

# Country Profile

## The State of Eritrea

### *Giraffe Conservation Status Report*



**Sub-region:** East Africa

#### General statistics

Size of country: 121,320 km<sup>2</sup>

Size of protected areas / percentage protected area coverage: 4.26%

#### (Sub)species

Nubian giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis camelopardalis*)

#### Conservation Status

##### IUCN Red List (IUCN 2012):

*Giraffa camelopardalis* (as a species) – Least concern

*Giraffa camelopardalis camelopardalis* – not assessed separately

##### In the State of Eritrea:

Extinct

#### Issues/threats

The State of Eritrea (referred to as Eritrea in this report) is located in the Horn of Africa and was historically known for its lush flora and an abundance of fauna, but today is characterised by sparse vegetation and wildlife populations that are almost non-existent (Tronvoll 1998). Various factors have contributed to environmental degradation in the country: population growth (or poorly planned population settlements), large-scale agricultural development, prolonged periods of war, severe droughts and the disintegration of traditional customs. All of these have created environmental constraints with far-reaching consequences for wildlife populations in Eritrea (Tesfagiorgis 2011; Naty 2002a; Coulthard 2001).

The greatest threat to wildlife in Eritrea has been the destruction and degradation of habitat. A rapidly growing population from the 1880s to the 1980s increased the demand for agricultural land, firewood and building materials (Tronvoll 1998). However, deforestation already became evident towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Tronvoll 1998).

The people in the Horn of Africa have been exposed to war and violence for the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tronvoll 1998). The Eritrean Liberation Struggle (1961-1991), followed by the Eritrea-Ethiopia border conflict (1998-2000), has had a cumulative negative impact on the natural resources of Eritrea (Tesfagiorgis 2011; Naty 2002b). During the times of unrest, armies exercised irresponsible consumption of ecological resources and inflicted irreparable damage on the environment (Tesfagiorgis 2011). In addition to the extensive use of woodlands for firewood and building of trenches and shelter, gunshots and air raids by the Ethiopian military often set fire to woodlands, resulting in further loss of habitat (Tesfagiorgis 2011; Naty 2002a).

The re-settlement of returnees and ex-combatants was later accompanied by the further clearing of woodland for farming and housing. With increased settlements, demand for firewood and charcoal also rose, thus contributing to ongoing habitat destruction (Naty 2002a,b).

The promotion and establishment of large-scale commercial agriculture in Eritrea further profoundly impacted the environment (Naty 2002a). Deforestation has been exacerbated by overgrazing and clearing of vegetative cover for commercial timber use and in search for better farming land (Tsfagiorgis 2011; Naty 2002a).

According to Naty (2002a), deterioration of the Eritrean environment can also be linked to the disintegration of traditional Kunama customs. Historically, traditions and customs of the local Eritrean population supported conservation values thus preventing over-exploitation of natural resources (Naty 2002a). The erosion of these customary practices encouraged individuals to utilise natural resources without any consideration for the norms and values of the others and society as whole (Naty 2002a).

The cumulative effects of all these factors have exerted severe pressure on wildlife populations in Eritrea (Tsfagiorgis 2011). Due to the continuous conflicts and excessive deforestation, the once abundant wildlife that previously populated the country has been vastly reduced and species such as buffalo, hippopotamus and giraffe have gone extinct (Tsfagiorgis 2011).

As in many other African countries, one of the greatest barriers to effective future conservation efforts is a lack of resources and capacity (trained personnel, systems and infrastructure) and lack of available data and information on the country's natural resources and biodiversity (Coulthard 2001).

### **Estimate population abundance and trends**

Records of giraffe in Ethiopia are mostly anecdotal, often contradicting, and fraught with uncertainty, especially regarding the (sub)species concerned.

#### **Historic**

According to East (1999), Nubian giraffe formerly occurred in the south-western savannas of Eritrea. Parkyns, an English discoverer who explored Abyssinia (which spanned a geographical area covered by present-day Eritrea and the northern half of Ethiopia) in the 1840s, described in his book 'Life in Abyssinia' the abundance of wildlife and made reference to the occurrence of giraffe in the region (Parkyns 1853).

Anecdotal sources among the Kunama people suggested the prevalence of giraffe in the Gash-Setit area in western Eritrea during recent historical times (Naty 2002a). In the past, the Kunama used to make shields from the hides of giraffe and rhino (Naty 2002a). By the mid 1960s, giraffe were reported to occur in the extreme south-western corner of Eritrea (ZSL 1965).

#### **Recent**

A review of the historical literature provided limited references to the presence of giraffe in Eritrea and it remains uncertain when giraffe in the country went extinct (Fennessy & Brown 2010; Naty 2002a; East 1999; Dagg 1962).

Naty (2002a) suggested the prevalence of giraffe in Gash-Setit as recent as a few decades ago, but did not give any further indication of the time period during which the species disappeared from the area.

#### **Current**

Nubian giraffe have been extirpated from their formal range in Eritrea and are now extinct in the country (Tsfagiorgis 2011; Fennessy & Brown 2010; Naty 2002a; East 1999).

## Acknowledgements

This study was financially supported by the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, Auckland Zoo, Blank Park Zoo and the Leiden Conservation Foundation.

## References

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## Citation

Marais, A.J., Fennessy, S. & Fennessy, J. 2014. *Country Profile: A rapid assessment of the giraffe conservation status in the State of Eritrea*. Giraffe Conservation Foundation, Windhoek, Namibia.

Map

