

NAMIBIA'S GIRAFFE

Conservation Guide

Thank you to Cindy Armstrong, Anja Denker and Micheal Viljoen for providing the images and map.

Local history of giraffe

Giraffe have ranged throughout the land that is now known as Namibia for many thousands of years. Evidence of this can be found in rock paintings and engravings of giraffe in the Erongo and Kunene Regions, suggesting that giraffe have been culturally and ceremonially important to these regions' indigenous communities for a long time. Although the first written record of giraffe was logged by Captain Hendrik Hop in 1761, who ventured north of the Orange River, giraffe distribution has been otherwise poorly documented. In recent history, Namibia's giraffe population was at its lowest in the mid-1990s. Since then, however, collaborative conservation efforts have successfully increased and expanded their range throughout the country.



Range and habitat

Giraffe occur throughout the dry savannah habitats of Namibia, including open grassland, woodland and scrubland, and along ephemeral rivers (rivers which are mostly dry and only flow for a short period of time after enough rain). They are browsers and feed on a wide variety of trees, including *Boscia*, *Combretum*, *Commiphora*, *Terminalia* and *Senegalia/Vachellia* (formerly *Acacia*) species.

Their range extends from west and south-west of the Etosha National Park, into the more arid habitats in the northern and central Namib Desert, where their movements are concentrated within and around the ephemeral riverbeds. Occasionally, giraffe will also move between these river systems. Giraffe also occur in the semi-arid Kalahari sandveld in north-eastern Namibia, as well as in the far eastern Zambezi Region, where they have been translocated to communal conservancies.

Giraffe are largely absent from densely populated areas that have been cleared of most of their woody vegetation, in particular the central northern regions, north of the Etosha National Park. However, throughout the rest of Namibia, giraffe co-exist with livestock on both commercial and communal farmland. Giraffe are absent from true desert areas, which are devoid of trees.

Over the last few decades, Angolan giraffe have been reintroduced to several protected, private and communal areas throughout the country, with the support of the Namibian Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism and other conservation organisations. Through these valuable conservation actions, giraffe have expanded in number and range. Compared with other giraffe in Africa, Angolan giraffe have the largest recorded home ranges (up to 11,600 km²), which is most likely due to their arid home environments. On average, male giraffe have larger home ranges than females. Female giraffe tend to be more sedentary and often prefer particular areas, while some solitary males roam far and wide between different groups.

Where do you find giraffe in Namibia?

Numerous populations of Angolan giraffe occur east, south, and west of the Etosha National Park (the country's giraffe stronghold) in formally protected areas such as the Bwabwata, Daan Viljoen, Hardap, Naute, Waterberg and Von Bach Game Parks, and in the Palmwag, Etendeka and Hobatere Concessions. Small populations are found in the Namib Naukluft National Park, Gondwana Canyon Park and Ai-Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. However, giraffe also occur widely on private land throughout the Khomas and Erongo Regions, including the Black Nossob, Kalkfeld, Khomas Hochland, Namatanga, Okawi and Waterberg Commercial Conservancies. Smaller numbers also live on private land in the south, including the NamibRand Nature Reserve, and Excelsior, Nomtsas and Neuhof farms. Healthy giraffe populations occur in the arid communal conservancy landscape in north-western Namibia (Kunene Region), including the Anabeb, Doro Inawas, Ehi-Rovipuka, //Huab, #Khoadi-//Hôas, Omatendeka, Orupembe, Puros, Sanitatas, Sesfontein, SorrisSorris and Torra Conservancies, and east and north-eastern Namibia, including the George Mukoya, Mashi, Mayuni, Mudumu, Nyae Nyae, Salambala and Sikunga Conservancies.



Taxonomy & Populations

Class: Mammalia (Mammals)

Order: Artiodactyla

Family: Giraffidae

Genus, Species and Subspecies:

Giraffa camelopardalis

G. c. antiquorum
G. c. camelopardalis
G. c. peralta

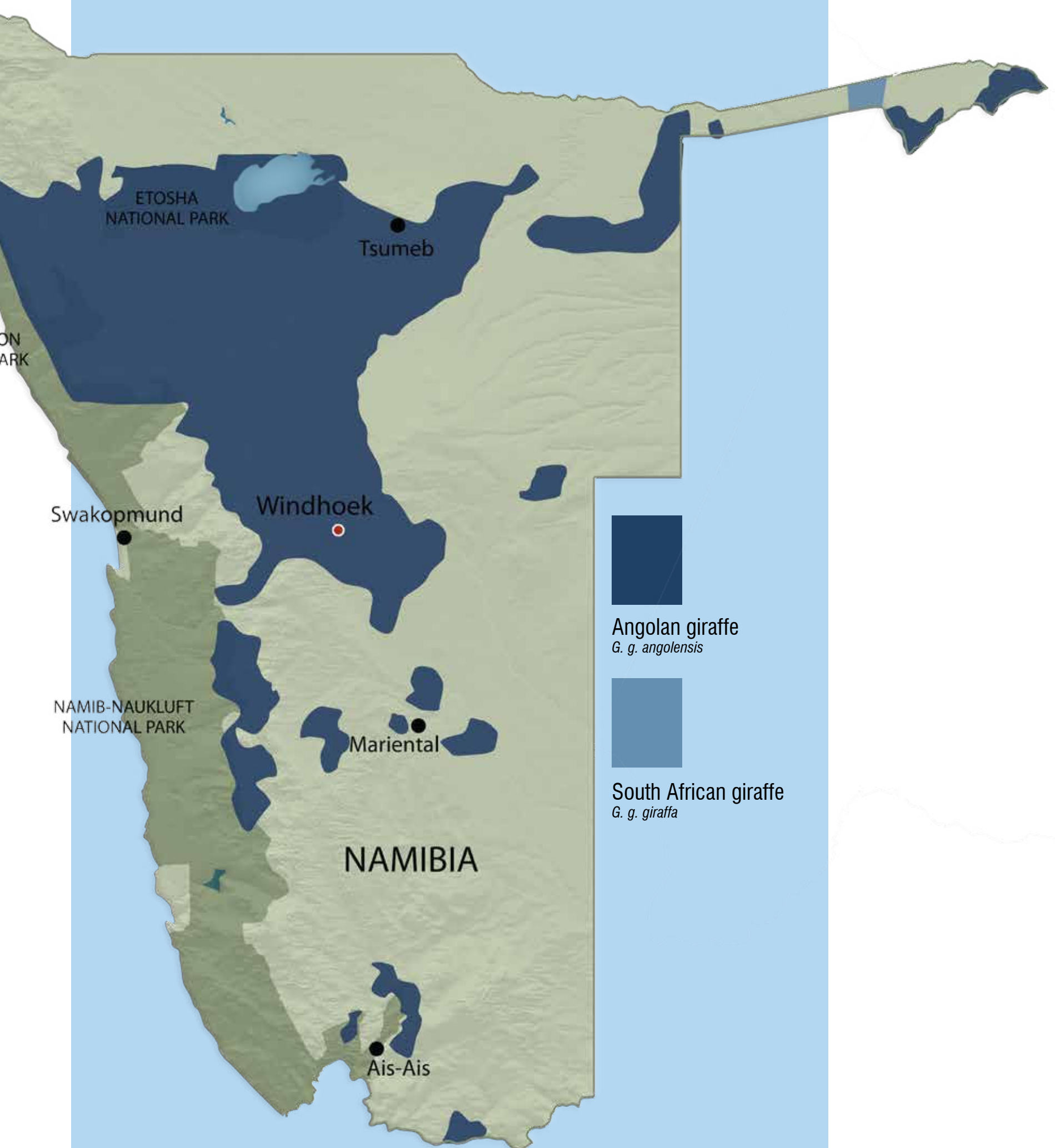
Giraffa giraffa

G. g. angolensis
G. g. giraffa

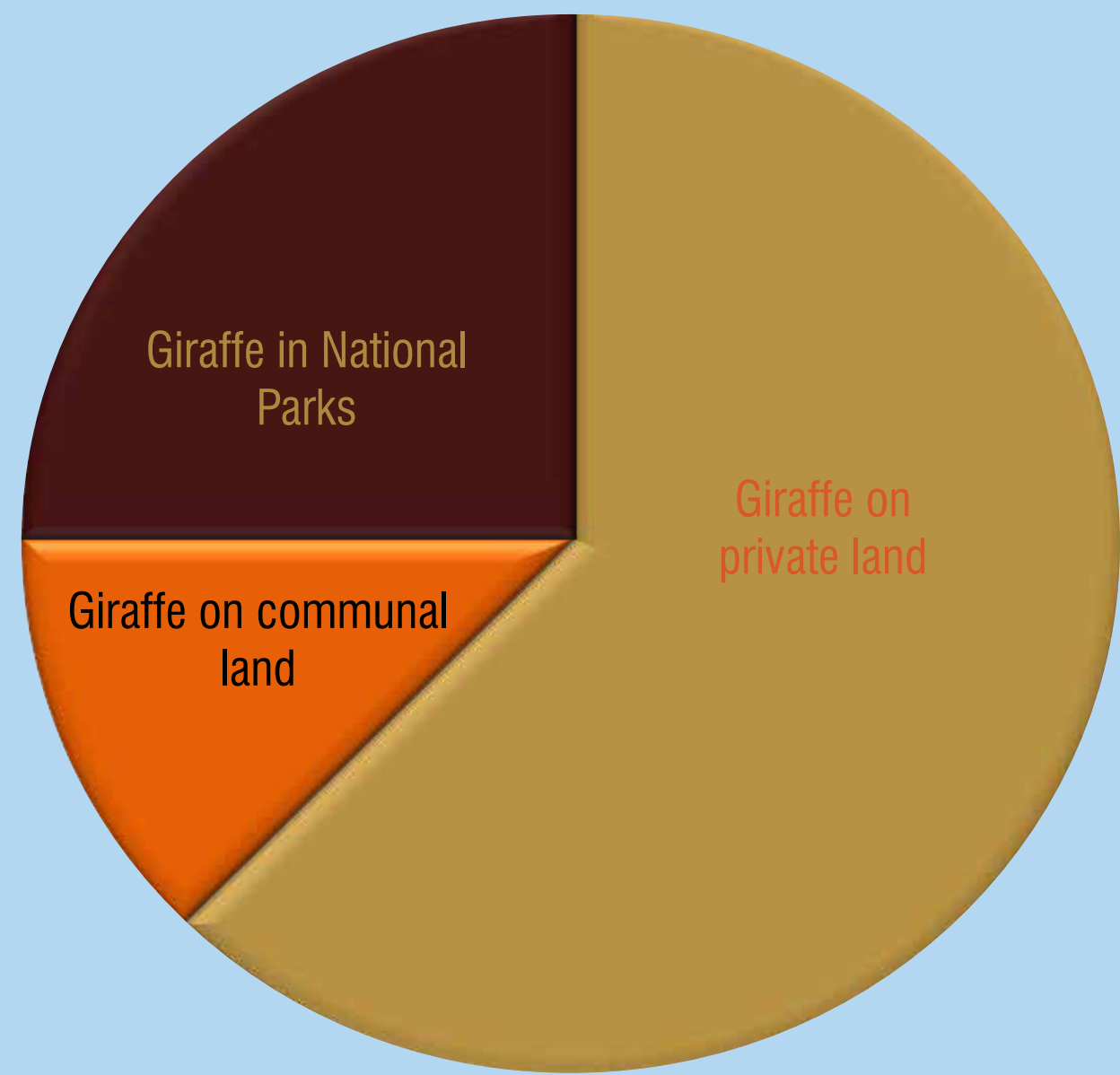
Giraffa reticulata

Giraffa tippelskirchi

G. t. thornicrofti
G. t. tippelskirchi



Giraffe in Namibia



Namibia is home to the Southern giraffe (*Giraffa giraffa*), which is one of the four distinct species of giraffe in Africa. Both subspecies, the Angolan (*G. g. angolensis*) and South African (*G. g. giraffa*) giraffe, occur in the country. Giraffe are widely spread throughout Namibia, occurring in national parks and on private and communal land. Giraffe population numbers and their distribution in Namibia have increased since the 1990s due to well-managed conservation efforts. Based on a recent survey by the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF), there are approximately 16,000 Angolan giraffe in Namibia: 10,000 on private land, 2,000 on communal land, and 4,000 in national parks. Additionally, approximately 250 South African giraffe occur in the Bwabwata National Park in the Zambezi Region.



Threats

The main threats to giraffe in Namibia include:

- Loss of suitable habitat** due to the clearing of land for crop cultivation, cutting of trees for charcoal, firewood and construction, and frequent human-induced bush fires.
- Climate change** may increase aridity in Namibia, which can lead to droughts, bushfires, and reduced giraffe forage availability.
- Fragmentation** of subpopulations due to the increase of infrastructure development, agriculture and the use of game-proof fencing.
- Risk of **hybridisation** with other subspecies may have already occurred due to the proximity and/or the extra-limital introduction of Angolan and South African giraffe, particularly in the Zambezi Region.
- Small-scale illegal hunting** and use is currently not a major threat as giraffe occur mainly in protected areas (public, private and communal). However, human population growth and increased droughts might change this over time.
- The risk of **local and international trade** in giraffe and their products is unknown.

Success story

Namibia is one of only a few countries in Africa with a steadily growing giraffe population, a success that can be attributed to the collaboration of many partners. As the first African country to incorporate the protection of the environment into its constitution, 40% of Namibia's land is managed in protected areas, communal and freehold conservancies, community forests, and tourism concessions. Namibia focuses on individual species, as well as on the bigger picture of biodiversity conservation, sustainability, ecosystem health and human wellbeing. Communal conservancies are one of Namibia's biggest successes. To date, 86 communal conservancies have been established, covering more than 20% of Namibia's land. One out of every four rural Namibians lives within these areas.

Communal conservancies rely on tourism and the sustainable utilisation of wildlife to simultaneously ensure the improvement of livelihoods and the protection of the environment. Giraffe have been successfully translocated and reintroduced into many communal conservancies from private and public land. The achievements of the Namibian government and communal conservancies signify the return of the environment to a healthier state for both the people and the wildlife living in the country. Private landowners have also contributed significantly to the conservation success of the country. Both photographic and sustainable use tourism have been identified as key reasons for the significant increase of wildlife throughout different land management systems in Namibia. As wildlife contributes to local Namibian livelihoods, it continues to be utilised in balance with agricultural land uses through effective management.



The Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) is dedicated to a sustainable future for all giraffe populations in the wild. 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