Where do you find giraffe in Tanzania?

Masai giraffe are widely distributed throughout northern and central Tanzania in both protected and unprotected areas, including the Serengeti, Tarangire-Ngorongoro, Arusha, Manyara, Mikumi, Kigoma and Shire Valley ecosystems. Additionally, Masai giraffe are also found in western and eastern Tanzania, including Nyasa National Park and the Kafunta-Rufiji ecosystem. Even though the Selous-Mikumi ecosystem, in southern Tanzania, is the largest wildlife protection area in the world, giraffes only occur in the northern section (Nyasa National Park) as the Ruvu River acts as a natural barrier, preventing them from accessing the southern sections. However, due to the vast size of conservation areas and the logistical difficulties involved in accessing southern Tanzania, studies of giraffe have mostly focused on the northern part of the country.

Giraffe in Tanzania

Historically, giraffes were considered one species, Giraffe camelopardalis, with nine subspecies. However, the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF), together with partner Serengeti-Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre (SBCR), performed the first-ever comprehensive DNA sampling and analysis (genomic, nuclear and mitochondrial) of all major natural populations of giraffes throughout their range in Africa. These studies have resulted in an updated understanding of the traditional taxonomy. The data shows that there are four distinct species of giraffes. These ground-breaking findings have already contributed significantly to giraffe research, conservation and management.

Only one of the four species of giraffes occurs in Tanzania. Masai giraffe (Giraffa camelopardalis tippelskirchi) is the only species of giraffe occurring in Tanzania, with a few individuals also occurring in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.

Habitat and Ecology

Throughout Tanzania, giraffes are mainly found in scrublands, open grasslands and woodlands. As browsers, giraffes feed primarily on the leaves, fruits, stems and flowers of a wide range of tree species, such as Combretum, Commiphora, Vachellia and Terminalia. Giraffes appear to seasonally change their home ranges, covering great distances in search of mates and available forage. Giraffe live in a fission-fusion social system, which means that the size and composition of herds change frequently. Depending on environmental factors and seasons, individuals or small groups will either merge with or split from a herd. However, a rapid increase in the human population has led to encroachment across the Masai giraffe range.

Local history of giraffe

Since Tanzania’s independence in 1961, giraffes have played an important role in the country. In Swahili, Tanzania’s lingua franca, giraffe are known as Twiga. Twiga was the country’s national animal, and they are protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act No. 2 of 2009. According to the IUCN, the Masai giraffe population in Tanzania has declined from approximately 31,000 in 1989 to 23,000 and they are listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. However, according to the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI) aerial survey data, the Masai giraffe population is estimated at 28,850 individuals. Together with the Kenyan population, this would make Masai giraffe the second most populous giraffe species in Africa.

Conservation

Conservation and management.

The main threats to giraffe in Tanzania include:

- Illegal hunting/poaching using snares and traps for bush meat and other products such as hides, bones and tail hair. Giraffe products are used for traditional medicine, for example, in northern Tanzania some people believe that giraffe bone marrow and brains can be useful for curing HIV/AIDS.
- Habitat degradation and fragmentation: the increased human population has led to encroachment across the Masai giraffe range.
- Disease such as Giraffe Skin Disease (GSD) and Giraffe Ear Disease (GED). GSD is characterised by greyish-brown lesions that appear on the forelimbs and neck of adult and sub-adult giraffes, and GED manifests in lesions on the ears which then become fur-covered. In Tanzania, it is estimated that approximately 10% of the total number of giraffes in the wild Giraffe in Tanzania occur within different types of land-management, including national parks, games reserves, wildlife management areas and communal land.

- Predation, particularly by lions and hyenas.
- Predation of calves by carnivores.
- Increase of unpalatable tree species such as Vachellia robusta, which is known to reduce giraffe forage in the Serengeti National Park, could have a declining effect on giraffe populations.
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Giraffa camelopardalis

Giraffa camelopardalis tippelskirchi

Giraffa camelopardalis thornicrofti

Giraffa reticulata

Giraffa c. peralta

Giraffa c. camelopardalis

Giraffa c. antiquorum

Giraffa c. giraffa

Genus, Species and Subspecies:

Giraffe camelopardalis

- G. c. tippelskirchi
- G. c. thornicrofti
- G. c. giraffa

Class: Mammalia (Mammals)

Order: Artiodactyla

Family: Giraffidae

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 giraffes in the wild throughout Africa.

giraffeconservation.org