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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

Local history of giraffe

Giraffes have ranged across current-day Namibia for many thousands of years and evidence of this can be found in rock paintings and engravings of giraffes in the Kunene Region. Even though the first written record of giraffes was logged by Captain Hendrik Hooa, who ventured north of the Okavango River in 1761, giraffe populations have been otherwise poorly documented.

For a long time, giraffes have been culturally and ceremonially important to the region’s indigenous communities. In the mid-1990s, giraffe populations were at their lowest in Namibia but, since then, conservation efforts have successfully increased and expanded their range across the country.

Range and habitat

Giraffes are found throughout the dry savannah habitats of Namibia, in open grassland, woodland and scrubland, and along ephemeral rivers (rivers which contain water for a short period of time and then dry out again). Their preferred food is Acacia, Combretum, Combretopilus and Terminalia tree species. Their range extends west and south-east of Etosha National Park, into similar or more arid habitats in the northern and central Namib Desert, where their movements are concentrated within and around the ephemeral riverbeds – occasionally also moving between these rivers. Giraffe also occur in the semi- and Kalahari sandveld in north-eastern Namibia, as well as in the far eastern Namibian Region, where they have been translocated to communal conservancies.

Giraffes are largely absent from densely populated areas which have been cleared of woody vegetation for agriculture, such as the central northern regions, north of Etosha National Park. However, across the rest of Namibia, giraffes can be co-existed with livestock on both commercial and communal farmland, where livestock farming is practiced extensively. Giraffes are absent from true desert areas which are devoid of trees.

Over the last few decades, the Namibian Ministry of Environment & Tourism and private operators have undertaken many re-introductions of Angolan giraffe from both private and public land to other protected, private and communal areas across the country. This has been a valuable conservation effort, enabling the population to expand in number and range.

Compared to any other giraffes across Africa, Angolan giraffe have the largest recorded home ranges (up to 11,600 km²), which is not easily related to the unit and environment of their habitat. Male giraffes usually have larger home ranges than females. Giraffes may need close contact with different groups while females, who are more sedentary, tend to stay in a particular area.

Threats

The main threats to giraffes in Namibia include:

- Loss of suitable habitat due to clearing of land for crop cultivation, cutting of trees for firewood and construction, and frequent human-induced bush fires.
- Climate change may increase aridity in Namibia, which can lead to droughts, harshness and reduced food availability.
- Fragmentation of suitable habitats due to increasing agriculture and use of game-proof fencing.
- Risk of hybridisation with other subspecies may have already occurred due to close proximity of Angolan and South African giraffe, particularly in the Zambezi Region.
- Small-scale illegal hunting is currently not a major threat as giraffes mainly exist in protected areas (public, private and communal). However, human population growth and increased drought might change this.
- Unknown risk through local and international trade in giraffe and products.

Success story

Namibia is one of a few countries in Africa with a growing giraffe population, a success that can be attributed to the combined forces and collaboration of many partners. As the first African country to incorporate protection of the environment into its constitution, 40% of Namibia’s land is sustainably managed in protected areas, communal and forested 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.

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