Where do you find giraffe in Kenya?

Giraffe in Kenya occur within different types of land-management, including national parks, national reserves, communal land, and private ranches. Even though the range of giraffes in Kenya has dramatically decreased over recent decades, they do still occur in 27 of the 47 counties, although mostly in and around protected areas.

Reticulated giraffe occur in the southern parts of Kenya, ranging from Nairobi National Park southwards through the Athi Plains, and southwest towards the Masai Mara Ecosystem to the Amboseli Ecosystem. Chyulu Hills National Park, Tsavo East and West National Parks. While the Nakuru private ranches are home to the northerm populations of Masai giraffes, they are also found in and around Hell’s Gate National Park.

Reticulated giraffe roam the northern and northeastern part of Kenya, through the Marsabit National Park and Reserve, Samburu, Shaba and Buffalo National Reserves, northern nilgandals and conservancies, and various private lands. The southeastern population occurs in northern Tsavo East National Park. Important reticulated giraffe populations also extend east to communal areas in Laikipia and Maribaire counties.

Since 1970, Nubian giraffe have gradually been reintroduced to their native ranges as well as to new ranges in Kenya. From east to west, small populations now occur in Mwea National Reserve, Giraffe Centre, Kigio Wildlife Conservancy, Soysambu Wildlife Conservancy and Lake Nakuru National Park, Naivasha, Eldoret National Park, Ruma National Park, and Lake Baringo.

Giraffe in Kenya

Giraffe range extends throughout Kenya and they can be found in open grasslands, woodlands and scrublands. Giraffes are browsers, feeding on a wide variety of tree species, such as Vachellia (formerly Acacia), Combretum, Commiphora and Fumalgal. Giraffe browsing pressure promotes new browse growth, making plant resources more accessible. In their search for browse and mates, giraffes cover great distances, but increasing human populations, expansion of agricultural land and infrastructure development have begun fragmenting their ranges. From a conservation aspect, this entailed lack of long-distance movement limits access to suitable forage as well as the natural gene flow between populations. Giraffes in Kenya live in a multiple-bond social system, which means that the size and composition of herds change, depending on environmental factors and seasons, individuals or small groups will either merge with or split from a herd. This increases vigilance and the protection of calves from predators by large carnivores, adult female giraffes sometimes form large herds or so-called mobs. Males bulls can be seen running at a stroll alone or in smaller numbers, occasionally joining different herds or groups.

Range and habitat

Giraffes are one of the most iconic and easily recognisable species in Africa. There is a wide array of local names for giraffes in Kenya: berga (Kikuyu), abanzi (Kamba), akoko (Luhya), akokr (Swahili), koriko (Ateso), and ake (Elgon). Historically, giraffes roamed throughout most parts of Kenya, and they played an important cultural role in indigenous communities. Apart from their meat and bones, their hides and tails were prized for their strong leather and also used as broom. Rapid expansion of the human population and the consequent changes in land-use practices have severely fragmented the habitat and range of giraffes in Kenya. In the case of reticulated giraffes, the rapid decline of their numbers in the mid-1950s almost led to their local extermination (local extinctions). To secure and further their conservation, giraffe has since been reintroduced into new areas as well as parts of their former native range in Kenya.

Threats

The main threats to giraffes 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, shrivelling and reduced food availability, especially in northern and eastern Kenya – an important habitat for reticulated giraffes.
- Prevalence and increased severity of viral, bacterial, canine, and dour, which is a major threat to their populations.
- Poaching by commoners, especially high amongst youth.
- The rise of disease in the recent decline of giraffes populations in Kenya is underestimated and requires greater attention.
- The risk of local and international trade of giraffes and giraffe products is also largely unknown and requires more attention.