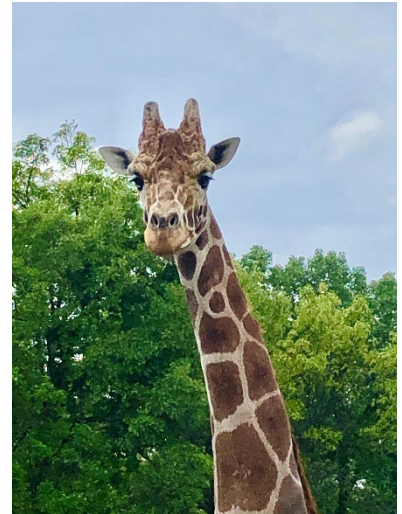


Giraffe
Reticulated
Giraffa reticulata



ANIMAL FACTS



Physical Characteristics

- Giraffes have long necks, with 7 large vertebrae, which is the same number as in a human neck.
- On average, their necks are about 7 feet long while their legs are about 6 feet long.
- A giraffe's heart weighs 25 pounds. They have special valves in their thick veins and arteries that prevent the backflow of blood when lifting and lowering their heads. The skin around their legs is much tighter to prevent blood from pooling near their hooves.
- Both males and females have horns on their heads, called ossicones, which are made of hardened cartilage that have ossified into bone. Female ossicones are short and covered in more hair than males. Males have lumpy calcium deposits all over their foreheads which help during fighting to both protect themselves and do additional damage to their opponents.
- A giraffe's tongue is nearly 18 inches long, purple, and coated in a thick mucus.
- Their tails have a tuft of rigid black hair that helps swat away flies.
- Their hooves are 12 inches across.
- Each giraffe individual has a slightly different spot pattern, but the 4 species are separated visually by their patterning and size.
- Coloration: Reticulated giraffes' patches are large and clearly defined, in an orange-brown color with a network of striking white lines between them. Their markings go nearly all the way to their hooves.

Size

- Height: Male: 16-18 feet; Female: 14-16 feet
- Weight: Males: up to 3,500 pounds; Females: up to 1,900 pounds

Lifespan

- In the Wild: 10-15 years
- In Zoos: 20-25 years

Behaviors

- Activity Cycle: You might think watching out for lions and spending 16 to 20 hours a day eating would all weigh heavily on a giraffe. Surprisingly enough, giraffes only need 5 to 30 minutes of sleep in a 24-hour period! They often achieve that in quick naps that may last only a minute or two at a time. Giraffes can rest while standing, but they sometimes also lie down with their head resting on their rump. That's a vulnerable position for a giraffe, though, so usually one herd member stays on guard.
- Vocalizations: They very rarely vocalize, but they do grunt, snort, hiss, and moo/roar. A snort is the most common and is used as an alarm call. Some scientists think they communicate over long distances using sounds lower than humans can hear. Females will sometimes bellow or whistle to their calves, who respond with whistles and whines.
- Social Structure: Giraffes live in loose, open, unstable herds of 10-20, though up to 70 have been seen, although some giraffes choose to live solitary lives. Giraffes are non-territorial and home ranges of different groups tend to overlap. The groupings change continually, but hierarchy within a group of males is established by necking, or neck wrestling. Some bachelor herds and mother/calf herds do form as well.

Diet

- In the Wild: herbivores, feed on leaves, flowers, seed pods, and fruits. They are ruminants (have a four-chambered stomach), and chew their cud during the heat of the day. Their main food source is the *Acacia* tree, from which they can eat the thorns as well as the leaves. Giraffes spend an average of 18 hours a day eating and can eat up to 75 lbs of leaves and twigs in a day when food is plentiful.
- In the Zoo: Our giraffe eats alfalfa (more nutritional than other types of hay), wild herbivore biscuits, and leaves from browse branches (mulberry, evergreen, honeysuckle, or willow). They also enjoy romaine lettuce during their feedings as well as bananas and apples for enrichment.

Reproduction

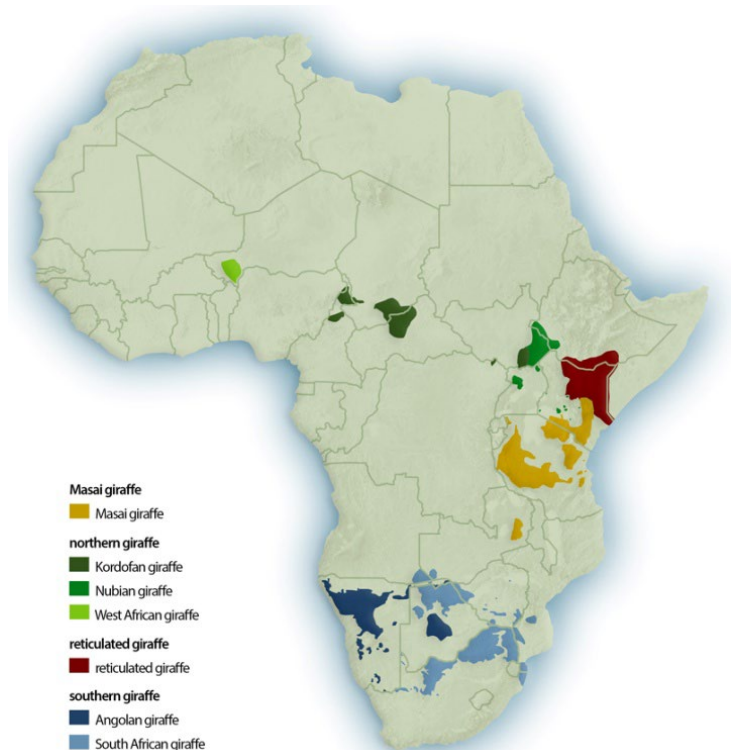
- Gestation Period: About 400-468 days, females have an interbirth interval of about 22 months.
- Parenting: Newborn calves make the 6-foot drop from their standing mother when they are born that both severs the umbilical cord and causes them to take their first deep breath. Calves are able to walk and run within an hour. Calves suckle until 12-16 months for females and 12-14 months for males. Females tend to stay with their herd once they have reached sexual maturity at 3-4 years, while males tend to become solitary once reaching sexual maturity at 4-5 years. Females will not breed until at least 5 years old, while males will not start breeding until at least 7 years old.
- Breeding Interval: Giraffes do not have a set breeding season, since they adapt to their environment and food availability, but generally they mate during the rainy season, then give birth during the dry season. However, when in a herd, giraffe females will tend to mate and give birth around the same time, since there is safety in numbers.
- Number of offspring: 1 calf. While twins do happen, they are uncommon
- Breeding Behaviors: Males will neck fight to establish a hierarchy and the strongest males usually breed with the most females. When testing females' urine odor, males do a distinctive lip curl called a "flehmen" to detect pheromones. He will follow her for hours until she allows him to mate.

Habitat and Range

- Reticulated
 - Range: north-eastern Kenya, but small populations persist in southern Somalia and possibly southern Ethiopia.
- Habitat: Giraffes live in savannahs, grasslands/plains, or open woodlands.

Conservation

- Status: Endangered
- Facts: There are about 15,000 left of this species in the wild.
- Research conducted by the Giraffe Conservation Foundation and its partners has determined through DNA testing that there are 4 distinct species of giraffe in Africa. These include Reticulated, Masai, Southern (with 2 subspecies, and Northern (with 3 subspecies) giraffe.
- There are approximately 117,000 giraffes total in Africa amongst the 4 species. When considered together as a single species, as currently identified by IUCN, giraffes are considered vulnerable. However, when considering 4 separate species, 3 of those 4 are considered endangered.
- Habitat destruction and poaching are a huge problem for giraffes of all species, and there are many conservation efforts dedicated to slowing the decline of the species in the wild.



Classification

- Kingdom: Animalia
- Phylum: Chordata
- Subphylum: Vertebrata
- Class: Mammalia
- Order: Artiodactyla
- Family: Giraffidae
- Genus: *Giraffa*
- Species: *G. reticulata*

Interesting Facts

- A giraffe's gait is unique; when walking, they move both right limbs together, then both left limbs together. This prevents their long legs from tangling together, and camels also use this gait. When galloping, they use their front limbs together, then back limbs together. Their hind hooves stay outside of their forelegs, so there is no contact. They can run up to 37 miles per hour.