



# East Africa Programme

UPDATE REPORT  
May – August 2018



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## Background

The Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) East African office helps to increase our collaborative efforts with government institutions, private stakeholders, along with local and international NGOs with respect to giraffe conservation and management. The East African region is critical for the long-term survival of wild populations of giraffe as it is home to three distinct species: Masai giraffe (*Giraffa tippelskirchi*), reticulated giraffe (*G. reticulata*) and Nubian giraffe (*G. camelopardalis camelopardalis*). This report highlights the steps and programmes that GCF has initiated towards conserving the three species in the region between May and August 2018.

## Broad-ranging programmes

In May 2018, GCF, in collaboration with the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI), the Senckenberg Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre (SBIK-F) and San Diego Zoo Global (SDZG) organised the first-ever Giraffe Conservation Science Symposium to initiate discussions in four key thematic areas that require urgent research and action to secure the future of giraffe populations in Africa. The thematic areas included taxonomy, ecology, health and human dimensions. Thirty-five experts from around the world attended the symposium and provided insights that will help address issues identified in the thematic areas. Of key importance to East African giraffe populations is gaining a better understanding of their numbers, distribution, spatial ecology and human dimensions, as well as the pathophysiology and potential impacts of the giraffe skin disease (GSD). East Africa is a hotspot of the disease with some of the highest incident rates observed, especially in Tanzania where the disease has an almost ubiquitous distribution. GCF was asked to coordinate all research and conservation efforts moving forward from the symposium and as such will continue to work with partners to support and address, where appropriate, aspects identified in the four thematic areas to secure the future of giraffe populations.

Through our long-term partnership with SBIK-F and the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), GCF has supported the collection of almost 300 giraffe tissue samples by KWS veterinarians throughout the country. The sampling effort was extensive and covered areas representing the distribution of all giraffe species across Kenya. Initiated one year ago, this collaborative study will provide crucial information on the genetic diversity of giraffe in Kenya, explore potential areas of natural interbreeding or hybridization, and provide recommendations for management. The samples will soon be sent for analysis to SBIK-F in Germany. New technologies will help to better understand the taxonomy and ecology of the giraffe species. By studying the genetics and distribution patterns of giraffe, we can better inform their management in East Africa. This is critical when considering the conservation translocations that have and will continue to take place in the region.

The launch of the National Recovery and Action Plan for Giraffe in Kenya 2018 – 2022 (initially scheduled for 1 August 2018) and the GPS satellite tagging of reticulated giraffe in northern Kenya with our partners SDZG (scheduled for September 2018) were postponed due to circumstances out of our control and changes within KWS. Planning efforts towards these important activities will resume as soon as possible and we will keep everyone updated on the progress.



## Specific programmes

### Masai giraffe

We recently drafted a detailed questionnaire that will be used to study the cultural and socio-economic values of giraffe in southern Kenya, where we are partnering with Wildlife Works, based in Rukinga Sanctuary. Wildlife Works provided important insights for the questionnaire to gather useful information on land ownership and land-use, which are sensitive issues to those living in the area. Fences are becoming more common in the region, yet a large proportion of wildlife occurs outside protected areas. In fact, fencing, poaching, and habitat loss and fragmentation were listed as the major threats to giraffe in the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem during the KWS Masai Giraffe Working Group Meeting held in February 2018. Data collection will commence in September 2018 in a bid to document the socio-economic and cultural values of giraffe in the transboundary area. In an attempt to curb any threats, results will be shared with our partners once available.



Fences are major threats to giraffe in southern Kenya. An increased number of giraffe dying as a result of has been recorded in the region.

In May and June 2018, with the support of Felix Patton and Petra Campbell, we provided support to conservation partners to conduct a rapid assessment of the giraffe population in Masai Mara, Kenya using road-based photographic mark-recapture surveys. Current numbers estimate that 20% of Kenya's Masai giraffe population occurs in the Masai Mara ecosystem, which groups the Masai Mara National Reserve and surrounding conservancies. Using pattern recognition software, 643 different giraffe were identified out of a total of 1,127 separate sightings in Naibosho Conservancy. Among the 643 giraffe, 356 (55.4%) were sighted only once in a 25-day period, indicating that there is substantial movement in and out of the conservancy. The sex structure noted in the study period was 69% female and 30% male while 1% was not identified. The age structure was 79% adults and 21% juveniles. In order to provide a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the population throughout the area, additional



photo-ID assessments during different times of the year are required. To learn more about Masai giraffe populations in this area, we are planning to conduct annual surveys following the same method.

In June 2018, GCF and USAID PROTECT Tanzania supported the development of the first-ever Tanzania National Giraffe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan in collaboration with the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI). A three-day national consultative workshop was held in Arusha where giraffe conservation stakeholders from government institutions, private land owners, community representatives, NGOs and academic institutions came together to highlight the most urgent giraffe conservation issues in the country. The workshop was led by Tanzanian expert Dr. Alex Kisingo with input from GCF, the College for African Wildlife Management, TAWIRI and Tanzania National Parks Authority. After the three-day workshop, GCF coordinated a session with selected experts to collate all inputs by participants, following an approach recommended by the IUCN. The participants drafted a vision that promotes the conservation of giraffe populations, their habitats and cultural importance across Tanzania while providing benefits to present and future generations. Along with the vision, participants developed two five-year goals that aim to mitigate the threats faced by giraffe populations and their habitats while broadening the understanding and awareness of giraffe conservation in Tanzania.

A total of 100 direct and indirect threats were initially identified by participants, which were then grouped into five major threats that affect giraffe populations in Tanzania: poaching, habitat loss and fragmentation, disease, road kills and electrocution. In order to mitigate these threats, participants developed seven strategic objectives that need to be implemented to secure the future of giraffe in Tanzania. The National Giraffe Conservation and Action Plan for Tanzania is currently still under review and awaiting input from all stakeholders involved. As the authority responsible for eventually implementing the strategy after endorsement, TAWIRI was selected to communicate with different stakeholders including GCF, TANAPA, Tanzania Wildlife Management Areas Authority, Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority, Tanzania Forest Services, academic institutions, and private stakeholders working on giraffe in Tanzania.



Participants and stakeholders at the first-ever Tanzania National Giraffe Conservation Strategy and Action workshop in Arusha, June 2018.



Masai giraffe have already declined by >50% over the last 30 years in their range in East Africa, and GCF is working with partners in the region to raise awareness on the causes of the decline and the conservation action required to mitigate the threats to the survival of this species. Specifically, GCF has drafted MoUs with the relevant wildlife management authorities in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The MoU in Uganda was signed five years ago and renewed recently, while we await input from KWS and TAWIRI to formalize the partnerships in Kenya and Tanzania respectively. The MoUs, along with the updated national giraffe conservation strategies will provide opportunities to increase regional collaboration and provide the baseline for developing an East African giraffe conservation strategy given the transboundary movement of giraffe in the region.

### Nubian giraffe

As the most threatened giraffe species in Kenya, there is an urgent need to update numbers and provide the most recent estimates of Nubian giraffe. We recently completed a conservation assessment report on Nubian giraffe in Kenya with the aim to provide a baseline for recent and current population numbers, trends and distribution, as well as providing recommendations on conservation management programmes, partnerships and collaboration opportunities. This detailed report provides a framework for the Nubian Giraffe Range Committee to develop a conservation strategy and action plan to mitigate the threats that affect the subspecies in Kenya. Efforts are underway to plan for a follow up meeting with the Nubian Giraffe Range Committee in the last quarter of 2018 with a focus on disseminating the conservation assessment report, updating the numbers and adopting a standard method for counting Nubian giraffe involving pattern recognition software.

In line with our ongoing commitment to increased giraffe conservation efforts in Uganda, GCF and partners provided valuable financial and technical support to the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to capture and translocate 14 Nubian giraffe from Murchison Falls National Park (NP) to Kidepo Valley NP over a three-week period in August 2018. Each giraffe was remotely darted from a vehicle and carefully roped to the ground. The giraffe were then transported by chariot to an enclosure (boma) where they spent a few days under close monitoring. A new chariot was commissioned by GCF for this translocation. It was locally built in Uganda and modelled on similar chariots used for giraffe capture in Southern Africa. GCF donated the chariot to UWA for future giraffe capture in the country.

The monitoring period in the boma before their long trip to Kidepo Valley NP significantly contributed to the success of this translocation as it helped to calm down the animals. Each drive took between 8-9 hours and the giraffe were moved in three batches. The truck with its precious cargo received a lot of attention along the way as it offered quite a sight when passing through regional centres such as Gulu and numerous villages. All giraffe stayed calm during the long and exhausting transfer and took all the attention in their stride – and the translocation team encountered many smiling faces along the roadside. This successful translocation increases the number of giraffe in Kidepo Valley NP from 36 to 50 individuals and will hopefully help the population grow over time. It will not only help the gene pool in the park, but also promote tourism opportunities as Kidepo Valley NP is becoming more popular as a tourist destination.



Nubian giraffe translocation from Murchison Falls NP to Kidepo Valley, NP.



Nubian giraffe in the translocation truck about to be released in Kidepo Valley NP, north eastern Uganda.



## Reticulated giraffe

Under the lead of San Diego Zoo Global and local partners, GCF has supported dedicated community-based conservation efforts across northern Kenya, including hiring of and equipping local staff and giraffe game guards – the Twiga Walinzi. The project is going well and continues to increase awareness and conservation efforts on the ground by evaluating and assessing any effects of ongoing development of infrastructure in eastern and north-eastern Kenya, and also implementing the new GiraffeSpotter programme ([giraffespotter.org](http://giraffespotter.org)). The team actively monitors a network of camera traps, removes snares from areas of habitat, conducts photo monitoring and human dimension surveys, as well as community education and outreach. The project currently employs a team of nine in Namunyak Conservancy and a team of three based at Loisaba Conservancy. The entire Twiga Walinzi team has conducted close to 600 face-to-face interviews on giraffe and human dimensions. From these results, it was clear that attitudes towards giraffe are extremely positive (giraffe were often cited as a favorite wildlife species,) and that respondents perceive key benefits from personal enjoyment and financial reasons related to conservation and tourism operations. Despite positive attitudes and beliefs in support of giraffe conservation, use of giraffe parts and products is estimated to be prevalent in about 30% of the communities sampled. Targeted outreach efforts may work to reduce this number, raising awareness of the overall decline and building community pride in the uniqueness of northern Kenya's giraffe species. Every year Twiga Walinzi conduct community days and celebrate World Giraffe Day in a bid to raise awareness for giraffe conservation – a great opportunity to bring people together and focus on giraffe!



Twiga Walinzi team celebrating World Giraffe Day with members of the Namunyak Wildlife Conservancy Trust, northern Kenya.



## Awareness raising and capacity enhancement

To enhance and raise awareness on giraffe conservation status in the region, we continue to build partnerships across the globe and give invited lectures. Our East Africa Coordinator, Arthur Muneza, was awarded the Steve H. Taylor African Conservation Award at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo in May 2018. The award honours achievements in wildlife conservation and research on the African continent. What a great recognition for his efforts to date!

Matthew Muruana, who has been interning with GCF for the past 14 months, was recently hired in a permanent position and as part of the new role GCF will support him to undertake a Master's degree at the University of Nairobi, with a focus on the conservation of Nubian giraffe in Kenya. These efforts will ensure that GCF remains at the forefront of training conservation leaders within East Africa and increase awareness and education opportunities around giraffe conservation and management.



GCF East Africa Coordinator, Arthur Muneza, receiving the Steve H. Taylor Award from Liz Fowler, Executive Director of the Cleveland Zoological Society and Dr. Chris Kuhar, Executive Director of Cleveland Metroparks Zoo.





# Partners & Supporters



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