Conservation Status

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

However, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (2016) still recognizes one species of giraffe and four subspecies. As one species (Giraffa camelopardalis), giraffe are currently classified as Vulnerable (VU) in the IUCN Red List. Despite the rise in the number of recognized subspecies, they have not been updated on the IUCN Red List. The Krueger and Natal subspecies in South Africa have now been listed as Critically Endangered (CR) due to their declining numbers. The Reticulated giraffe's West African subspecies is Vulnerable (VU) and the Tippelskirch's subspecies is Endangered (EN). The northern and southern subspecies are listed as Least Concern (LC).

In the 1980s, giraffe numbers in Africa were estimated at more than 155,000 individuals. Today, GCF estimates the current African giraffe population at approximately 117,000 individuals. This is based on a 20% decline, which is a slight increase from recent studies suggesting a 30% decline. This is the first time that the population estimate has been updated to reflect the current number of giraffes.

The existence of long-term studies, reliable historical data, and targeted conservation research concerning giraffes is limited. This lack of information creates one of the main 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 subspecies' future conservation and management. Some of the current projects and studies in Africa are the first ever to be undertaken of giraffes 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 predators. In some populations, lions are responsible for the mortality of more than 50% of calves in their first year. Giraffe are less vulnerable to leopards and hyena and are even less vulnerable to cheetah and crocodile. Population growth is also limited by drought, which results in poor food quality and thereby limited giraffe growth. Population growth is also limited by drought, which results in poor food quality and thereby limited giraffe growth. Population growth is also limited by drought, which results in poor food quality and thereby limited giraffe growth. Population growth is also limited by drought, which results in poor food quality and thereby limited giraffe growth. Population growth is also limited by drought, which results in poor food quality and thereby limited giraffe growth. Management Priorities

• Securing viable – and protecting existing – habitats for giraffes
• 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 giraffes, and innovative ways to mitigate these threats
• Developing the skills and capacity of individuals and organizations in particular those in giraffe-range-state countries, dedicated to securing the giraffe population
• 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 local, distinct 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 habitat degradation often leads to the isolation of giraffe populations which, in turn, can limit the flow and exchange of genetic diversity between populations.

The introduction 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 hybridization of non-native species and giraffes in an area already occupied by a native species could create the risk of hybridization – a situation that is already occurring in South Africa.

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