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AFRICA'S GIRAFFE

Species

Thank you to Cindy Armstrong, Billy Dodson, Luke Hausler (Zoos Victoria) and Christopher Wade for providing the images and map.

It has been widely recognised that there was only one species of giraffe, *Giraffa camelopardalis*, and nine subspecies. However, for over a decade now, GCF has spearheaded a long-term effort to unravel the mystery of giraffe genetics and their taxonomy. GCF and its partners have gathered DNA samples and data from almost every major giraffe population throughout Africa. In close collaboration with experts, our genetics partner, Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre (BiK-F) at the Senckenberg Museum in Frankfurt, Germany, has provided immense support by analysing all samples and interpreting the results in the context of geography, phylogeography and conservation.

GCF and its partners have now shown that there are in fact four distinct species of giraffe, and five subspecies. These ground-breaking findings will enhance giraffe research, conservation and management.

All four species and their subspecies live in geographically distinct areas throughout Africa, and even though some of them have been reported to hybridise in zoos, there is very little evidence that this occurs readily in the wild.

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

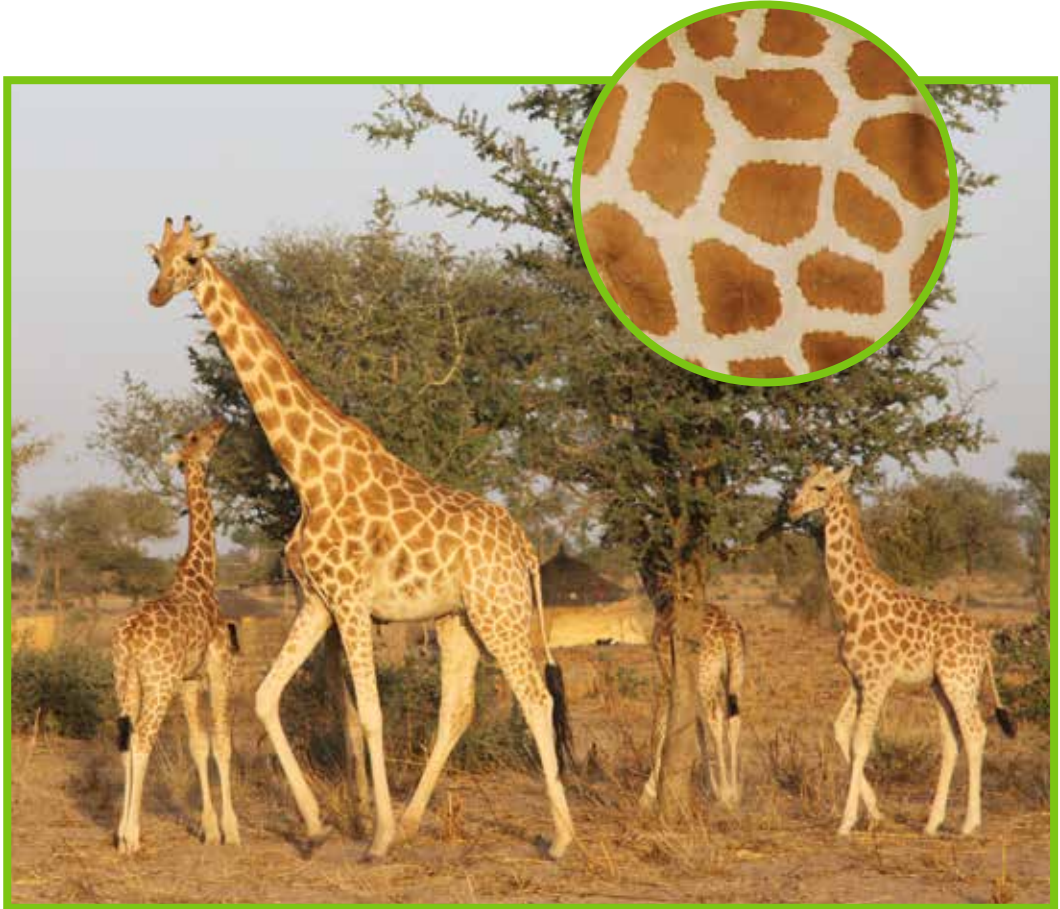
G. g. angolensis
G. g. giraffa

Giraffa reticulata

Giraffa tippelskirchi

Northern giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis*

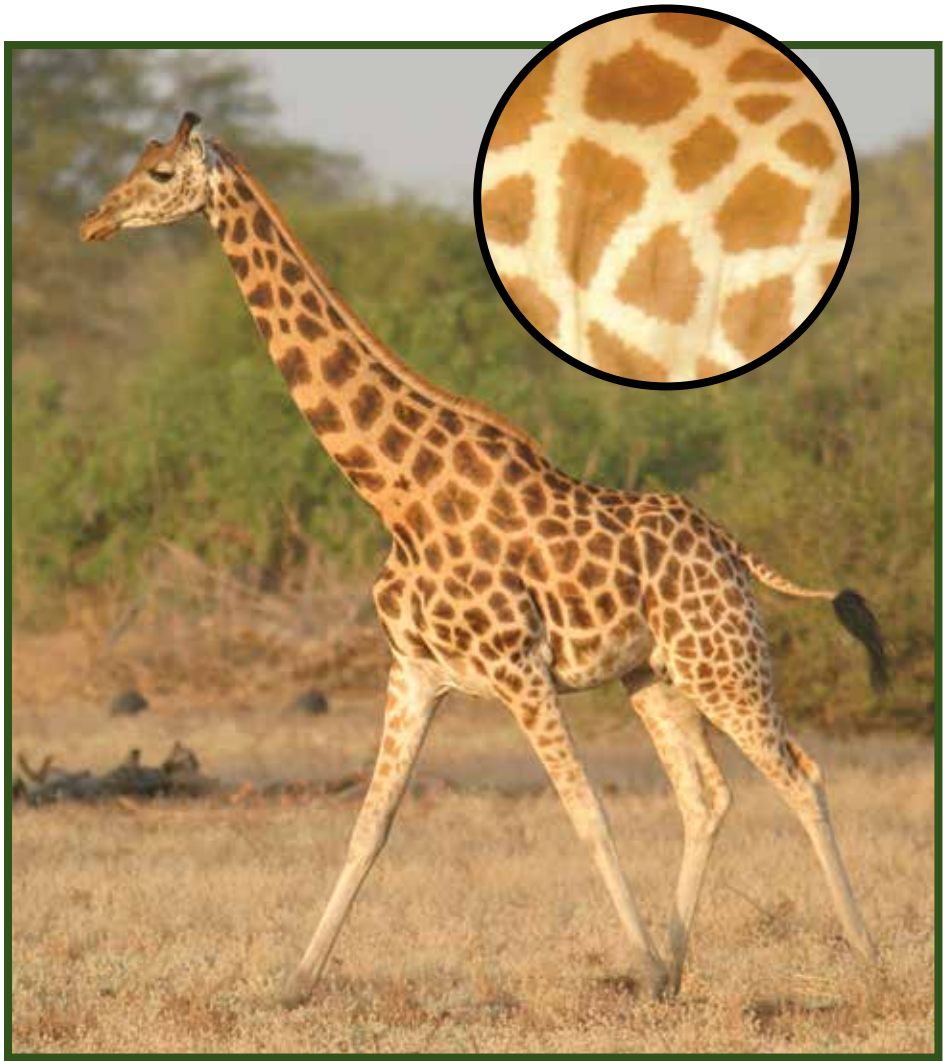
Three subspecies of the northern giraffe occur across Eastern and Central Africa.



West African giraffe *G. c. peralta*

At the beginning of the 20th century the West African giraffe were widely distributed, from Nigeria to Senegal, but by the late 1990s only 49 individuals remained in the whole of West Africa. These few survivors are now formally protected by the Niger government and their numbers have risen to more than 550 individuals. However, their future is still of great concern as they live in an isolated pocket (the giraffe zone) east of the capital Niamey, and share their living space with local villagers. No other large wild mammals occur in this area, and habitat loss and destruction is increasing. In 2008, the West African giraffe was classified as Endangered and of high conservation importance on the IUCN Red List.

The West African giraffe is noticeably light in appearance. Their patches are rectangular and tan coloured, and are broadly surrounded by a creamy-colour. There are no markings on their lower legs.

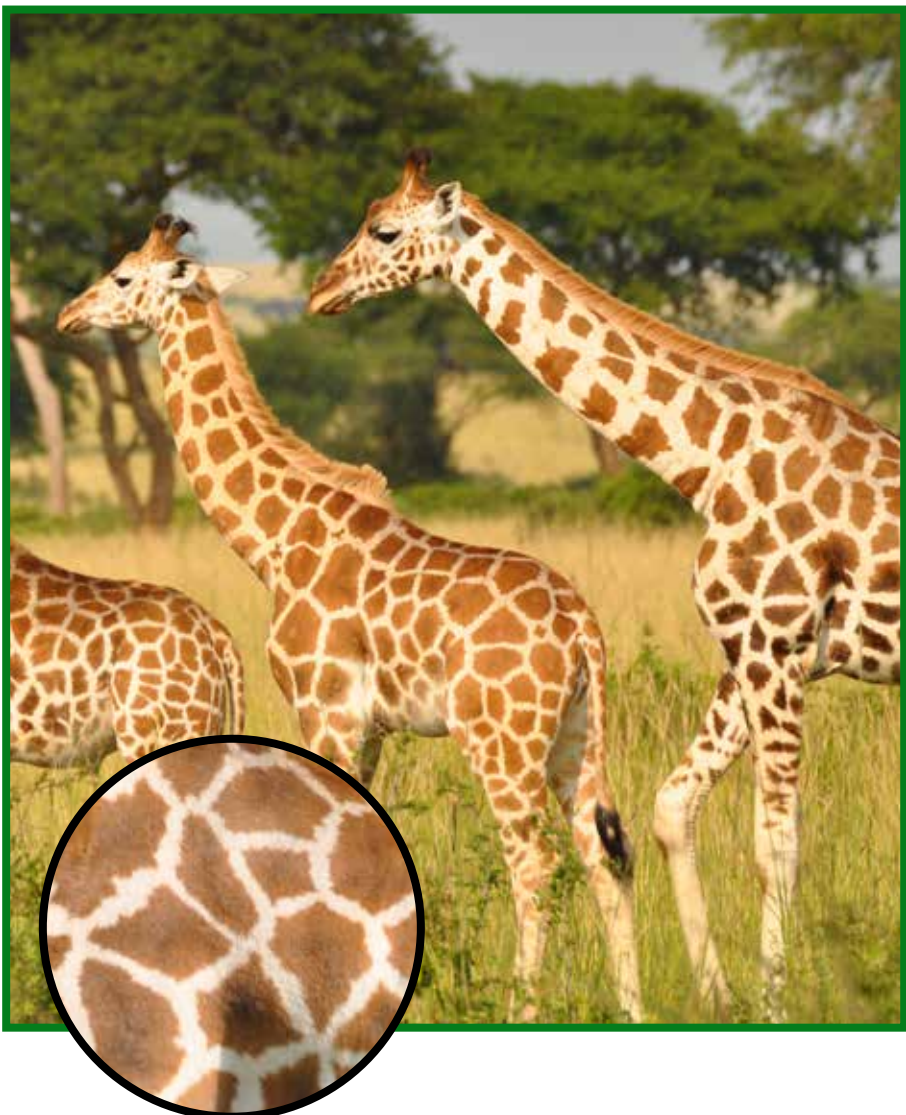


Kordofan giraffe

G. c. antiquorum

The Kordofan giraffe's range includes some of Africa's more hostile areas: southern Chad, Central African Republic, northern Cameroon, northern Democratic Republic of Congo, and western South Sudan. It is estimated that fewer than 2,000 individuals survive in these war-ravaged countries. Some of these population groups were previously assumed to be other giraffe subspecies, but our recent research has shown this to be incorrect and, instead, they are distinct subspecies.

The Kordofan giraffe's patches are pale and irregular. Similar to other northern giraffe subspecies, they have no markings on their lower legs.



Southern giraffe *Giraffa giraffa*

Two subspecies of the southern giraffe occur across Southern Africa and, together, they make up more than 50% of the continent's total giraffe numbers.



South African giraffe *G. g. giraffa*

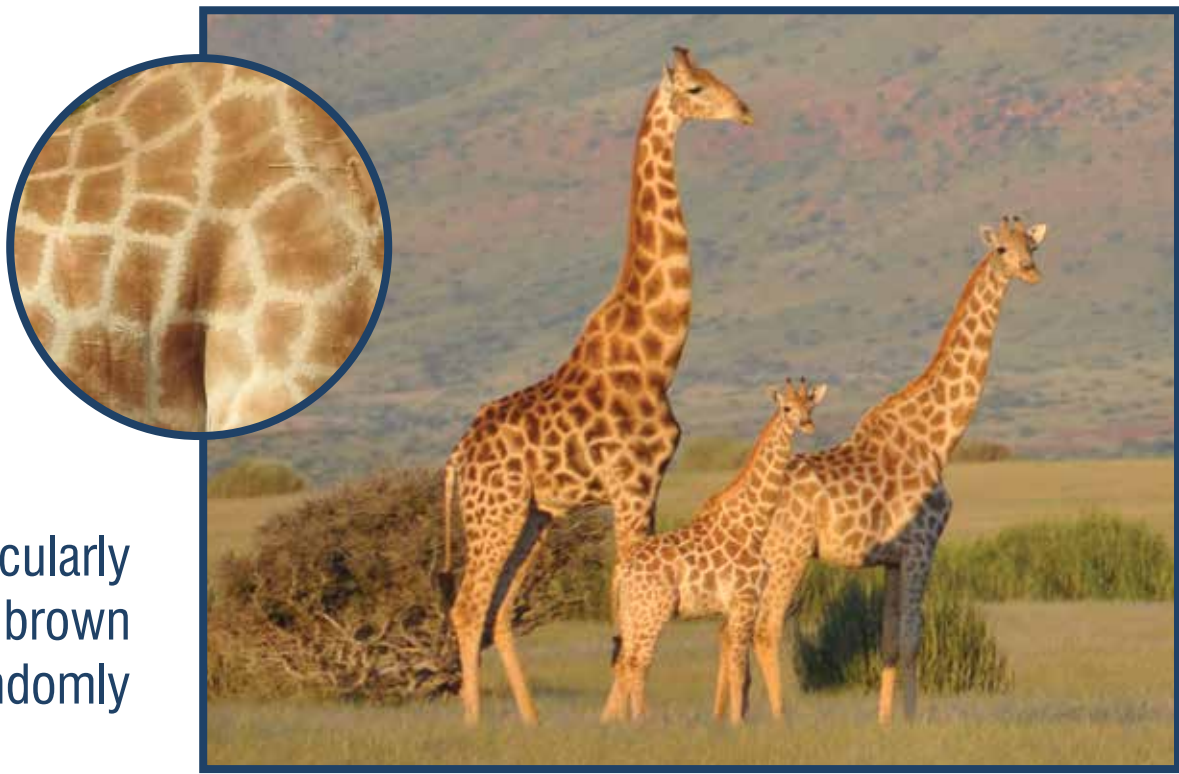
The South African (or Cape) giraffe ranges from west to east across southern eastern Angola; northern Botswana; southern Mozambique; northern South Africa; south-western Zambia; and eastern and southern Zimbabwe. Previous re-introductions of the South African and Angolan giraffe to overlapping areas have likely resulted in hybrid populations. There have also been extralimital (outside their natural range) introductions of South African giraffe across Angola, Senegal, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. At present, the South African giraffe population is estimated at 39,000 individuals, showing a marked increase over the past three decades.

The South African giraffe has star-shaped patches in various shades of brown, surrounded by a light tan colour. Their lower legs are randomly speckled with uneven spots.

Angolan giraffe *G. g. angolensis*

Despite their name, Angolan giraffe were extirpated (locally extinct) in Angola until recent translocations. The Angolan giraffe's range includes central Botswana and most parts of Namibia. Extralimital populations (those outside their natural range) have been translocated to South Africa, and to private land in Botswana and Zimbabwe. The estimated 5,000 individuals three decades ago have, today, almost tripled to an estimated 13,050 in the wild.

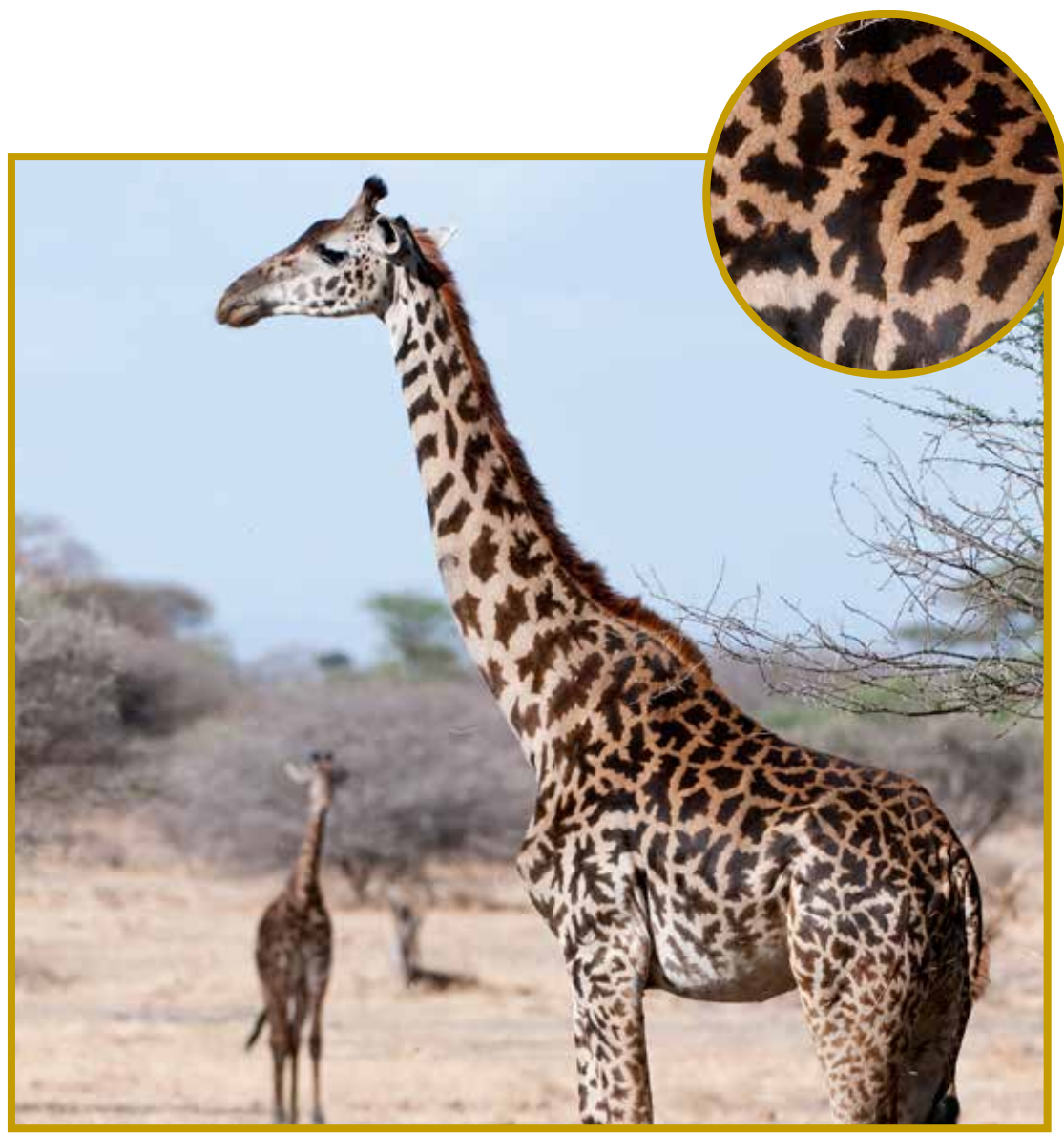
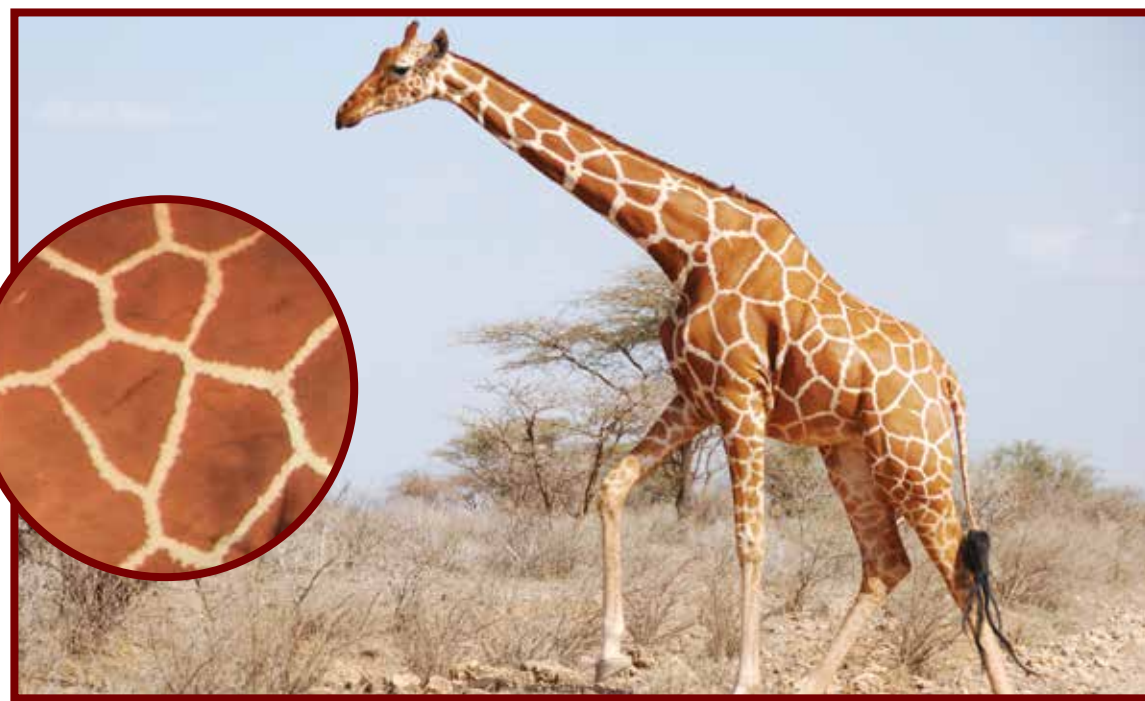
The Angolan giraffe is relatively light in colour. In northwest Namibia, where it is particularly arid, they can be almost colourless. They have large, uneven and irregularly notched light brown patches. Their patches are surrounded by a pale cream colour, and their lower legs are randomly speckled with uneven spots.



Reticulated giraffe *Giraffa reticulata*

The reticulated giraffe has a relatively limited distribution across northern and north-eastern Kenya, and small restricted populations most likely persist in southern Somalia and southern Ethiopia. It is estimated that about 8,700 individuals remain in the wild – a significant decrease from the approximate 37,000 three decades ago. However, numbers across northern Kenya appear to be increasing with improved community and private land conservation.

It is easy to see why this species is called the reticulated giraffe, as it's rich orange-brown patches are clearly defined by a network of striking white lines, which continue the entire length of their legs.

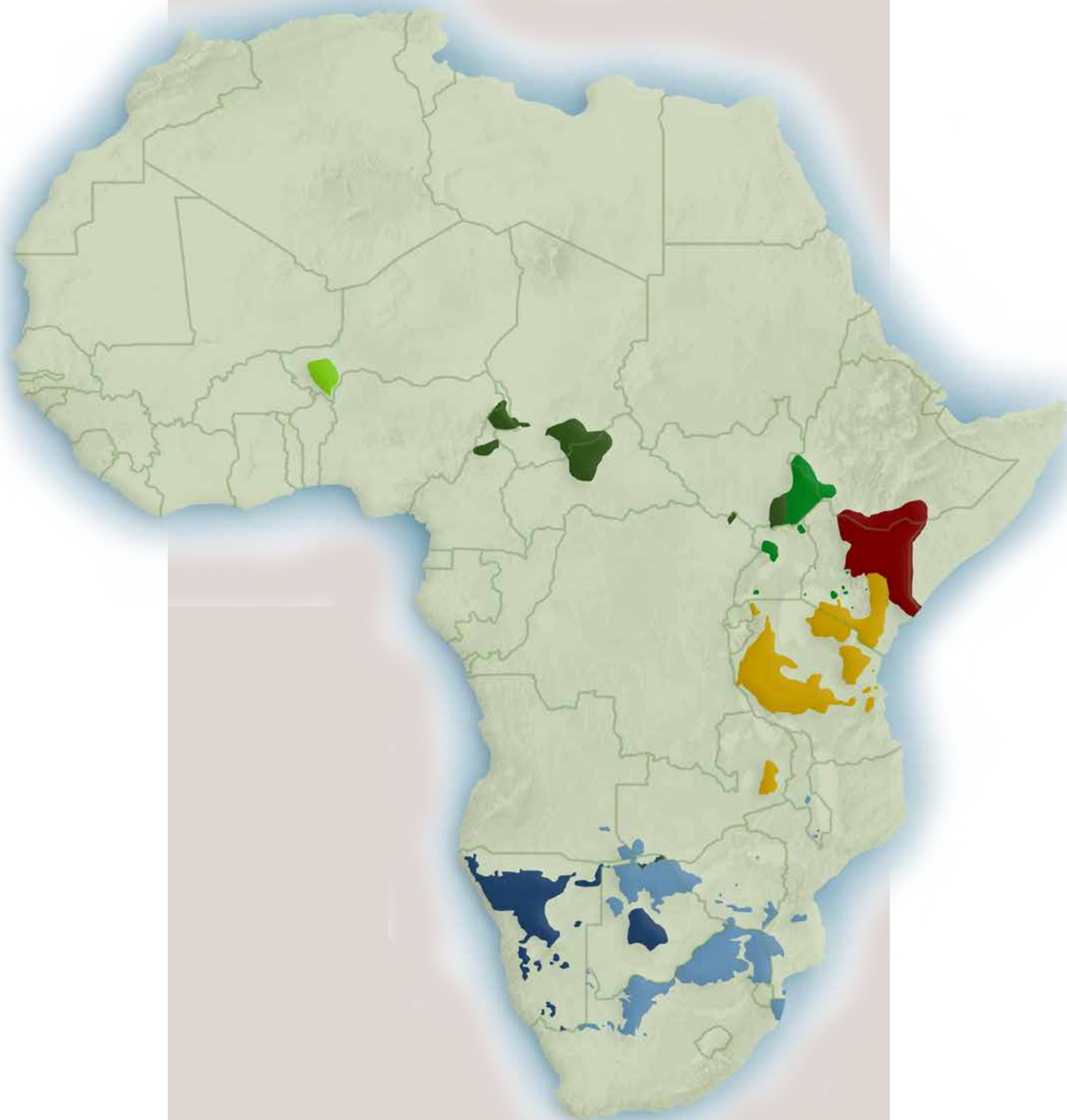











Masai giraffe

Giraffa tippelskirchi

Masai giraffe range across central and southern Kenya; throughout Tanzania; and an isolated population exists in the South Luangwa Valley, north eastern Zambia (formerly known as Thornicroft's giraffe). Extralimital populations (those outside their natural range) have been translocated to the Akagera National Park, Rwanda. Formerly the most populous giraffe with an estimated 66,500 individuals three decades ago, less than half (32,500) of them remain in the wild today. Approximately 600 of the remaining individuals occur in the geographically isolated Zambian population. Ongoing reports of poaching suggest that their population continues to decrease.

The Masai giraffe is often noticeably darker than other species. Its patches are large, dark brown and distinctively vine leaf-shaped with jagged edges. The patches are surrounded by a creamy-brown colour, which continues down their lower legs.



 Masai giraffe	<i>Giraffa tippelskirchi</i>	32,500
 Northern giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	5,195
 Kordofan giraffe	<i>G. c. antiquorum</i>	2,000
 Nubian giraffe	<i>G. c. camelopardalis</i>	2,645
 West African giraffe	<i>G. c. peralta</i>	550
 Reticulated giraffe	<i>Giraffa reticulata</i>	8,700
 Southern giraffe	<i>Giraffa giraffa</i>	52,050
 Angolan giraffe	<i>G. g. angolensis</i>	13,050
 South African giraffe	<i>G. g. giraffa</i>	39,000



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