

Country Profile

Republic of Burkina Faso



Giraffe Conservation Status Report

August 2019

General statistics

Size of country: 274,200 km²

Size of protected areas / percentage protected area coverage: 14.4%

Species and subspecies

In 2016 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) completed the first detailed assessment of the conservation status of giraffe, revealing that their numbers are in peril. This was further emphasised when the majority of the IUCN recognised subspecies were assessed in 2018 – some as *Critically Endangered*. While this update further confirms the real threat to one of Africa's most charismatic megafauna, it also highlights a rather confusing aspect of giraffe conservation: how many species/subspecies of giraffe are there? The IUCN currently recognises one species (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) and nine subspecies of giraffe (Muller *et al.* 2016) historically based on outdated assessments of their morphological features and geographic ranges. The subspecies are thus divided: Angolan giraffe (*G. c. angolensis*), Kordofan giraffe (*G. c. antiquorum*), Masai giraffe (*G. c. tippelskirchi*), Nubian giraffe (*G. c. camelopardalis*), reticulated giraffe (*G. c. reticulata*), Rothschild's giraffe (*G. c. rothschildi*), South African giraffe (*G. c. giraffa*), Thornicroft's giraffe (*G. c. thornicrofti*) and West African giraffe (*G. c. peralta*).

However, over the past decade GCF together with their partner Senckenberg Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre (BiK-F) have performed the first-ever comprehensive DNA sampling and analysis (genomic, nuclear and mitochondrial) from all major natural populations of giraffe throughout their range in Africa. As a result, an update to the traditional taxonomy now exists. This study revealed that there are four distinct species of giraffe and likely five subspecies (Fennessy *et al.* 2016; Winter *et al.* 2018). The four species are Masai giraffe (*G. tippelskirchi*), northern giraffe (*G. camelopardalis*), reticulated giraffe (*G. reticulata*) and southern giraffe (*G. giraffa*). Nubian giraffe (*G. c. camelopardalis*), Kordofan giraffe (*G. c. antiquorum*), West African giraffe (*G. c. peralta*) are the three subspecies of the northern giraffe, while Angolan giraffe (*G. g. angolensis*) and South African giraffe (*G. g. giraffa*) fall under the southern giraffe. Rothschild's giraffe is genetically identical to the Nubian giraffe, and thus subsumed into it. Similarly, preliminary data suggests that the Thornicroft's giraffe is genetically similar to the Masai giraffe, however, additional research is necessary to determine if they are genetically identical or should be considered a subspecies of Masai giraffe (Winter *et al.* 2018). Based on this research, GCF in all publications refers to the updated giraffe taxonomy of four species, while a taxonomy review by the IUCN is ongoing.

The following species/subspecies of giraffe are historically found in Burkina Faso:

Species: Northern giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*)

Subspecies: West African giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis peralta*)

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List (IUCN 2018):

Giraffa camelopardalis (as a species, old taxonomy) – Vulnerable (Muller *et al.* 2016)

Giraffa camelopardalis peralta – Vulnerable (Fennessy *et al.* 2018)

In the Republic of Burkina Faso:

Regionally Extinct.

Issues/threats

Once widely distributed across the Sudano-Sahelian Zone, from Senegal to Lake Chad, West African giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis peralta*) have been extirpated from most of its former range by illegal hunting and habitat alteration, destruction and fragmentation (Hassanin *et al.* 2007; Ciofalo 1995; Dagg & Foster 1976; Happold 1969). Today, West African giraffe only occur in two populations in Niger.

The Republic of Burkina Faso (previously known as the Upper Volta and referred to as Burkina Faso in this report) was once considered to have the greatest wealth of faunal species in West Africa (ALIC 1980). Desert lands have encroached upon the country's savanna habitats as vegetation cover decreased in response to grazing, cultivation, woodcutting, burning and drought, leaving the land progressively degraded (ALIC 1980; Happold 1969). Overexploitation exerted severe pressure on wildlife populations and has threatened the survival of many species, especially large mammals (Stuart *et al.* 1990; ALIC 1980; Happold 1969). Although natural geographical barriers might have restricted the range of giraffe into and out of Burkina Faso (Happold 1969; Sidney 1965), the abovementioned factors have contributed to the extirpation of giraffe from the country more than a century ago.

Estimate population abundance and trends

Historic

Historically, West African giraffe were found all over the region now covered in many areas by the Sahara Desert (Dagg & Foster 1976; Dekeyser 1955). Although giraffe were still widely distributed throughout West Africa by the end of the nineteenth century, a substantial reduction in their distribution range, due to the introduction of firearms, agriculture development and deforestation, was reported by the beginning of the twentieth century (Leroy *et al.* 2009; Ciofalo 1995; Sidney 1965; Mauny 1957).

The Niger-Benue River system and the forests of the Cameroons and Liberia were generally regarded as effective barriers to the extension of the West African giraffe's geographical range southwards into the apparent suitable savanna woodland habitat of Burkina Faso and adjoining countries such as Ivory Coast and Ghana (East 1999; Ciofalo 1995; Happold 1969). However, according to East (1999), giraffe were known to occur as rare vagrants in Burkina Faso.

Giraffe were reportedly absent from Burkina Faso by the mid-1930s (Sidney 1965). In 1949, a small group of giraffe were seen in the far south of the country, suggesting that giraffe occasionally crossed the Niger River (Happold 1969). River crossings were only possible due to the existence of several small islands and sand banks exposed during periods of low water (Happold 1969). According to Happold (1969), no giraffe were present in the country during the late 1960s and also Dagg (1962) made no reference to their occurrence. In 1980, giraffe was reportedly present in the north of Burkina Faso, close to the borders with Mali and Niger, outside of any protected area (ALIC 1980). In the early 1980s, a pair of giraffe wandered



from the Mali-Niger border area south-westwards across the country and ended up near the Nazinga Game Ranch in the south of Burkina Faso (East 1999).

In the late 1990s, Niger's president donated five giraffe from Niger as a personal gift to the president of the neighbouring Burkina Faso (Pittman 2009). Of the five captured giraffe three died during the operation, while two were supposedly transported to Burkina Faso (Pittman 2009). Their fate is unknown (Pittman 2009).

Current

Giraffe are regionally extinct in the wild in Burkina Faso (Fennessy & Brown 2010).

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Map

