

Country Profile

United Republic of Tanzania



Giraffe Conservation Status Report

August 2020

General statistics

Size of country: 947,303 km²

Size of protected areas / percentage protected area coverage: 38%

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one species (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) and nine subspecies of giraffe (Muller *et al.* 2018) historically based on outdated assessments of their morphological features and geographic ranges.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 and subspecies of giraffe are found in the United Republic of Tanzania:

Species: Masai giraffe (*Giraffa tippelskirchi* formerly *Giraffa camelopardalis tippelskirchi*)

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List (IUCN 2018):

Giraffa camelopardalis (as a species, old taxonomy) – Vulnerable (Muller *et al.* 2018)

G. c. tippelskirchi – Endangered

In the United Republic of Tanzania:

Giraffe are the national animal of the United Republic of Tanzania (referred to as Tanzania in this report), and as such, are protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act No. 5 of 2009, which prohibits any killing, wounding, capturing and hunting. Punishment for violating this act includes fines and imprisonment. While there is no direct mention of giraffe as Tanzania's national animal in the constitution, giraffe have been prominently used in Tanzanian symbolism. For instance, giraffe were used as watermarks on Tanzanian banknotes issued since independence in 1961 to the 2011 series (Linzmayr 2011). The Bank of Tanzania unveiled the 'Giraffe banknote series' in 1997 whereby the 500, 1,000, 5,000, and 10,000 denominations had giraffe as the obverse (principal design), while the 5,000-banknote retained giraffe as the reverse as well (Fig. 2). Giraffe are also used widely in marketing and promoting various products and services in Tanzania, with the *twiga* meaning giraffe in the local Kiswahili language, including beer (Twiga Brew), tourism (Twiga Campsite & Lodge), building material (Twiga Cement), airlines (Air Tanzania), banks (Twiga Bancorp), and chemical products (Twiga Chemical Industries), to name but a few. Between 2018 and 2019, the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI), in collaboration with relevant government and non-government stakeholders, developed and launched the National Giraffe Conservation Action 2020 – 2024, making Tanzania only the third African country with an official giraffe conservation strategy. This crucial framework outlines the priority actions for giraffe conservation in the country.

Issues/threats

Tanzania is home to the Masai giraffe only, distributed throughout northern and central areas of the country. The most important contemporary threats to the Masai giraffe are illegal hunting, land encroachment, and diseases.

Masai giraffe are illegally hunted using guns, snares and dogs for meat, as well as products such as hide, bones and tail hairs (Caro 2008; Strauss *et al.* 2015). In Serengeti National Park (NP), adult giraffe are illegally hunted with wire snares hung on tree canopies (Strauss *et al.* 2015). Although a single giraffe can provide a large quantity of meat, it is not clear that giraffe are preferred as a source of bushmeat (e.g. Strauss *et al.* 2015). Giraffe products are used in traditional medicine; in some areas of Tanzania, giraffe bone marrow and brains are believed to cure HIV/AIDS (Arusha Times 2004; Nkwame 2007), while tail-hair and other products are used to make bracelets and trinkets for tourists (Mbogoni 2013). Between the 1970s and 2000s, Masai giraffe numbers declined in Serengeti NP, partially due to poaching (Strauss *et al.* 2015), while Rentsch *et al.* (2015) estimated annual giraffe poaching caused a 2-10% decline in the Serengeti population. Poaching of Masai giraffe appears to be also widespread in the Katavi-Rukwa ecosystem (Caro 2008) and the West Kilimanjaro corridor (Nkwame 2007). Illegal hunting has potentially resulted in the near total absence of giraffe in the game controlled area in the western part of the Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem (Kiffner *et al.* 2015). However, the disappearance of giraffe in this area is also reported to be due to increased livestock influx and grazing (TAWIRI pers. comm.). To better understand the effects of poaching on Masai giraffe, more comprehensive and wide-spread studies need to be done on the drivers of illegal hunting.



Extensive encroachment of land has occurred across some parts of the Masai giraffe range. The majority of Tanzania's population lives off sustenance farming, yet increasing human populations are leading to a reduction in habitat (Soini 2005), and areas with human settlement and agriculture have reduced species richness (Kiffner et al. 2015). In the Mt. Kilimanjaro area, habitat loss and fragmentation, coupled with the expansion and appearance of settlements, is increasing (Soini 2005). While management areas (inhabited by both livestock and wildlife) show no reduction in species richness, they do show a difference in species composition (Kiffner et al. 2015). This might be a special case however, as areas with livestock in Tanzania have smaller wildlife numbers. Importantly, the coexistence of livestock and wildlife is fundamental to the continued survival of many large mammal species in Tanzania and other areas of Africa. While such a situation may increase the likelihood of broader human-wildlife conflict, the impact on giraffe is likely minimal as disease transmission, competition for resources, and illegal hunting may be more serious threats (Kiffner et al. 2015).

Increasingly, giraffe skin disease (GSD), an infection characterised by greyish-brown lesions that appear on the forelimbs and neck of adult and sub-adult giraffe (Fig. 3), appears to be an indirect threat to giraffe survival in Tanzania (Epaphras et al. 2012, Karimuribo et al. 2014). While GSD was first observed in Ruaha NP in 2000 (Epaphras et al. 2012), it is now considered to be among the most urgent threats to giraffe populations in the country (TANAPA pers. comm.). Tanzania is a hotspot for GSD with the highest reported rates in Africa: 86% of the observed giraffe population in Ruaha NP have symptoms of GSD, while as many as 63% and 23% of the giraffe population in Tarangire NP and Serengeti NP respectively show signs of the skin condition (Muneza et al. 2016, 2017).

Despite these documented high rates of GSD, no study has proven that the infection is fatal to affected individuals. The etiological agent of the disease is yet to be identified as well, but preliminary results indicate that GSD is caused by a nematode, then further complicated by a fungal infection (Epaphras et al. 2014, Muneza et al. 2016). Another study has revealed that soil could play a role in the development of the disease (Bond et al. 2016). Because the disease manifests primarily on the limbs, researchers have suggested that the disease could lead to lameness, reduced mobility and eventually increased vulnerability to lion predation (Epaphras et al. 2012, 2014; Muneza et al. 2017). Tanzania is also the only area in Africa where giraffe ear disease (GED) has been observed (Karimuribo 2014, Muneza et al. 2016). The infection is characterised by lesions appearing on the ears, which then become droopy (Karimuribo, 2014). Preliminary results suggest that GED could be caused by the Kikoboga worm, named after the location in eastern Tanzania where it was first discovered, near Mikumi NP (TAWIRI pers. comm.). Both GSD and GED present an unknown threat as no study has examined yet whether either disease can be transmitted to livestock or other wildlife species.

Estimate population abundance and trends

Historic

Masai giraffe were once widespread in northern and central Tanganyika (now present day Tanzania), with sightings common both inside and outside of protected areas (Sidney 1965). Giraffe were commonly seen in many areas including the Serengeti Plains, Ngorongoro Conservation Area, many parts of the Masai Steppe, around Mt. Kilimanjaro and the Sanya Plains. A ground game count conducted in January 1958 estimated 750 giraffe in Serengeti NP alone, mostly around Banagi (Sidney 1965). Giraffe have never been seen in the Southern Province of Tanzania, their range restricted by the Rufiji River (Sidney 1965). Around the middle of the last century, giraffe herds numbering 30-40 individuals were regularly seen in the Serengeti Plains (Sidney 1965).



Studies conducted throughout the 1960s and 1970s in various locations around the country often found giraffe populations to be stable, if not increasing. Throughout 1960-61, Lamprey (1964) concluded that the giraffe density in the Tarangire ecosystem had remained stable at 0.95 giraffe per km² throughout the year. An aerial census of the Serengeti conducted in 1976 found that giraffe numbers had increased by 6% in the 5-year period since 1971 (Pellew 1983). An extensive aerial survey of the Ruaha NP, the Rungwa and Kizigo Game Reserves and the proposed Mloa-Ilambi Game Controlled Area conducted in 1977 observed 3,478 giraffe (Barnes & Douglas-Hamilton 1982). This study found there to be a non-significant increase in giraffe numbers from the previously reported 2,430 giraffe in 1972 (Norton-Griffiths 1975; Barnes & Douglas-Hamilton 1982). Accurate estimates of giraffe distribution and abundance at the beginning of the last century are hard to come by. Sidney (1965) speculated that although there was no numerical comparison available, giraffe distribution was similar to what it was in the early 1900s. It was known that a large number of giraffe were decimated by Rinderpest in the first 60 years after its detection in 1890 (Barrett et al. 2006), but this was not thought to have had a lasting impact on the population, which later recovered after the global eradication of rinderpest (Sidney 1965). Although no population estimate for Tanzania is available, by the middle of the 1900s Masai giraffe had a widespread, stable population that was in no danger of extermination (Sidney 1965).

Recent

East (1999) reported that the giraffe population in Serengeti NP had declined from 8,830 in 1989-91 to 6,170 in 1996. He proposed illegal hunting and/or possibly disease as the apparent cause of decline. East (1999) also stated that there was a total of 28,860 giraffe in Tanzania, mostly inside of protected areas.

Caro et al. (1998) pointed out that illegal hunting was having a negative impact on giraffe populations across the whole of Tanzania. Poachers were known to move into hunting areas once tourism abated in the wet season (Caro et al. 1998). Caro (1999) found a very high local density of giraffe (2.21 giraffe/km²) in the Katavi-Rukwa ecosystem, which was not unusual for the area as the seasonal lakes in the Katavi-Rukwa NP supported very high local populations of large mammals. A later study by Caro (2008) in the same ecosystem noted a non-significant decline in the giraffe population from 1988-2002, as well as other large mammals. This evaluation of long term data from the Tanzania Wildlife Conservation Monitoring Program (TWCM), now known as the Conservation Information Monitoring Unit (CIMU) under TAWIRI, was gathered from systematic reconnaissance flights (SRF) (Stoner et al. 2006). Furthermore, data came from the vehicle surveys carried out in 1995-96 (Caro 1999) coupled with foot surveys carried out in 2004 (Waltert et al. 2008), which estimated a density of 0.71 giraffe/km². Caro (2008) concluded that the decline in giraffe was mainly due to illegal hunting pressure.

While the Katavi-Rukwa system showed a decline in giraffe numbers, Treydle et al. (2005) assessed ground survey and aerial survey data from 1991-2003 and observed an increase in the giraffe population in Saadani NP. Between 2001 and 2003, 152 giraffe were counted throughout the Park.

A comprehensive study of all the SRF data from 1988-2001 was conducted by Stoner et al. (2006; 2007). Six regions of Tanzania were surveyed, encompassing large protected areas such as national parks and game reserves. These analyses found that only the Katavi-Rukwa habitat showed a decline in giraffe population. Throughout the other five survey areas, giraffe populations were stable.

Current

TAWIRI has been conducting SRF since 1986 and population estimates from SRF methods. It is important to note that this is standard TAWIRI protocol as regular SRF flights are conducted every three years unless an urgent need arises prompted by drastic changes in climatic patterns or other ecological changes. Additionally, SRF flights are cost effective in that they cover large areas in a short amount of time. An analysis by Bolger



et al. (2016) of the TAWIRI dataset attempted to smooth variation in data by averaging the first ten years of data (1986-1995) and comparing that with the average of the last ten years of data (2002-2011). These time ranges contain different numbers of estimates in each site. This analysis method determined there to be a 29% decline in giraffe numbers across Tanzania from approximately 31,000 in 1986 to 22,000 in 2013 giraffe. Statistically significant declines were seen in the Katavi and Ruaha-Rungwa regions. In an attempt to compensate for any underlying trends in the data that averaging over a number of years can create, Bolger et al. (2016) used regression equations from the regression of ln (population size) from 1986-2011. This suggests a more substantial decline of 52% from 39,000 to 19,000 in these six areas of Tanzania over the 25-year period. However, the total giraffe population in Tanzania is estimated to be at 28,580 from TAWIRI SRF data. Thus, despite trend of giraffe population declines across East Africa, Tanzania still supports the largest giraffe population of any African country.

A recent study conducted in Serengeti NP by Strauss et al. (2015) used photographic mark-recapture methods to estimate local population densities of giraffe in three locations: Seronera, Kirawira and Bologonja. This density data was used to extrapolate to other areas in the national park with a similar habitat. Based on this extrapolation they suggest the total Serengeti NP population was approximately 3,500 in 2008-2010. Recent SRF data from Serengeti NP estimate there are 5886 ±1221 giraffe (TAWIRI, 2010). These population estimates, when compared to those of Pellew (1983) in 1975-76, suggest a decline of 67-86%. However, SRF data from the larger Serengeti ecosystem, which includes the Maswa Game Reserve (GR), Ikorongo GR, Grumeti GR, Ikona Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Makao WMA, and Loliondo Game Controlled Area (GCA) indicate that the region is home to a stable population of approximately 12,000 giraffe. The major reasons for giraffe declines in the Serengeti ecosystem are illegal hunting and snaring (Hoare and Brown 2010; Kilewo and Mpanduji 2010; Marealle 2010), disease (Bond et al. 2016; Muneza et al. 2016) and food limitation caused by the increase in relative abundance of unpalatable tree species, notably *Acacia robusta*. Other threats noted in the Serengeti ecosystem include encroachment (in the west, there is no buffer zone between the PA and farmlands), impacts of climate change, wildfires, erosion of riverbanks, and human activities along the riverbank.

In the Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem, Lee (2015) used photographic mark-recapture methods and recorded a declining trend in the metapopulation growth rate between 2012-2014. The total population size of adult giraffe within the sample area was estimated at 1,225 individuals (790 adult females and 435 adult males), approximately 1.07 giraffe/km². The most recent data from TAWIRI SRFs, which cover the areas of Tarangire NP, Lake Manyara NP, Manyara Ranch Conservancy, Lolkisale GCA, Lake Burunge WMA and Mto wa Mbu GCA, show that there are 3,904 ±507 giraffe (TAWIRI 2016). Interestingly, demographic analysis of sub-populations at five locations in the core of the ecosystem found spatial variation in adult female survivorship that was positively correlated with the intensity of anti-poaching patrols by TANAPA rangers (Lee et al. 2016). As is the case with many of the conservation areas in northern Tanzania, poaching and habitat fragmentation are the major threats to giraffe survival in the Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem.

Giraffe populations in the Katavi-Rukwa ecosystem have a declining trend (Stoner et al. 2007b; Caro 2008) and it was suggested that illegal hunting was the most serious threat to giraffe populations (Caro 2008). Based on interviews with 82 illegal hunters in villages along the southwest boundaries of the park and game reserve, Martin & Caro (2012) estimated that 98 Masai giraffe were illegally hunted annually. In 2006, there were an estimated 4,300 giraffe in the Katavi-Rukwa ecosystem (Müller et al. 2006), down from an estimated 6,107 giraffe, that were counted via foot-surveys (Caro 2008). Recent TAWIRI data show a slow decline with surveys in 2012 and 2014 finding 853±157 giraffe and 1076 giraffe respectively. In addition to poaching, the major threats to the Katavi-Rukwa ecosystem include habitat loss due to a) poor agricultural and mining practices and unsustainable irrigation (this has resulted in pollution and siltation of Lakes Katavi, Chada and Rukwa); b) blocking and damming of major river causeways, which has resulting in emigration and die-off of wildlife downstream; and c) immigration of large herds of livestock and deforestation (Friends of Katavi 2017).

Recent total counts by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) between 2005 and 2017 show that the giraffe population in Mkomazi NP has more than doubled from approximately 62 individuals to an estimated 255 (Ngene et al. 2017). This could be attributed to the fact that Mkomazi NP was upgraded to national park status in 2007.



SRF data by TAWIRI also show that the giraffe population could potentially be higher, with the park supporting 406 ± 108 giraffe. The major threats in Mkomazi NP include cattle invasions and overgrazing, and poaching of giraffe for traditional medicine uses. Despite the upgrading of the status of the conservation area in 2007, Ngene et al. (2017) found a sharp increase of cattle and shoats between 2005 and 2017, from 3,035 heads of cattle to 7,546 and from 800 shoats in 2005 to 2,832 shoats.

Recent estimates of Masai giraffe numbers in the West Kilimanjaro area were 237, while 726 giraffe were counted in the Lake Natron area (Okello et al. 2015). These estimates were averaged across seasons and years. In the West Kilimanjaro and Lake Natron areas, no consistent trend in giraffe numbers was observed. However, the same estimates show declines when compared to earlier total aerial counts conducted by KWS and TAWIRI, which found 1,767 giraffe in the Natron area and 813 giraffe in the West Kilimanjaro area (Kenana et al. 2013). Both the Lake Natron and West Kilimanjaro areas have recently been under intense human pressure; Kenana et al. (2013) found 159,281 shoats, 55,486 cattle, 1,382 donkeys and 21 camels in the Natron area while West Kilimanjaro had 81,517 shoats, 41,954 cattle, 1,138 donkeys and 12 camels.

Road-based transect surveys found that there are an estimated 100 giraffe in Arusha NP (Mahenya et al. 2016), and the area remains among one of the least studied areas for giraffe ecology. On the other hand, existing data from SRF surveys by TAWIRI indicate that the giraffe population in Saadani NP is stable, with an estimated population of 483 ± 187 giraffe. Major threats in Saadani NP is illegal hunting for bushmeat and parts, and diseases. Giraffe estimates are still lacking in areas such as Burigi-Biharamulo-Kimisi ecosystem, Swaga Swaga GR, Mahale ecosystem, and Ibanda-Rumanyika ecosystem.

Conservation areas in western and southern Tanzania are less studied compared to the ones in the north. This is mainly due to their large size and logistics involved in covering expansive areas. For instance, the Ruaha-Rungwa ecosystem covers $52,464\text{km}^2$ and includes Ruaha NP, Rungwa WMA, Kizigo WMA, Muhesi WMA, Lunda-Mkwambi GCA. Ruaha NP alone, at $20,226\text{km}^2$ covers almost half of the ecosystem and is East Africa's largest national park. Road-based photographic mark-recapture surveys in south-eastern Ruaha NP found that there are 1614-2040 giraffe in the study area, which is a hotspot for giraffe skin disease (Muneza et al. 2017). Recent SRF data indicate that there are $3,525 \pm 980$ giraffe in the ecosystem (TAWIRI 2015). Major threats identified in the Ruaha-Rungwa ecosystem include giraffe skin disease (Coppolillo 2004; Epaphras et al. 2012; Muneza et al. 2017; TANAPA pers. comm.), poaching and snaring (Coppolillo 2004; TANAPA pers. comm.) and habitat fragmentation.

The Selous-Mikumi ecosystem is located in southern Tanzania and is home to one of the largest wildlife reserves in world. An estimated 3,183 giraffe occur in the ecosystem (TAWIRI 2015), but it is important to note that giraffe only occur in the smaller northern section of the ecosystem as the Rufiji river forms a natural barrier and no giraffe have been sighted in the expansive southern section of the park, which forms part of the important Selous-Niassa Corridor. Giraffe in the Selous-Mikumi ecosystem are threatened by diseases such as giraffe ear disease (Osofsky 2005; Karimuribo et al. 2011) and giraffe skin disease (Muneza et al. 2016), large influx of livestock, road kills, and habitat degradation (TAWIRI 2015).

Lastly, the Malagarasi-Mwoyovosi ecosystem in western Tanzania, covering an area of $44,809\text{km}^2$ is home to approximately 1300 giraffe (TAWIRI 2015). The giraffe population in the ecosystem, which includes Mwoyovosi GR, Kigosi GR, and Ugalla GR has declined over the past few years. This reduction in population numbers is attributed mainly to habitat loss due to pollution, effects of climate change, expansion of agricultural and pastoral activities, and influx of refugees (Tanzania Wildlife Conservation Monitoring [TWCM] 1998). The increase of human populations in the ecosystem has coincided with increased poaching of giraffe, where giraffe are killed using modern and traditional weapons.

As shown in the data above, Masai giraffe populations have declined in the past 30 years – a trend which has been observed in the rest of East Africa, with the exception of Uganda. If this rate of decline and the major threats to giraffe survival in the region remain unabated, there will be a high risk of losing the last strongholds of Masai giraffe. Tanzania currently has approximately $26,079 \pm 2,772$ giraffe, the largest of any African nation, and immediate action is required to secure the future of the country's national animal. While Tanzania's population increases and places pressure on natural resources, the government has put in a framework to



protect biodiversity. Tourism and biodiversity have been identified as key components to realizing Tanzania's Development Vision of 2025. It is envisaged that giraffe will also benefit from the increased efforts put in place to develop tourism and the country's natural resources, which are key to developing Tanzania's economy.

Future Conservation Management

The following are proposed conservation management options for giraffe in Tanzania:

- Implementation of the National Giraffe Conservation Action Plan (2020 – 2024) for Tanzania in partnership with government and relevant stakeholders;
- Increased support to giraffe conservation initiatives, habitat protection (including wildlife corridors), and education and awareness creation initiatives;
- Examine the pathology and aetiology of GSD and GED for giraffe population management and assess potential for zoonotic diseases;
- Assess giraffe population numbers and conservation status in the country;
- Greater understanding and mitigation of social, cultural, and economic drivers of giraffe poaching in the country;
- Conduct more robust studies to examine the giraffe population structure in key conservation areas to inform conservation policies;
- Increase transboundary giraffe conservation and management initiatives with Kenya; and,
- Identification of priority conservation efforts and continuation of robust and systematic population monitoring programmes.

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Map

