

# KENYA'S GIRAFFE

## Conservation Guide

Thank you to Farid Abdin, Cindy Armstrong, Poulomee Basu and Billy Dodson for providing the images and map.



### 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*

### Where do you find giraffe in Kenya?

Giraffe in Kenya occur within different land-management types, including national parks, game reserves, communal land, and private ranches, and are distributed across 27 of the 47 counties. Since the 1980s, the range of giraffe has decreased slightly, mainly due to land conversion and habitat loss.

**Masai giraffe** occur in the southern parts of Kenya: ranging from the Nairobi National Park southwards through the Athi Plains, and eastwards from the Masai Mara Ecosystem to the Amboseli Ecosystem, Chyulu Hills National Park, Taita Ranches, Tsavo East and West National Parks, and Shimba Hills National Reserve. The Naivasha private ranches and areas in and around the Hell's Gate National Park are home to the northernmost population of Masai giraffe.

**Reticulated giraffe** occur in the northern and northeastern parts of Kenya: they roam from the northern rangelands and conservancies, north through the Marsabit National Park, south through Samburu, Shaba and Buffalo Springs National Reserves, to various private lands in Laikipia. Important reticulated giraffe populations also extend east to communal areas in the Lamu and Garissa counties. More than 90% of Kenya's reticulated giraffe population is found outside government-managed protected areas.

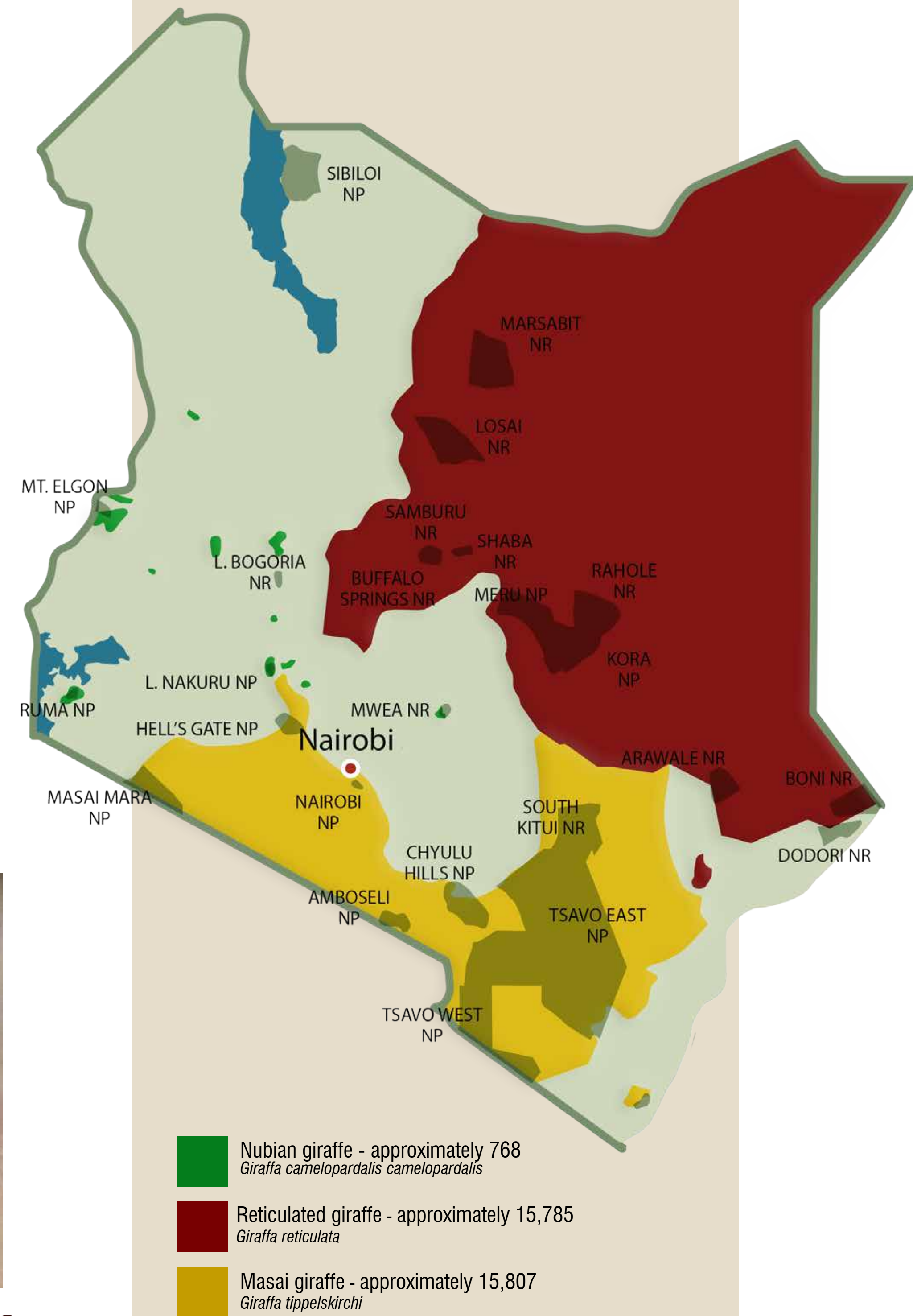
Since 1970, **Nubian giraffe** have been gradually reintroduced to part of their natural range, as well as to new areas in Kenya. From east to west, bigger populations occur in the Ruma National Park, Mwea National Reserve, Kigio Wildlife Conservancy, Soysambu Wildlife Conservancy, Lake Nakuru National Park, Nasalot National Reserve, and north in the Ruko Conservancy. Smaller populations are found in a few sanctuaries and on a few private farms: the Nguuni Sanctuary, Delta Crescent Sanctuary, Giraffe Centre, Rimoi National Reserve, Sergoit Farm, Tindress Farm, and Haller Park. Recently, the Nubian giraffe has disappeared from the Mt. Elgon National Park.

### Conservation Status

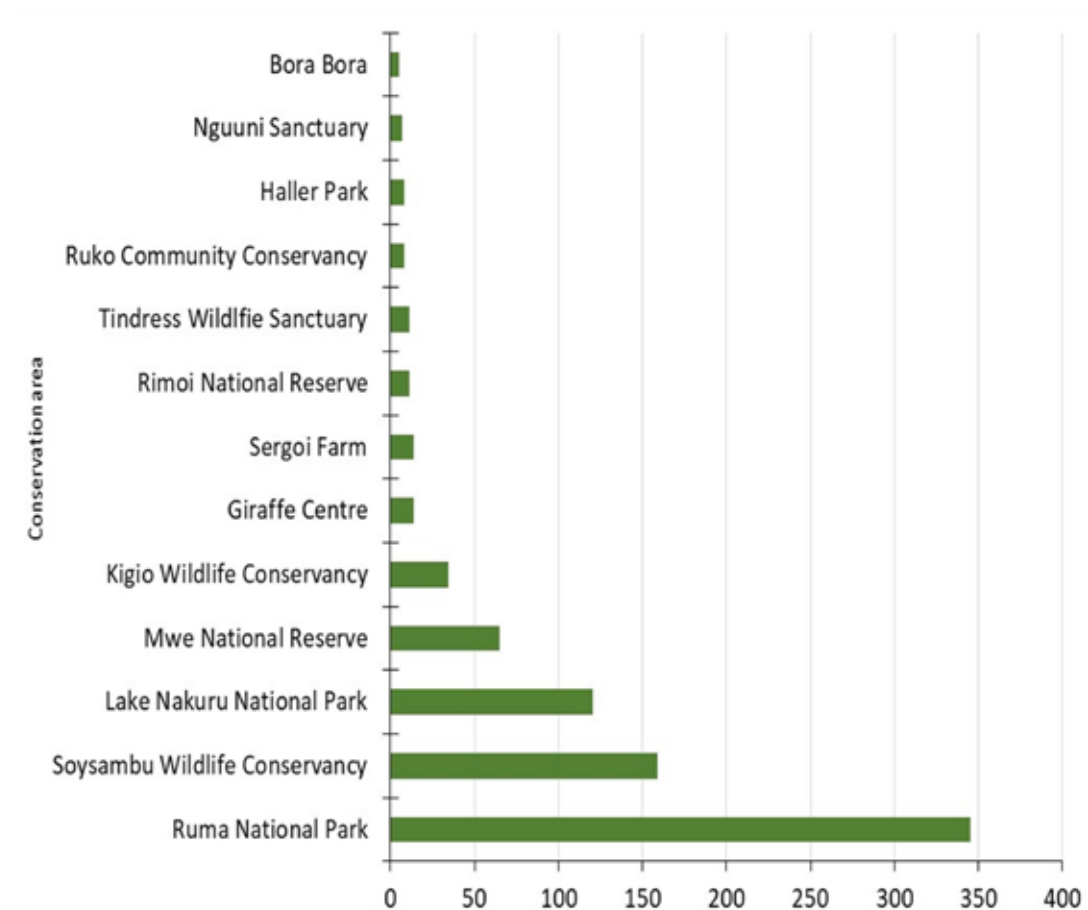
Until recently, giraffe were classified as one species with nine subspecies, occurring naturally in 21 countries in Africa. However, GCF's research has shown that there are indeed four distinct species of giraffe. Three of these species occur in Kenya: Masai giraffe (*Giraffa tippelskirchi*), reticulated giraffe (*G. reticulata*), and Nubian giraffe, which is one of the three subspecies of northern giraffe (*G. camelopardalis*). In Kenya, only the Nubian giraffe is listed as Endangered under the Wildlife Management and Conservation Act, 2013.

In the last 35 years, Masai giraffe have declined by more than 50%, while reticulated giraffe have experienced an even greater decline of approximately 60%. At the same time, Nubian giraffe have experienced an increase of approximately 40%, from 130 individuals in the 1970s to the current estimate of 768. The conservation success of the Nubian giraffe is a direct result of conservation actions such as translocations, range expansion, applied conservation science, and long-term monitoring.

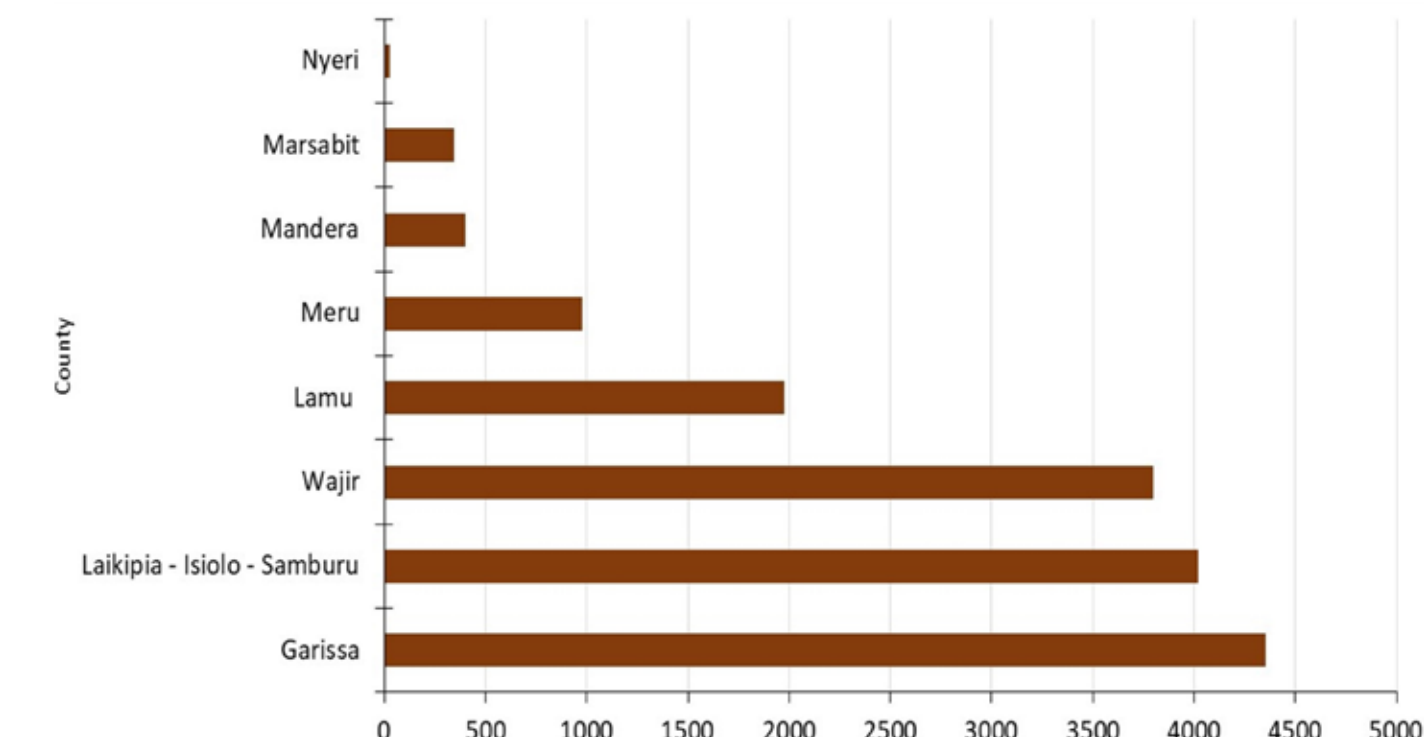
Today, reticulated giraffe are the most abundant giraffe species in Kenya (approximately 15,785 individuals), followed by Masai giraffe (approximately 15,807 individuals), and finally Nubian giraffe (only approximately 768 individuals). Overall, Kenya is a giraffe hotspot in East Africa, with an estimated giraffe population of 32,300, which accounts for approximately 28% of all the giraffe in Africa.



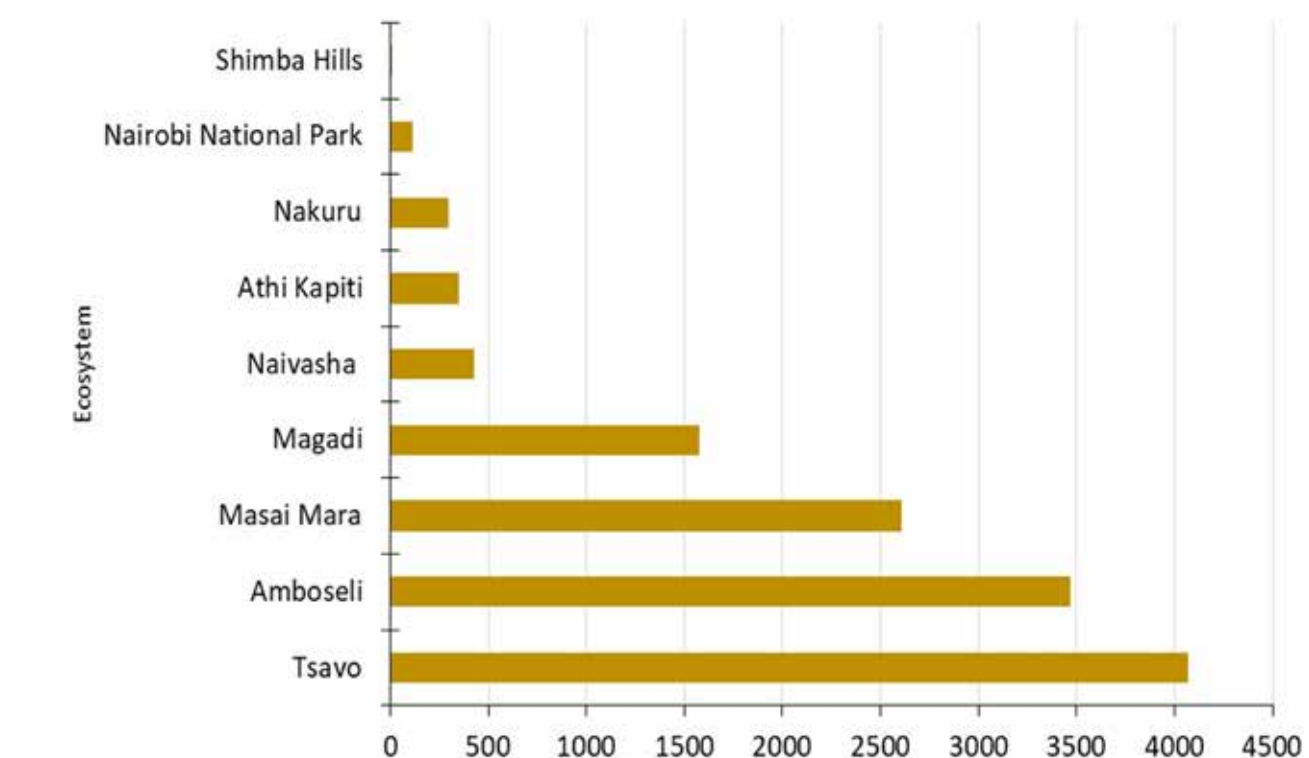
#### Nubian giraffe *G. c. camelopardalis*



#### Reticulated giraffe *Giraffa reticulata*



#### Masai giraffe *Giraffa tippelskirchi*

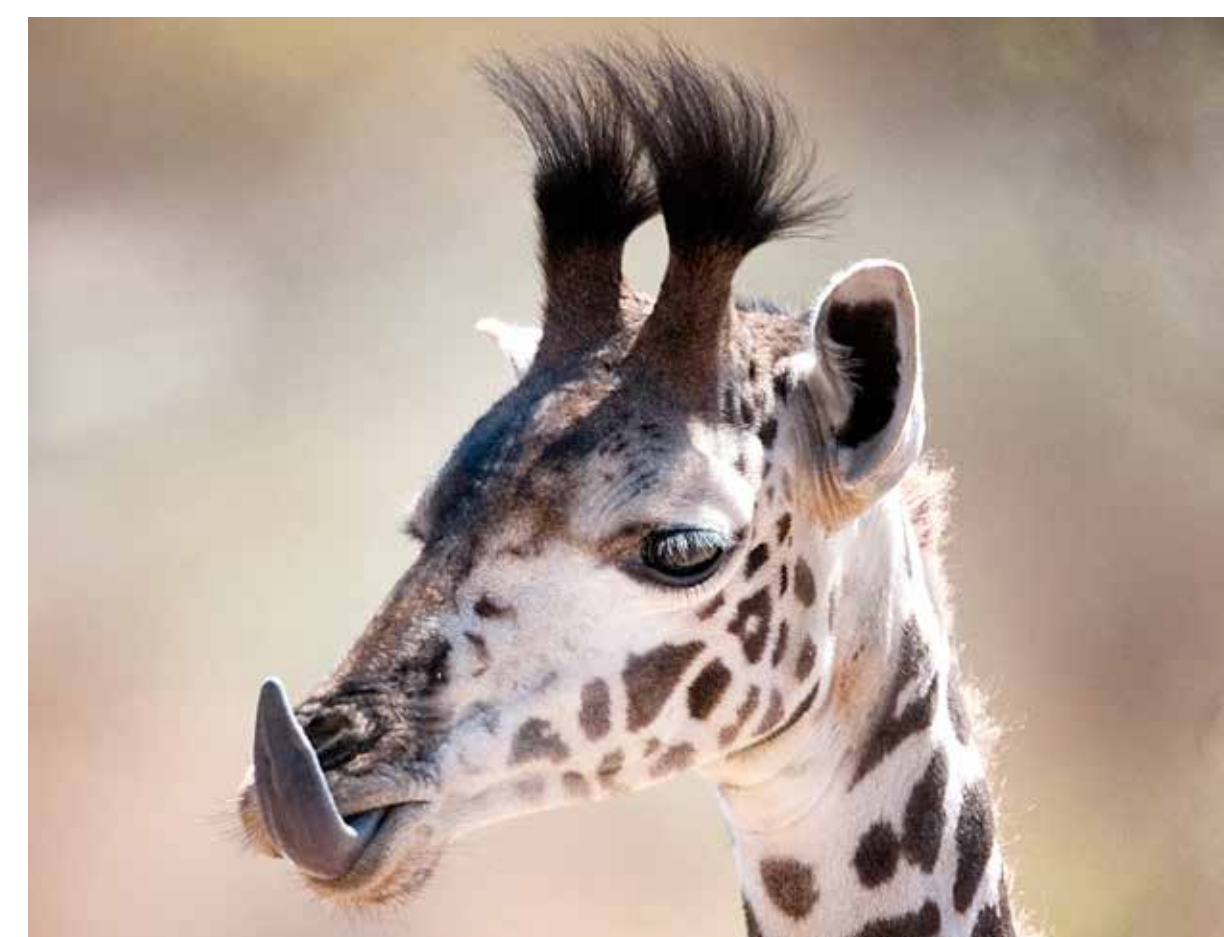


### Range and social structure

The giraffe range extends throughout Kenya and they can be found in open grasslands, woodlands and scrublands. Giraffe are browsers and feed on a wide variety of trees, including *Vachellia/Senegalia* (formerly *Acacia*), *Combretum*, *Commiphora* and *Terminalia* species.

In their search for forage and mates, giraffe can cover great distances, but an increasing human population, expansion of agricultural land, and infrastructure development have fragmented their range in some areas and limited the natural gene flow between populations.

Collaborative studies by GCF, together with the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance and other conservation partners, in northern Kenya have shown that giraffe move long distances in search of food and mates – several giraffe were recorded to travel well over 2,000 km within a few months. Giraffe live in a fission-fusion social system, which means that the size and composition of their herds change regularly. Depending on environmental factors and seasons, individuals or small groups will merge with or split from a herd. To increase vigilance and the protection of calves from predation by large carnivores, female giraffe sometimes form large herds or calf crèches. Mature bulls can often be seen roaming alone or in small bachelor groups, occasionally joining different herds of giraffe.



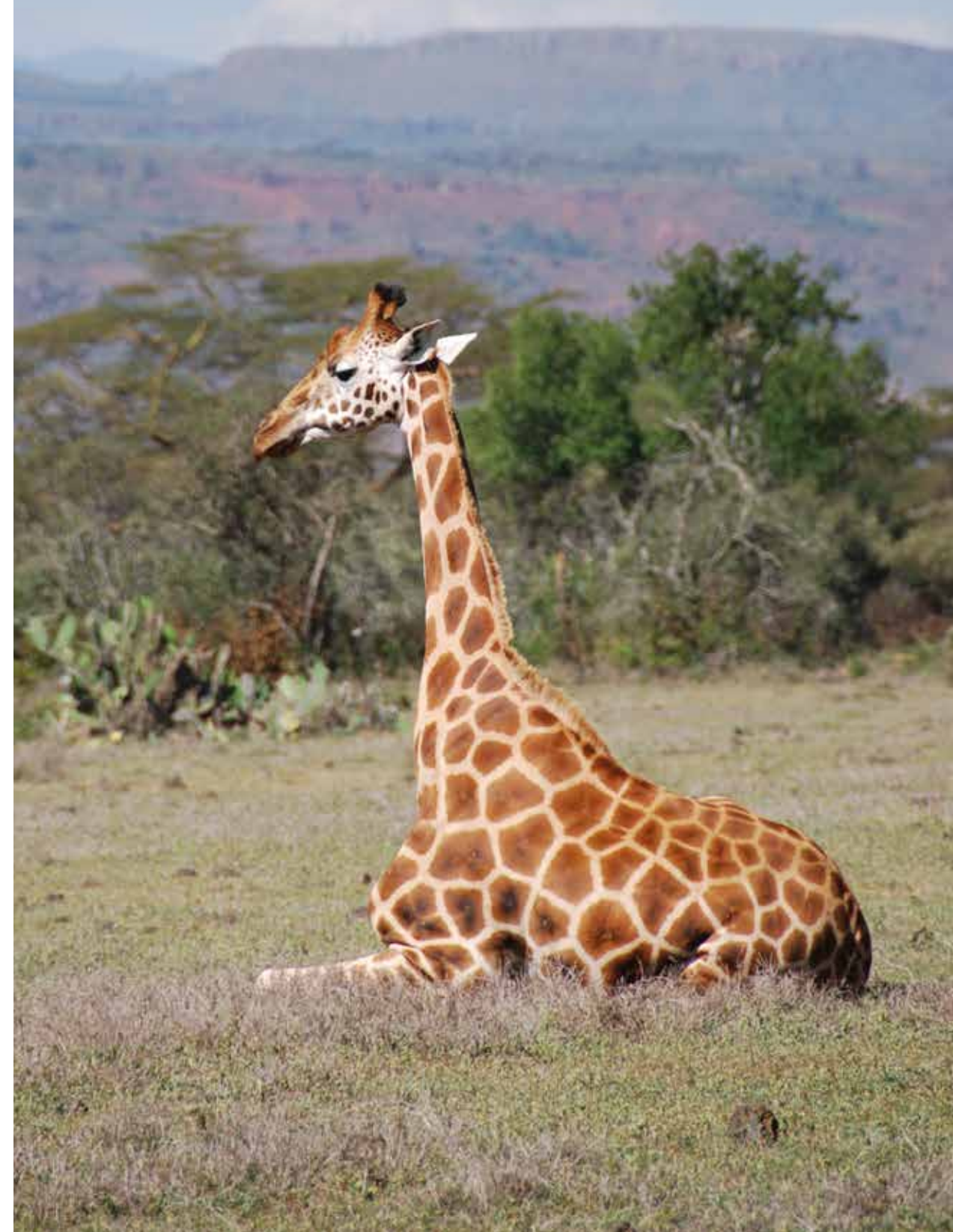
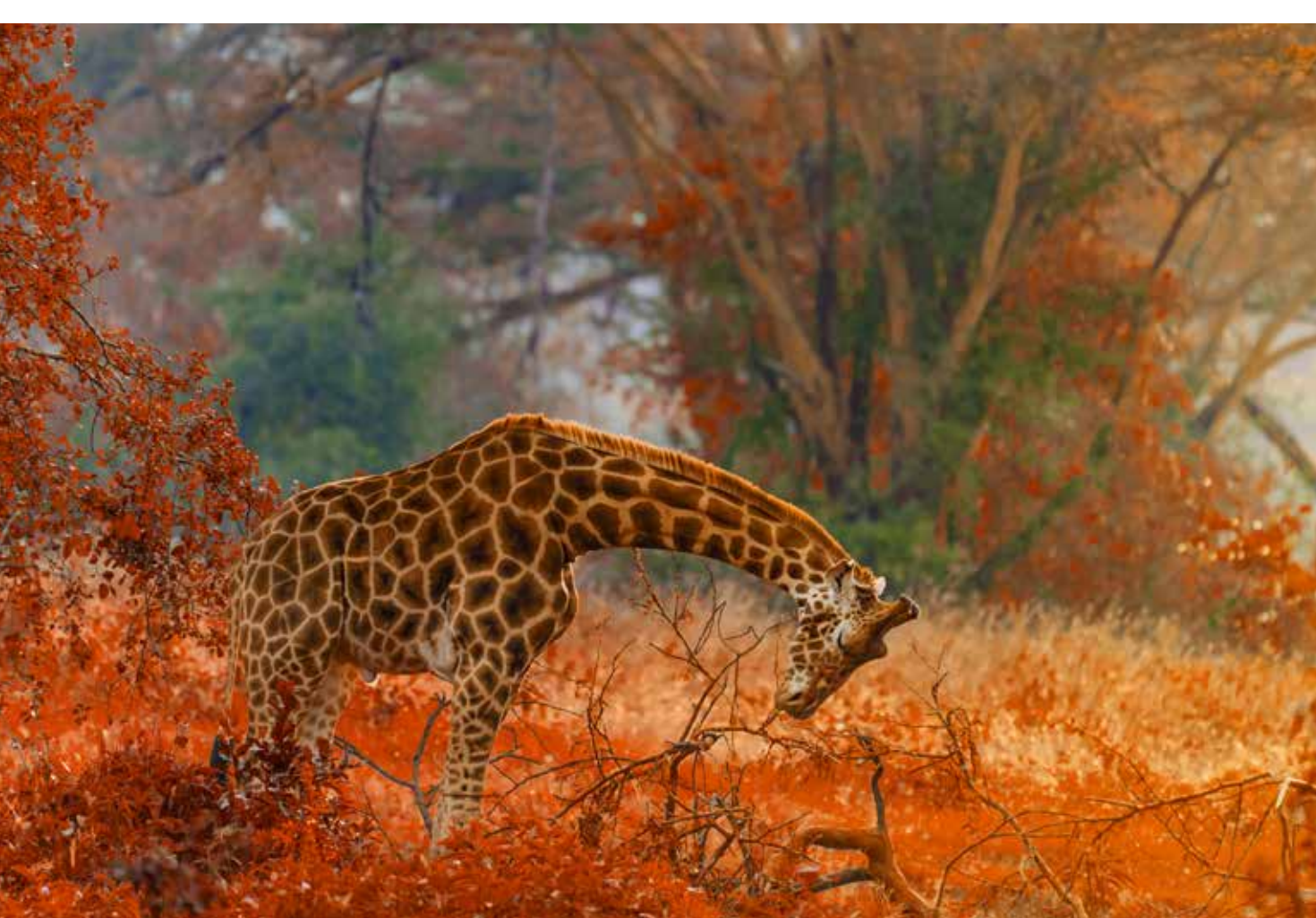
### Local history of giraffe

Giraffe are one of the most iconic and easily recognisable species in Africa. There is a wide array of local names for giraffe in Kenya: twiga (Swahili), ekorii (Ateso), kanyiet (Elgon), ndũiga (Gikuyu), tiga (Kalenjin and Luo), ndwiya (Kamba), etiika (Luhya), olmara (Maasai), lenywa (Meru), and ormeut (Masaai and Samburu). Historically, giraffe roamed throughout the country, and they played an important cultural role in indigenous communities. Apart from their meat for sustenance, their hides and tails were prized for their strong leather and used as bridal gifts. Rapid expansion of the human population and the consequent changes in land-use practice have severely fragmented their habitat and range in Kenya. In the case of Nubian giraffe, their rapid decline in the mid-1900s almost led to their local extirpation (extinction). Since then, targeted reintroductions into parts of their former native range and new areas in Kenya are securing their future.

### Threats

The main threats to giraffe in Kenya include:

- Loss of suitable habitat** due to clearing of land for agriculture, tree-cutting for firewood and building, and infrastructure development.
- Climate change** increases desertification and aridity, which leads to droughts, bushfires and reduced food availability, especially in northern and eastern Kenya – an important habitat for reticulated giraffe.
- Poaching and indiscriminate snaring** for meat, bones, bone marrow, and tail hair is a threat to some populations.
- Predation** by carnivores, which is especially high amongst calves.
- The role of **disease** in the recent decline of giraffe in Kenya is undetermined and requires greater attention.
- The risk of **local trade** in giraffe and their products is also largely unknown and requires more attention.



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](http://giraffeconservation.org)