



KENYA'S GIRAFFE

Conservation Guide

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



Taxonomy & Populations



Where do you find giraffe in Kenya?

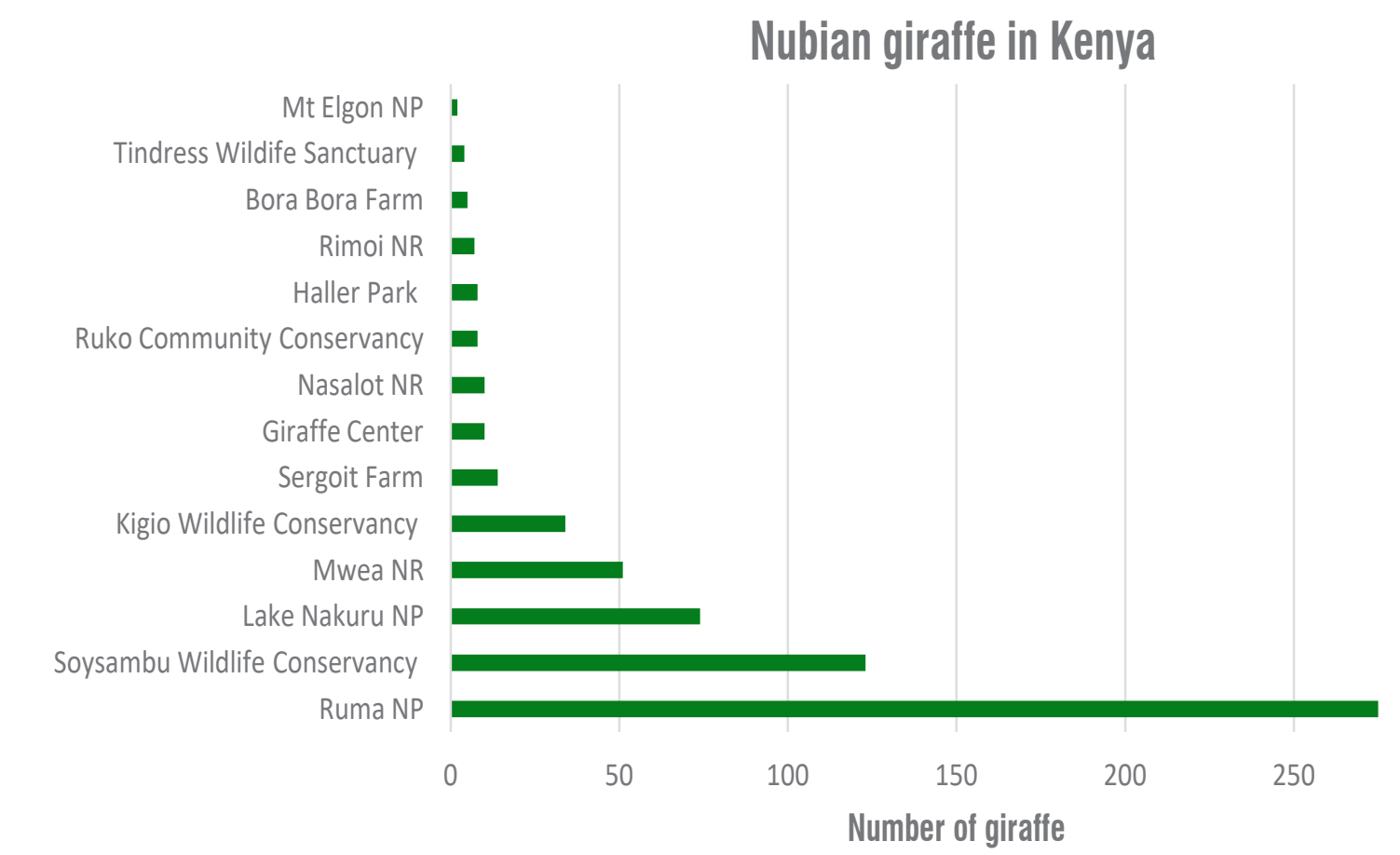
Giraffe in Kenya occur within different types of land-management, including national parks, national reserves, communal land, and private ranches. Even though the range of giraffe in Kenya has dramatically decreased over recent decades, they do still occur in 27 of the 47 counties, although mostly in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

Masai giraffe occur in the southern parts of Kenya, ranging from 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 East and West National Parks. While the Naivasha private ranches are home to the northernmost population of Masai giraffe, they are also found in and around Hell's Gate National Park.

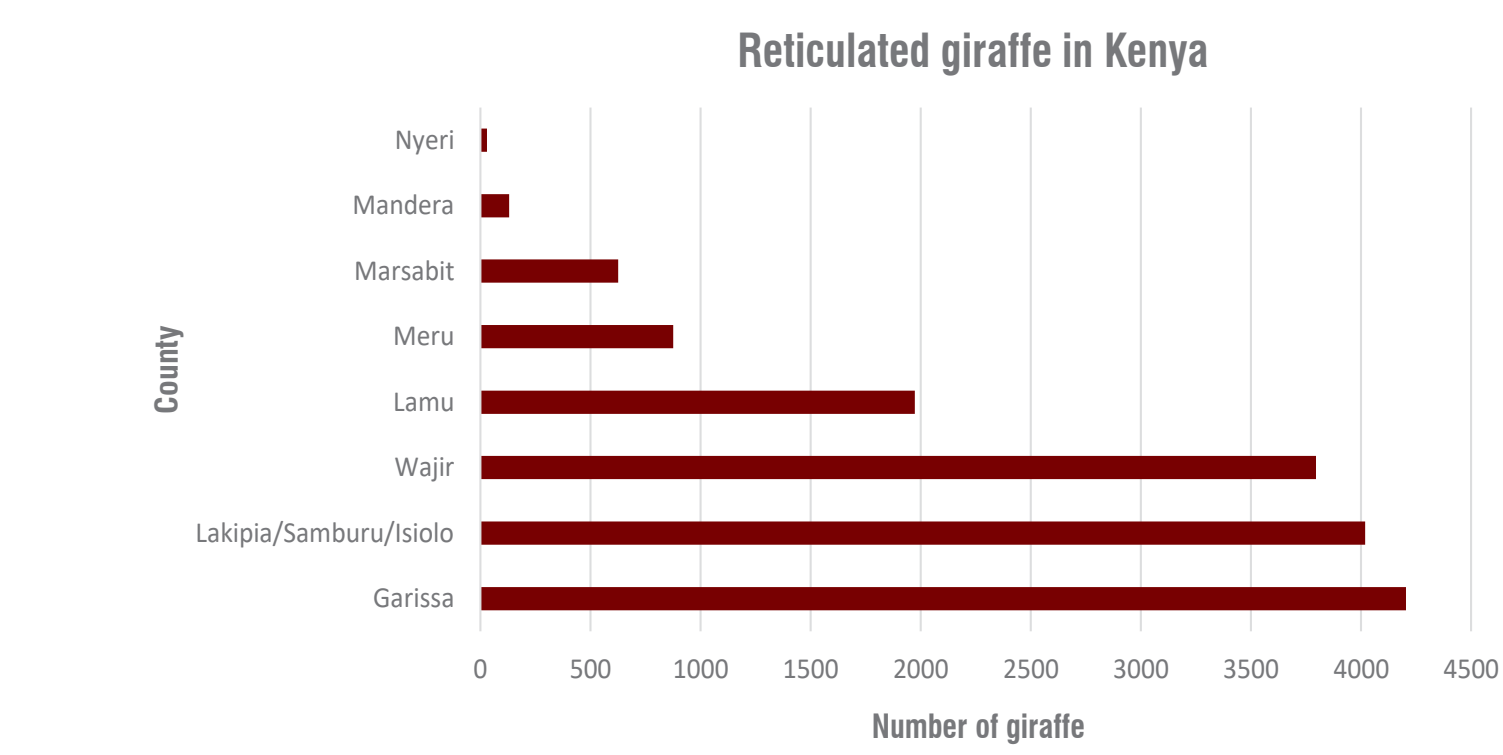
Reticulated giraffe roam the northern and northeastern part of Kenya, through the Marsabit National Park and Reserve, Samburu, Shaba and Buffalo National Reserves, northern rangelands and conservancies, and various private lands. The southernmost population occurs in northern Tsavo East National Park. Important reticulated giraffe populations also extend east to communal areas in Lamu and Garissa 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, Nasolot National Reserve, Mt. Elgon National Park, Ruma National Park, and Ruiko Conservancy (Lake Baringo).

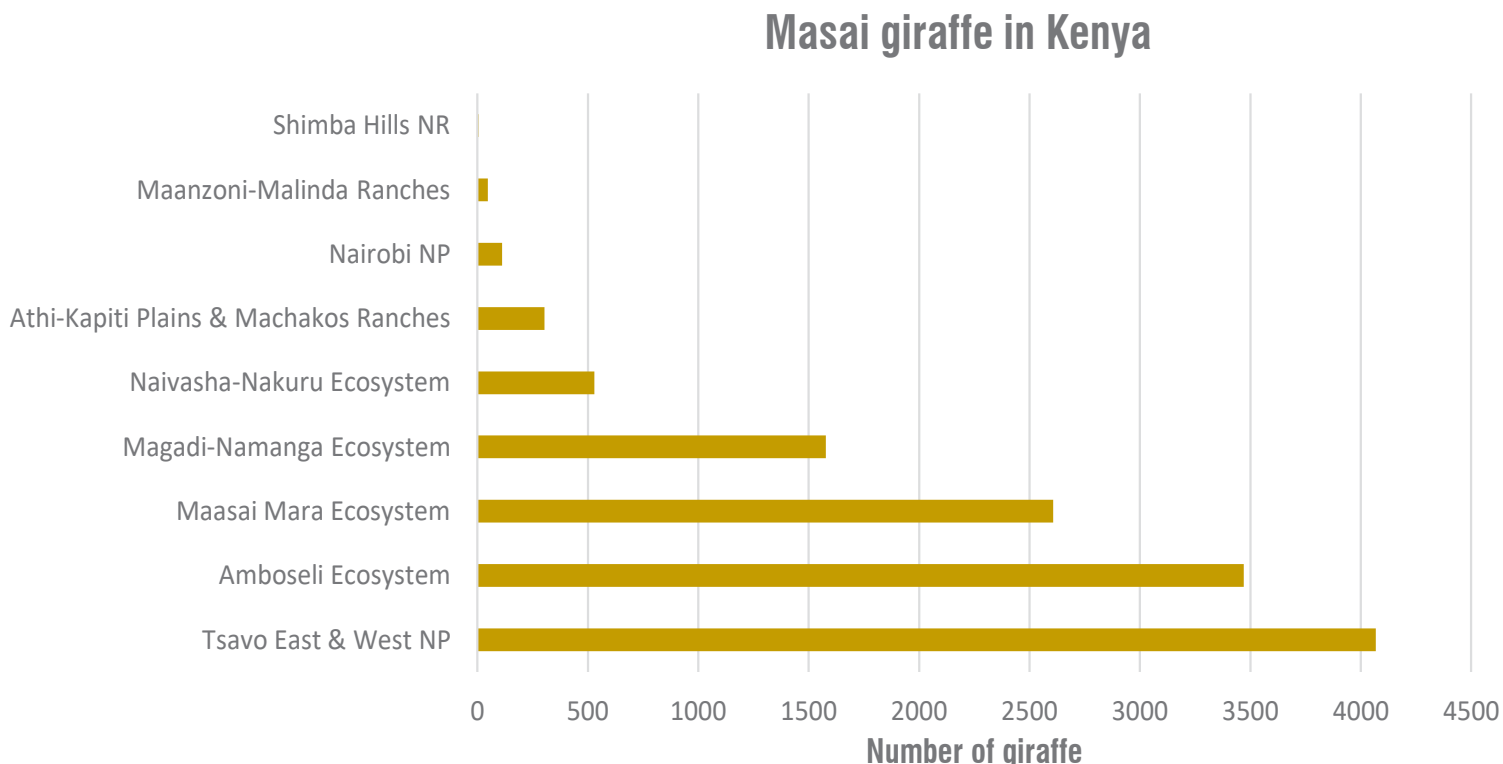
Nubian giraffe *G. c. camelopardalis*



Reticulated giraffe *Giraffa reticulata*



Masai giraffe *Giraffa tippelskirchi*



Range and habitat

Giraffe range extends throughout Kenya and they can be found in open grasslands, woodlands and scrublands. Giraffe are browsers, feeding on a wide variety of tree species, such as *Vachellia* (formerly *Acacia*), *Combretum*, *Commiphora* and *Terminalia*. Giraffe browsing-pressure promotes new forage growth, making plant resources more accessible. In their search for forage and mates, giraffe cover great distances, but increasing human population, expansion of agricultural land and infrastructure development has largely fragmented their range. From a conservation aspect, this enforced lack of long-distance movement limits access to suitable forage as well as the natural gene flow between populations. Giraffe in Kenya live in a fission-fusion 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. To increase vigilance and the protection of calves from predation by large carnivores, adult female giraffe sometimes form large herds or calf crèches. Mature bulls can be seen roaming either alone or together in smaller numbers, occasionally joining different herds of giraffe.



Giraffe in Kenya

Until recently, giraffe were classified as one species with nine subspecies, occurring in 21 countries in Africa. However, our new research shows that there are indeed four distinct species of giraffe; three of these species occur in Kenya.

Reticulated giraffe roam northern and eastern Kenya; Masai giraffe inhabit the savannah and woodlands of southern Kenya; and Nubian giraffe (a subspecies of the northern giraffe, formerly Rothschild's giraffe) have been introduced to several natural and new fragmented areas in western and central Kenya.

In the last two decades, Masai giraffe have declined by more than 50%, while reticulated giraffe have experienced an even greater decline of approximately 60%. Nubian giraffe have increased from 130 individuals in the 1970s to the current estimate of 625 individuals – which is a significant increase. This increase in Nubian giraffe estimates is a result of increased conservation attention through more scientific studies and long-term monitoring efforts.

Kenya, a hotspot for giraffe in East Africa, has a total of 29,200 giraffe, which account for almost 30% of giraffe in Africa. Reticulated giraffe are the most abundant giraffe species in Kenya (approximately 15,650 individuals), followed by Masai giraffe (approximately 12,700 individuals), and finally Nubian giraffe (only approximately 625 individuals).



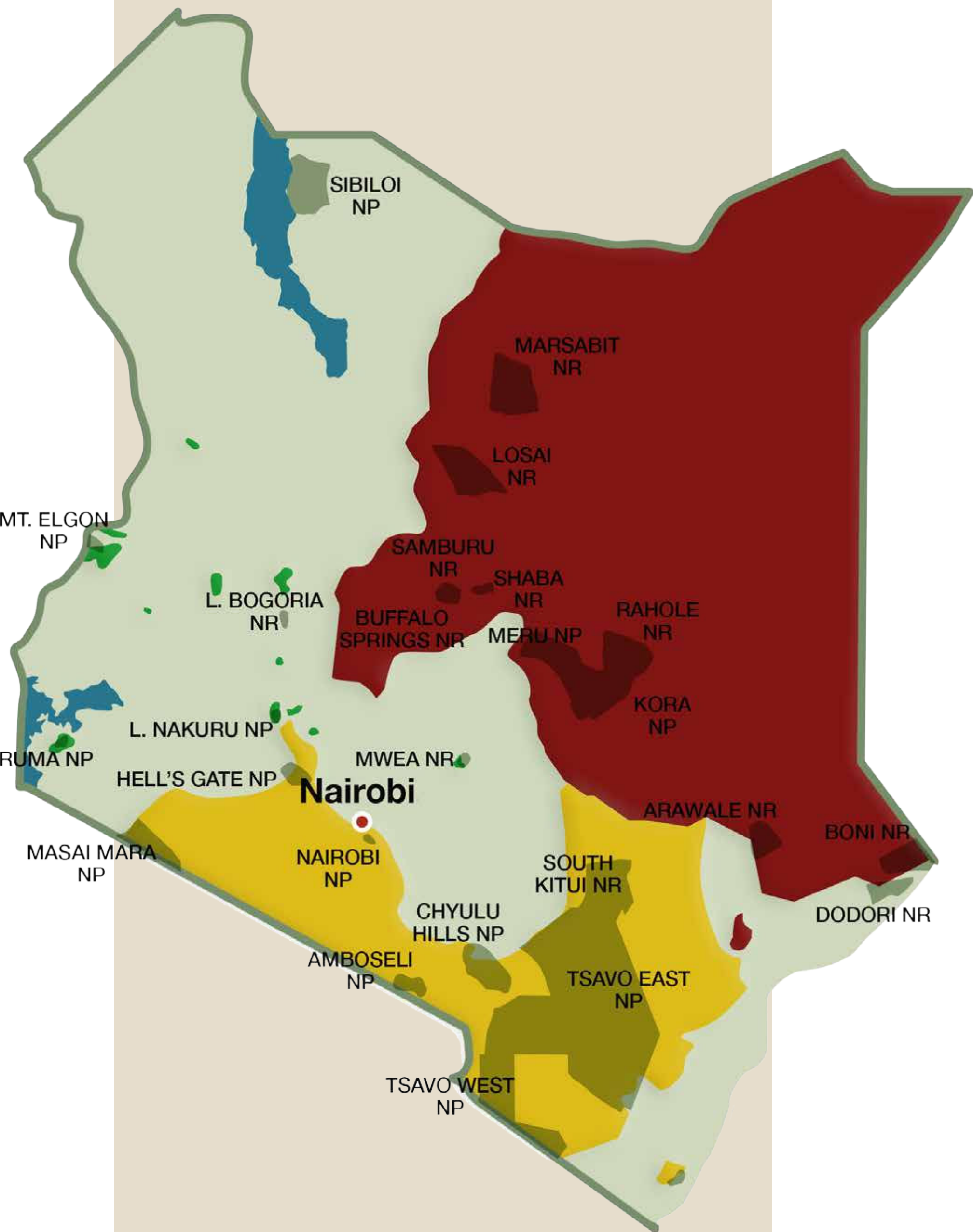
Local history of giraffe

Giraffe are one of the most iconic and easily recognisable species in Africa. There is a wide array of local names for giraffe in Kenya: twiga (Swahili), ekorii (Ateso), kanyiet (Elgon), ndũiga (Gikuyu), tika (Kalenjin and Luo), ndwiya (Kamba), etiika (Luhya), oloodo-kirragata or olchangito-oodo (Maasai), lenywa (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 also 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 their numbers in the mid-1900s almost led to their local extirpation (local extinction). To secure and further their conservation, Nubian giraffe have since been reintroduced into new areas as well as parts of their former native range in Kenya.

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 amongst calves.
- The role of **disease** in the recent decline of giraffe populations in Kenya is undetermined and requires greater attention.
- The risk of **local and international trade** of giraffe and giraffe products is also largely unknown and requires more attention.



- Nubian giraffe - approximately 625
Giraffa camelopardalis camelopardalis
- Reticulated giraffe - approximately 15,650
Giraffa reticulata
- Masai giraffe - approximately 12,700
Giraffa tippelskirchi



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.

www.giraffeconservation.org