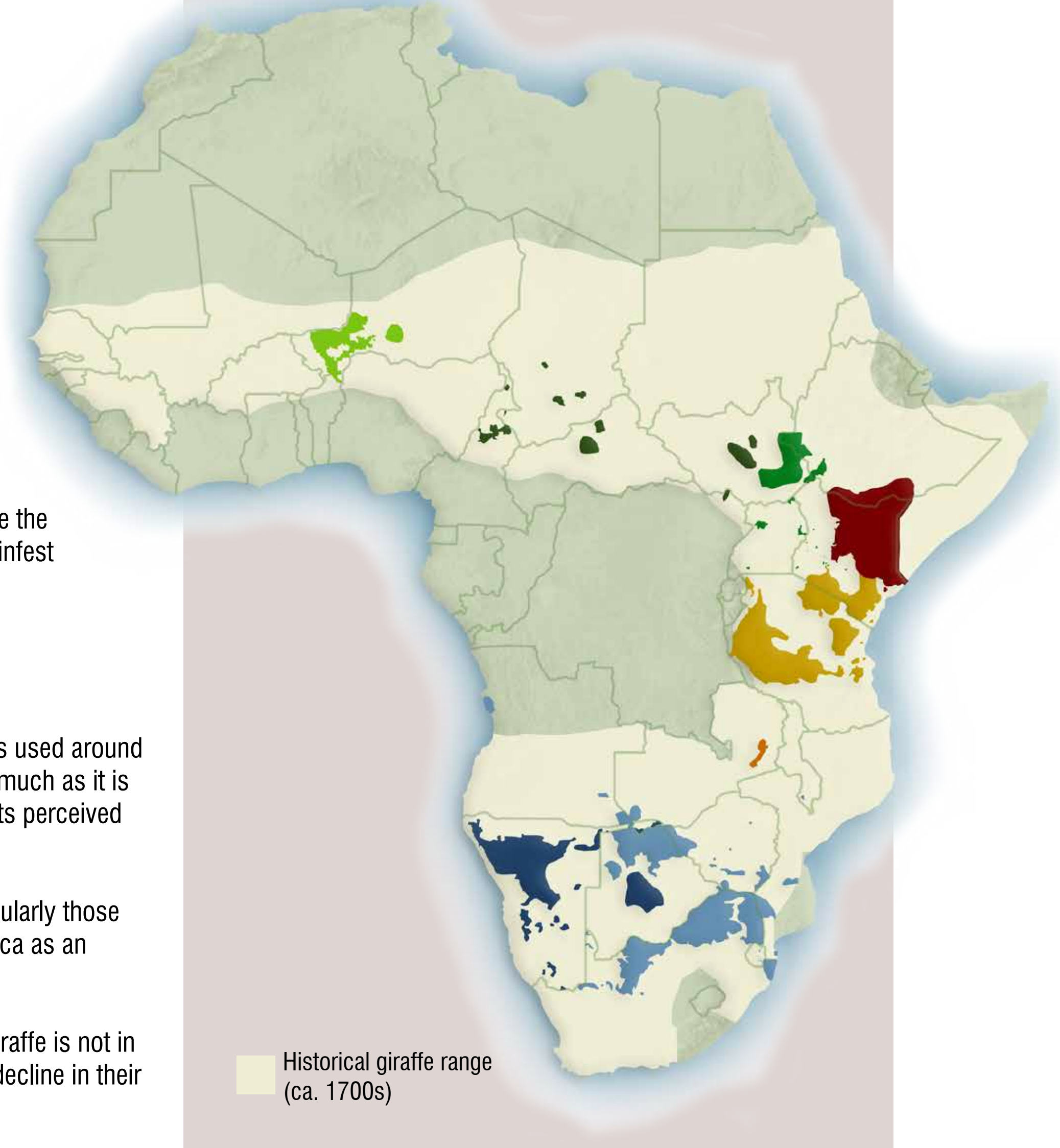
Mutually beneficial relationships also exist between giraffe and some animals, especially the oxpecker. These birds have the important job of assisting giraffe, and others, to groom hard-to-reach places. By removing parasitic ticks, which often infest giraffe, the oxpeckers benefit from a valuable food source.

### Economic Significance

The giraffe's significance lies in its evolutionary uniqueness. Its silhouette, which is both unmistakable and evocative, is used around the world as a symbol to market a wide range of commercial and non-commercial products, events and initiatives. As much as it is a symbol for Africa, the giraffe is also widely used for other purposes because of its uniquely recognisable shape and its perceived gentle nature. Giraffe are much-loved by most.

In Africa, it is the tangible economic benefits generated by tourism that interest and motivate many stakeholders, particularly those who live and work amongst wildlife. Many travel operators and safari brochures include the giraffe when marketing Africa as an exciting travel destination, and giraffe are a must-see on every African safari-goer's wish list.

Unlike the 'Big Five' (African savanna elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo and black rhino) and a handful of ungulates, the giraffe is not in demand as a trophy. Revenue from legal hunting and the trade in body parts is therefore limited and has not caused a decline in their numbers.



### Limiting Factors

#### Scientific

The existence of long-term studies, reliable historical and current data, and targeted conservation research concerning giraffe is limited. This lack of information remains one of the most limiting factors when it comes to improving their conservation and management, as well as their ecology and taxonomy. However, exciting advances are being made.

GCF's collaborative Africa-wide genetic research has unravelled the mystery surrounding the giraffe's taxonomy, providing invaluable information for all four species' future conservation and management. Some of the current projects and studies in Africa are the first ever to be undertaken of giraffe in their natural environments.

#### Ecological

Giraffe populations naturally fluctuate due to mortality through predation and disease, and this varies from population to population. Lion are giraffe's biggest natural predator. In some populations, lion are responsible for the mortality of more than 50% of calves in their first year. Giraffe are less vulnerable to leopard and spotted hyena and to an even lesser extent to cheetah and crocodile. Population growth is also limited by drought, which results in poor food quality and quantity and malnutrition, as well as diseases such as anthrax and, historically, rinderpest. Additionally, the poaching (illegal hunting) of giraffe by humans poses a threat throughout certain areas of their range.

#### Social

When it comes to conservation, giraffe compete with more charismatic species such as African savanna elephant and rhinos, particularly for funding. It is estimated that the current giraffe population is only just over a third of the African savanna elephant's. This discrepancy, and little-known fact by most in the world, leads many people to assume that giraffe are everywhere and do not face a conservation crisis – but the almost 30% population decline over the past three and a half decades clearly demonstrates that it does.

### 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 science 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 conservation, science and management discussion
- Promoting and supporting giraffe conservation initiatives by working collaboratively with African governments, local communities, NGOs and interested stakeholders to develop a sustainable future for both people and wildlife

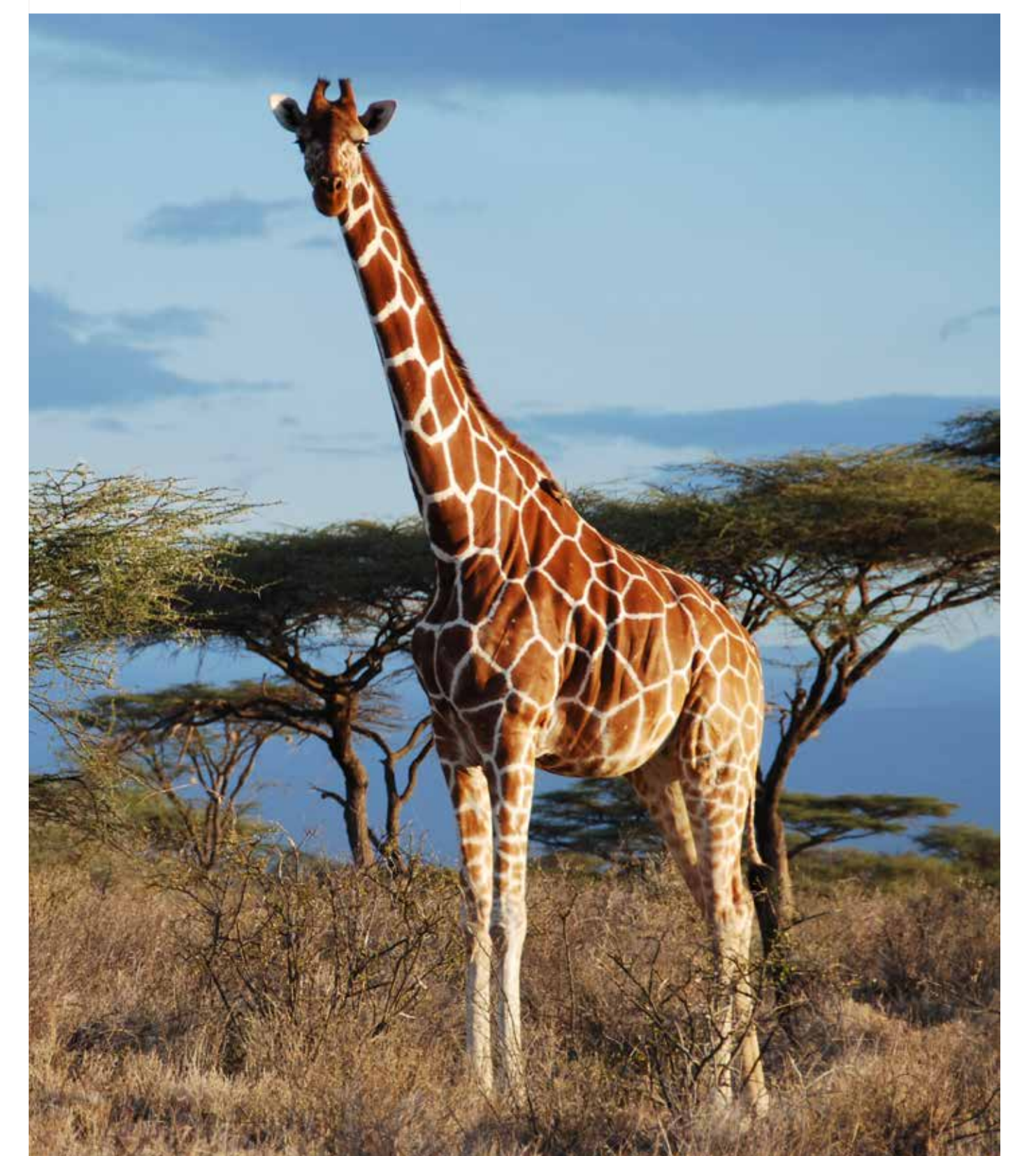
### Threats

The combined impacts of habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, habitat degradation, human population growth, poaching (illegal hunting), disease, and war and civil unrest threaten the remaining giraffe and their distribution throughout Africa. Many threats arise from direct, indirect or perceived competition for resources with humans and their livestock. Habitat degradation and loss is caused by an increasing human demand for agricultural land, pastoralism, and unsustainable timber and fuel-wood harvesting.

Human-giraffe conflict can develop due to crop loss and damage, and potential disease transmission can result from sharing habitats with domestic livestock. The fragmentation and loss of giraffe habitat caused by human encroachment and infrastructure development often leads to the isolation of giraffe populations which, in turn, can limit the flow and exchange of genetic diversity between populations.

The interbreeding of giraffe species poses a potential threat as it could result in the loss of the genetic uniqueness of each individual species. Although there is essentially no evidence of species naturally interbreeding in the wild, the translocation of one species of giraffe to an area already occupied by a different species could create the risk of hybridisation – a situation that is already occurring in South Africa.

<b>Masai giraffe</b>	<i>Giraffa tippelskirchi</i>	<b>45,400</b>
Luangwa giraffe	<i>G. t. thornicrofti</i>	650
Masai giraffe	<i>G. t. tippelskirchi</i>	44,750
<b>Northern giraffe</b>	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	<b>5,900</b>
Kordofan giraffe	<i>G. c. antiquorum</i>	2,300
Nubian giraffe	<i>G. c. camelopardalis</i>	3,000
West African giraffe	<i>G. c. peralta</i>	600
<b>Reticulated giraffe</b>	<i>Giraffa reticulata</i>	<b>15,950</b>
<b>Southern giraffe</b>	<i>Giraffa giraffa</i>	<b>49,850</b>
Angolan giraffe	<i>G. g. angolensis</i>	20,200
South African giraffe	<i>G. g. giraffa</i>	29,650



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)