

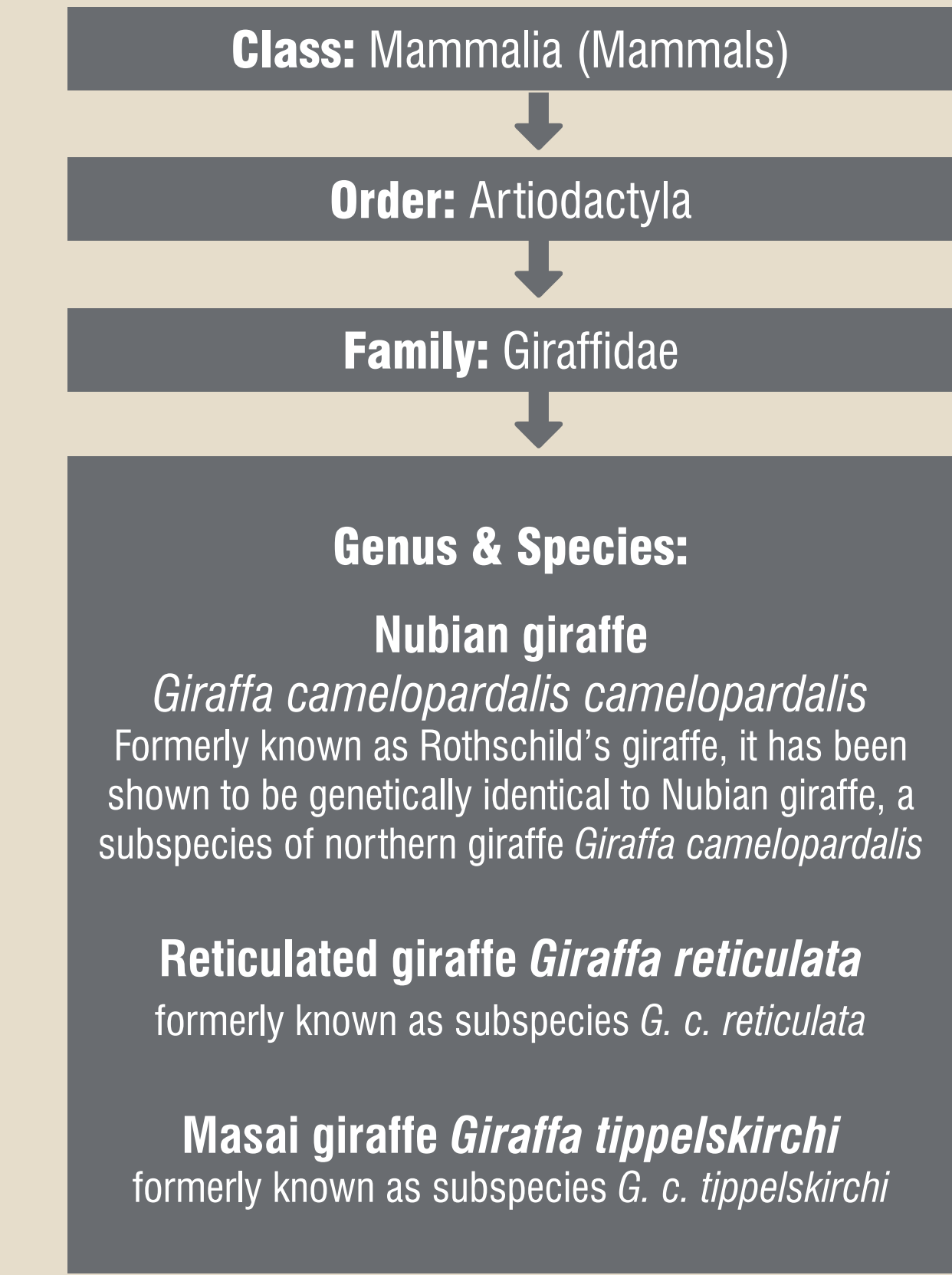
KENYA'S GIRAFFE

Conservation Guide

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



Taxonomy & Populations



Where do you find giraffe in Kenya?

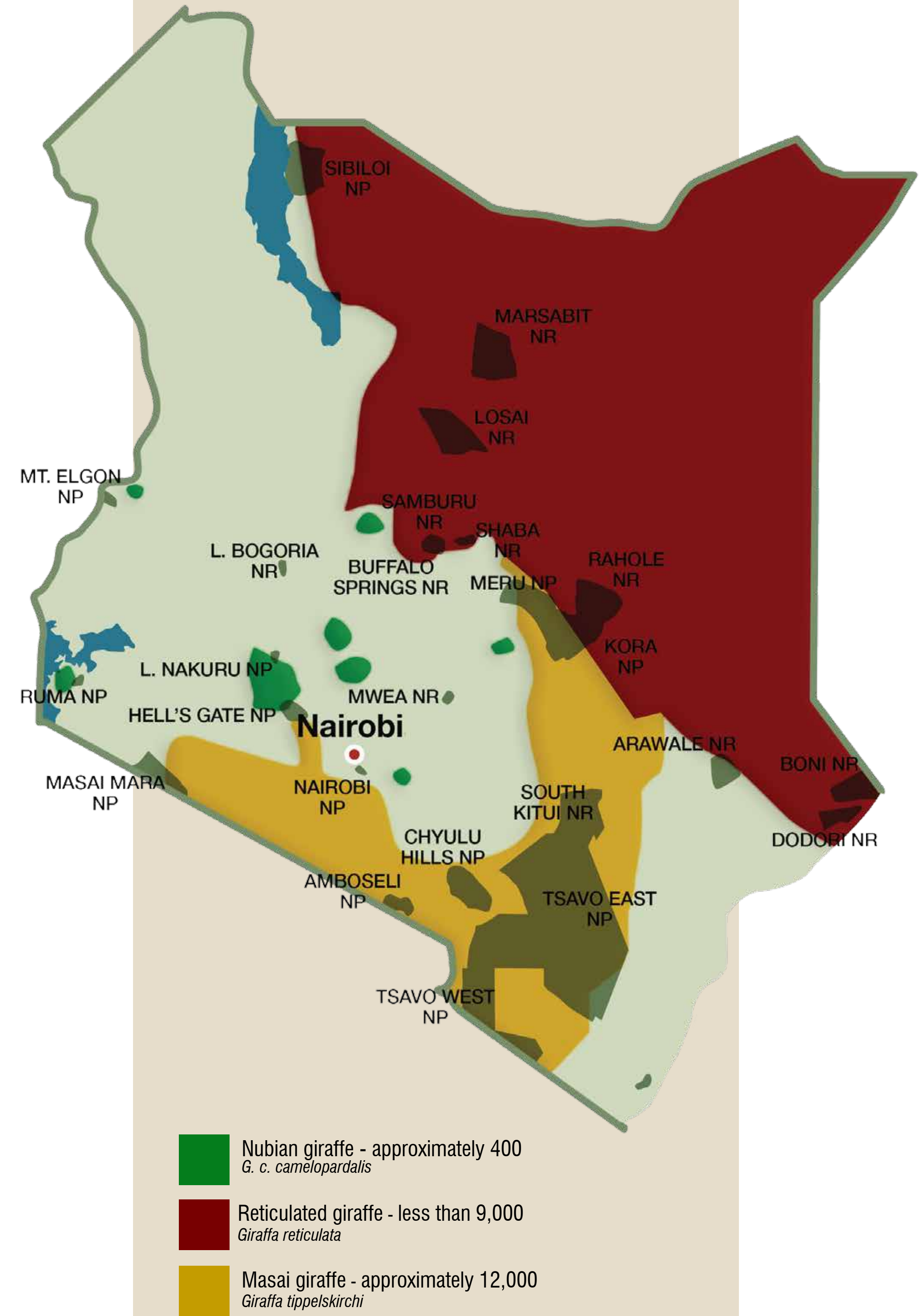
Although the range of giraffe in Kenya has dramatically decreased in the past few years, they still continue to exist, mostly in protected areas, in 27 of the 47 counties. Masai giraffe are now limited to the southern parts of Kenya: ranging from the Nairobi National Park southwards through the Athi Plains, and eastwards from the Masai Mara Ecosystem to the Amboseli Ecosystem, Chyulu Hills National Park, Taita Ranches and Tsavo West National Park. Marula Valley Farm is home to the northernmost population of Masai giraffe, whilst other populations are found in and around Hell's Gate National Park.

Reticulated giraffe, on the other hand, roam throughout northern Kenya: through the Marsabit National Park and Reserve, Samburu, Shaba and Buffalo National Reserves, northern rangelands and conservancies, and various private lands. The southernmost population occurs in northern Tsavo East National Park. Recent surveys show that Lamu and Garissa counties are home to important populations of reticulated giraffe.

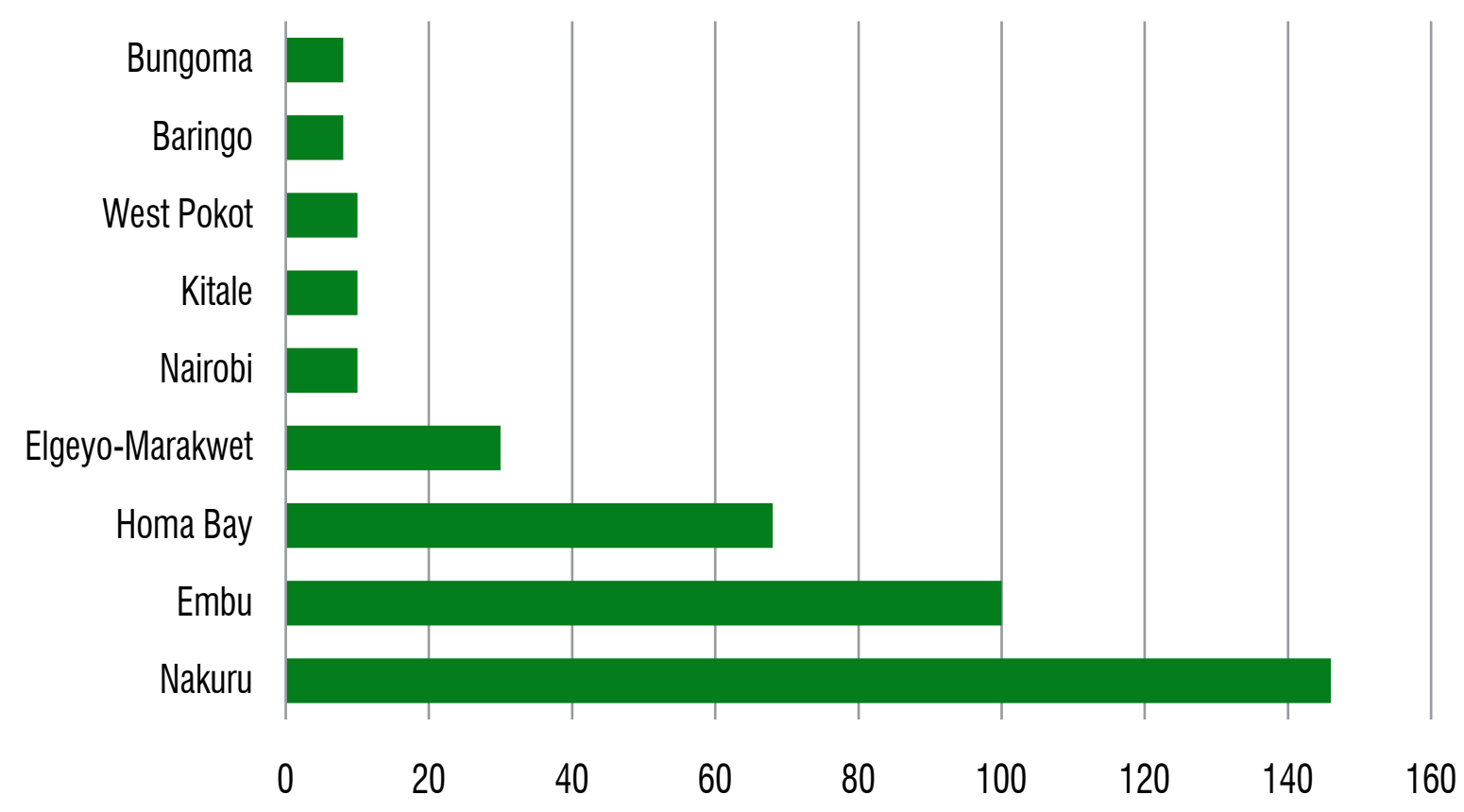
From 1970, Nubian giraffe have gradually been (re-)introduced to their native and new ranges. From east to west, small numbers now occur in Mwea National Reserve, Giraffe Manor, Kigio Wildlife Conservancy, Soysambu Conservancy and Lake Nakuru National Park, Nasolot National Reserve, Mt. Elgon National Park, Ruma National Park and Lake Baringo National Park.

Giraffe in Kenya

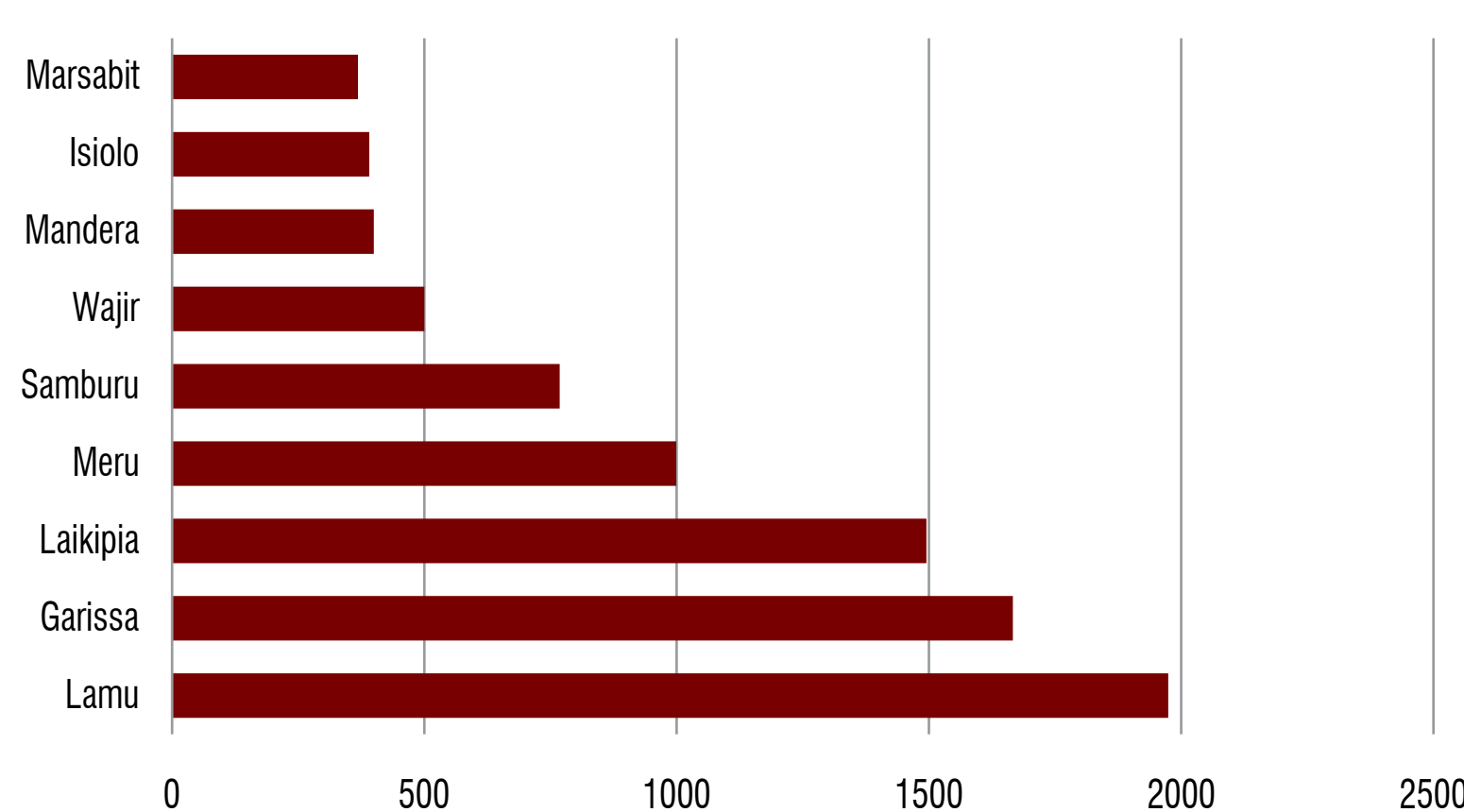
Up until now, giraffe have always been classified as one species with nine subspecies, occurring throughout 21 countries in Africa. However, new research shows that there are now four distinct species of giraffe, of which three occur in Kenya. Reticulated giraffe roam northern and eastern Kenya; Masai giraffe inhabit the savanna and woodlands of southern Kenya; and the Nubian giraffe (formerly Rothschild's giraffe), which has been reduced to several fragmented populations, occurs in western and central Kenya. In the last two decades, Masai giraffe have declined by 50%, while reticulated giraffe have declined by approximately 70%. Masai giraffe are the most abundant giraffe species in Kenya (approximately 12,000 individuals), followed by reticulated giraffe (less than 9,000 individuals), and finally Nubian giraffe (approximately 400 individuals). Giraffe in Kenya occur within all types of land, which includes national parks, game reserves, communal land, and private ranches.



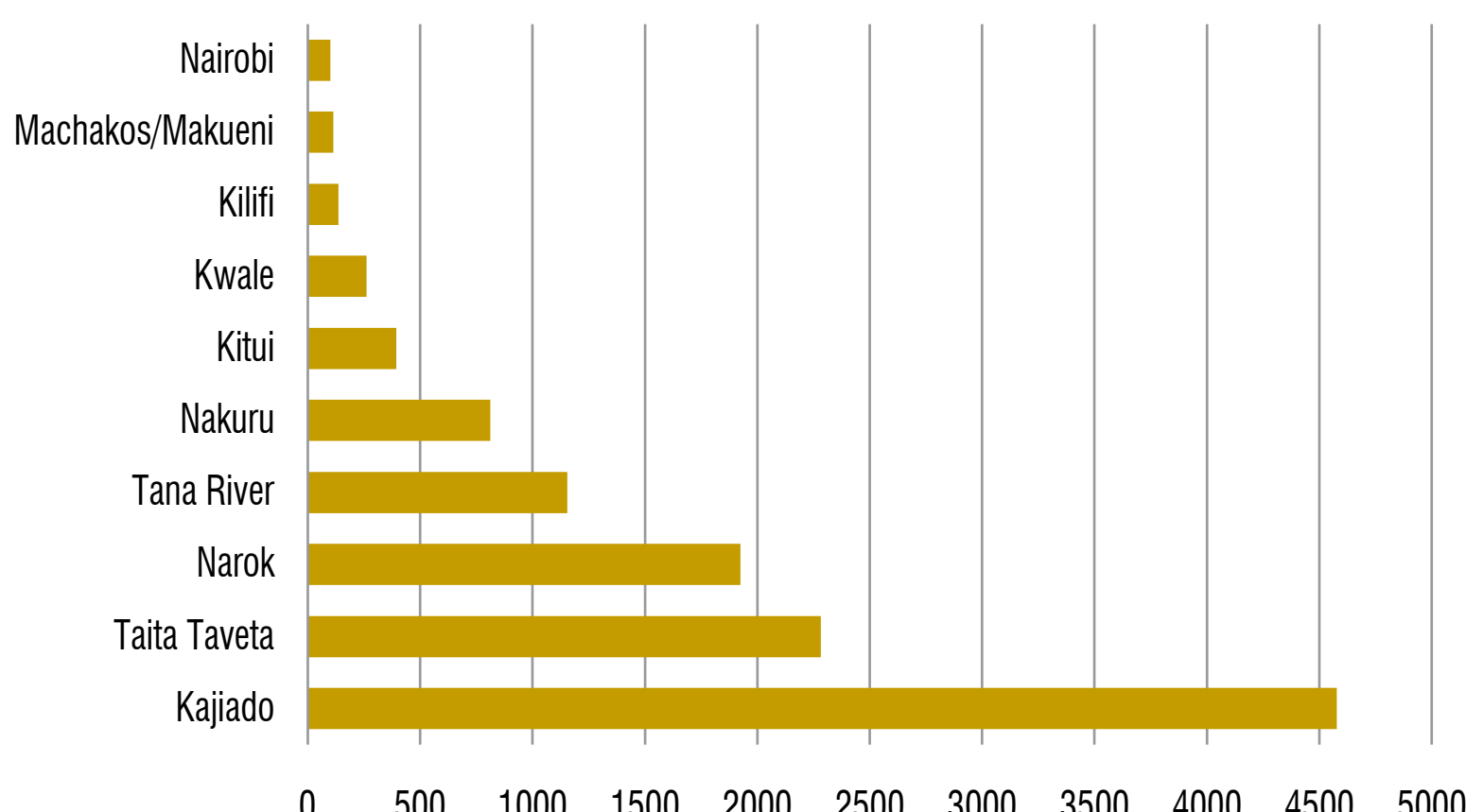
Nubian giraffe *G. c. camelopardalis*



Reticulated giraffe *Giraffa reticulata*

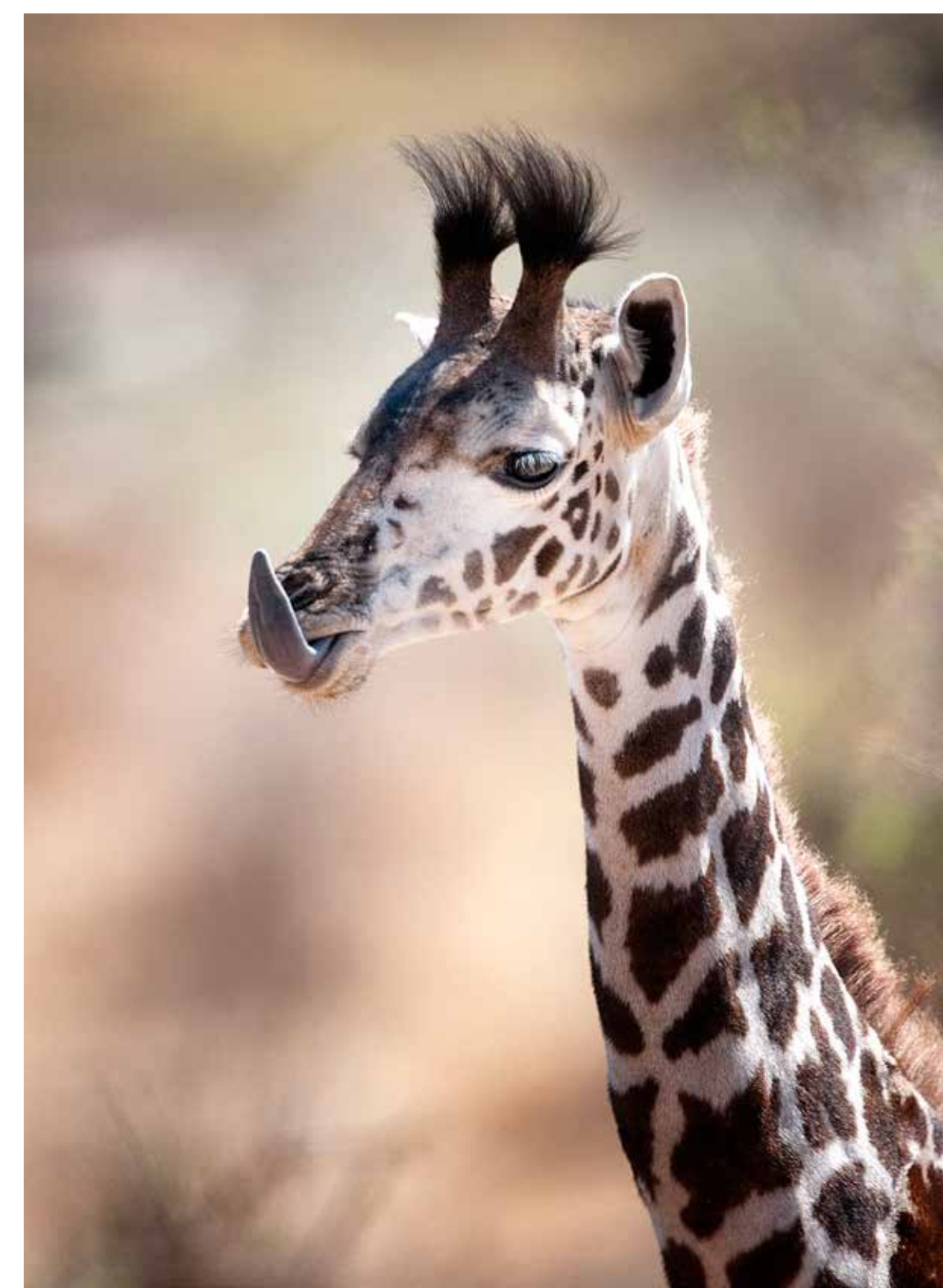


Masai giraffe *Giraffa tippelskirchi*



Range and habitat

Giraffe range extends across Kenya, where they are found in open grasslands, woodlands and scrublands. Giraffe are browsers, feeding on a wide variety of tree species, which include *Vachellia* (formerly *Acacia*), *Combretum*, *Commiphora* and *Terminalia* genera. Giraffe browsing-pressure promotes new forage growth, making plant resources more accessible. In their search of forage and mates, giraffe cover great distances, but increasing human population, the expansion of agricultural land, and the development of infrastructure has caused the fragmentation of their range. From a conservation aspect, this lack of long distance movement limits access to suitable forage and the natural gene flow between populations. Giraffe in Kenya exhibit a fission-fusion social system, which means that members of a herd come together and break away in response to local environmental factors. To increase vigilance and the protection of calves from predation by large carnivores, adult female giraffe sometimes form large herds. Mature bulls can be seen roaming either alone or together in smaller numbers, occasionally joining different herds of giraffe.



Local history of giraffe

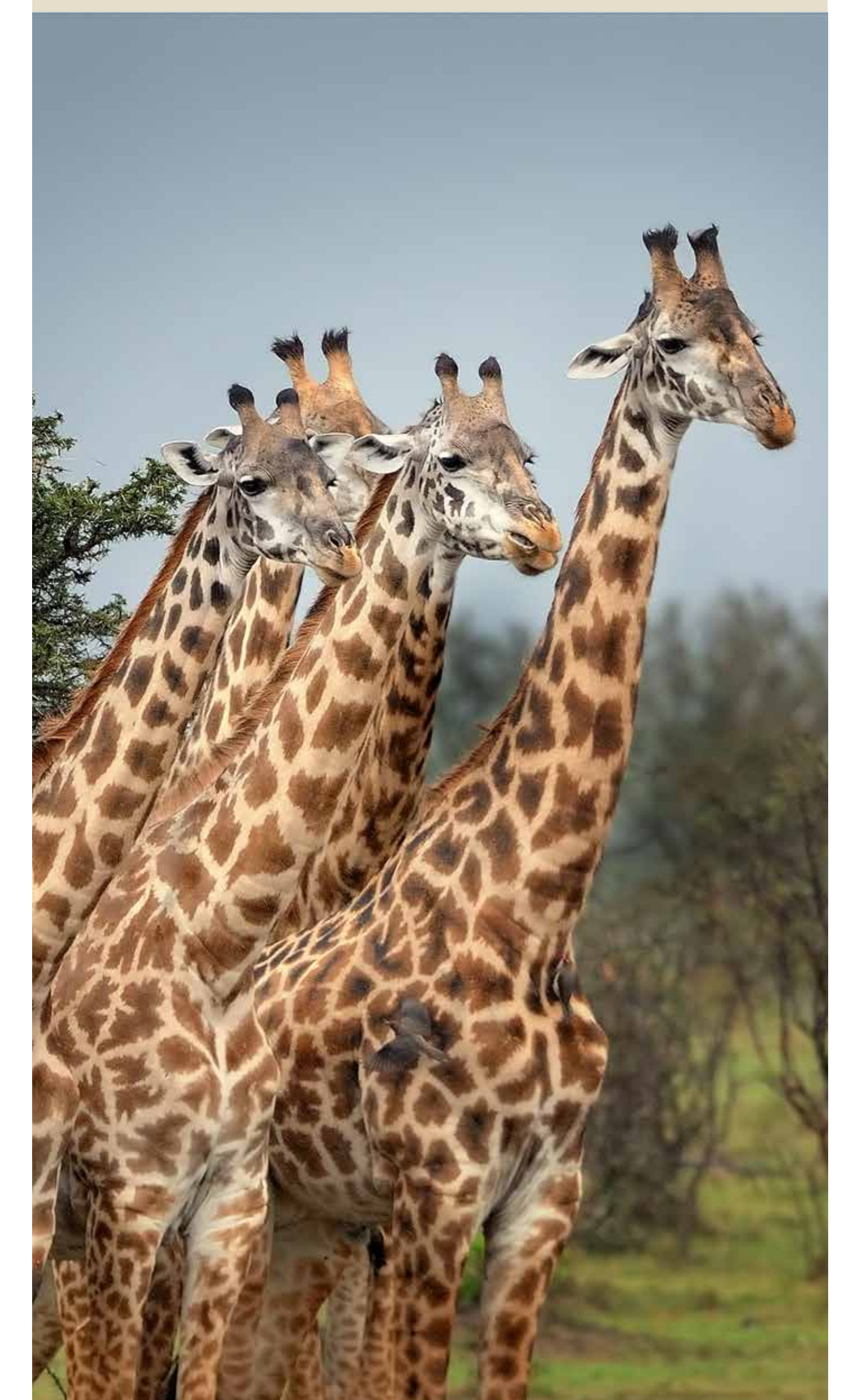
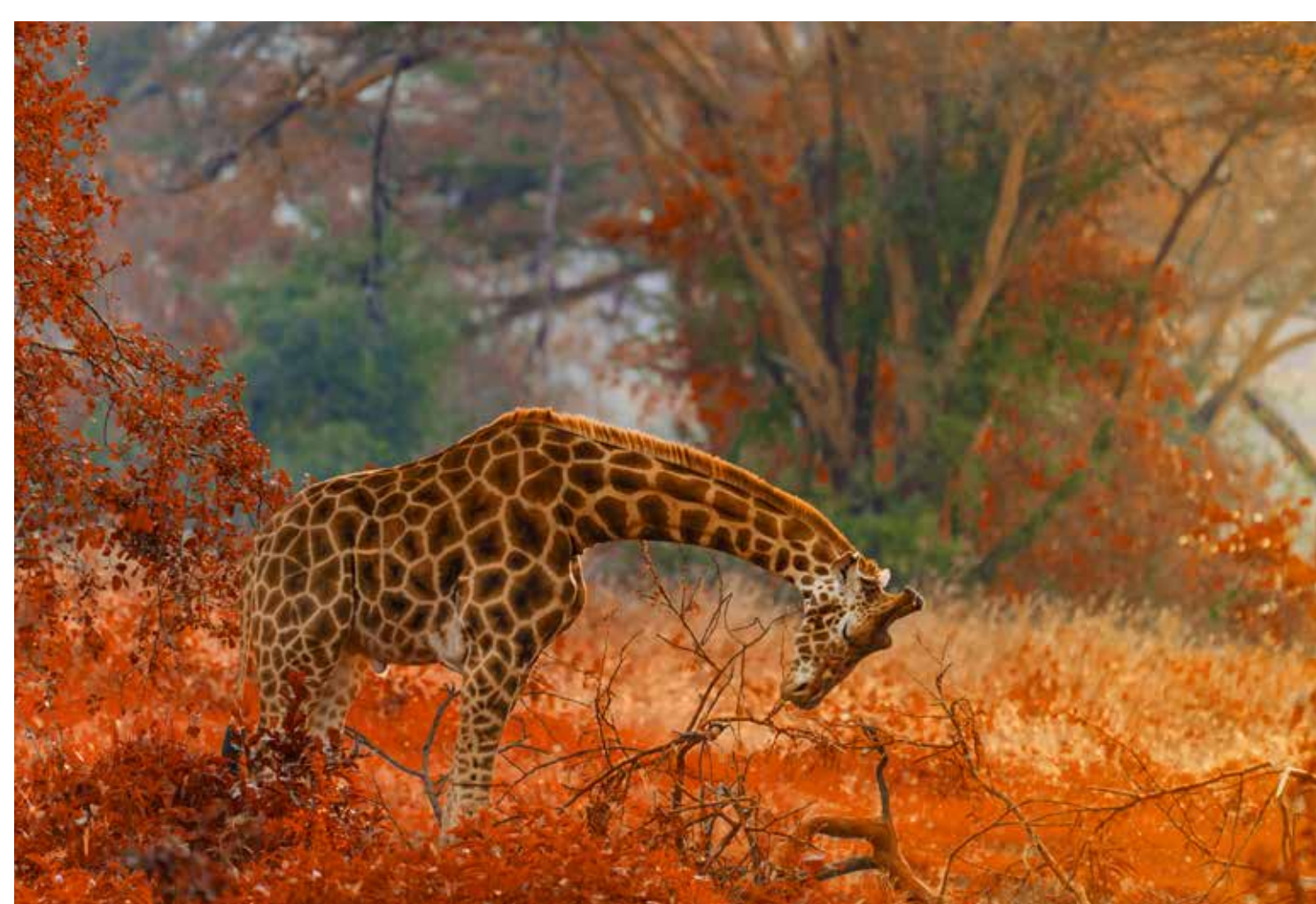
Giraffe are one of the most iconic and easily recognisable mammal species in Africa. They have several local names in Kenya: *twiga* (Swahili), *ekorii* (Ateso), *kanyiet* (Elgon), *ndũiga* (Gikuyu), *tiga* (Kalenjin and Luo), *ndwija* (Kamba), *etiika* (Luhya), *oloodo-kirragata* or *olchangito-oodo* (Maasai), *lennywa* (Meru), and *iment* (Samburu). Historically, giraffe roamed throughout most parts of Kenya, 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 has severely fragmented the habitat and range of giraffe in Kenya. In the case of Nubian giraffe, the rapid decline of population numbers in the mid 1900s almost led to their local extirpation (local extinction). Since then, Nubian giraffe have been re-introduced into parts of their former, native range in Kenya in order to secure and further their conservation.



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** may increase desertification and aridity, which can lead 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 major threat to their populations.
- Predation** by carnivores, especially high for young calves.
- Hybridization** potential between the Masai and reticulated giraffe in northern Tsavo East National Park.
- Undetermined role of **disease** in the recent decline of giraffe populations in Kenya – a probable situation which requires greater attention.
- Unknown risk through **local and international trade** of giraffe and giraffe products.



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.

www.giraffeconservation.org