

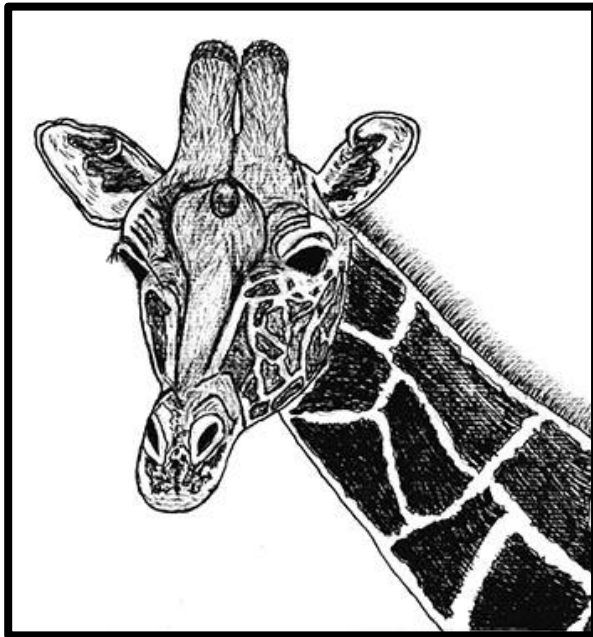


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*a shell book*

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# All About Animals Giraffes



*level: intermediate / advanced*

# All About Animals

## Giraffes

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# Giraffes

Giraffes are the tallest land mammals on earth. Fully grown giraffes stand at 4.3 to 5.7 metres (14 to 18 feet) tall.

They only live in Africa in herds called 'towers'; they can inhabit savannas, grasslands or open woodlands, often preferring areas enriched with acacia.

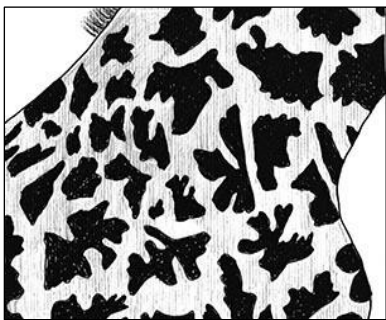
There are four different species:

## Southern

These live in the south. They are the most well-known and numerous. There are over 50,000 and their population is increasing.



## Masai

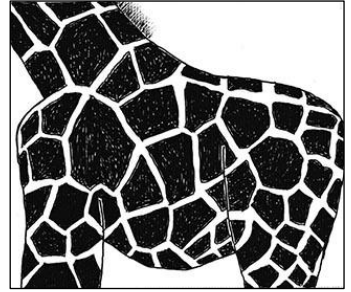


There are around 35,000 living in Eastern Africa. They are noticeably darker than other giraffes with large, dark brown jagged patches separated by irregular, light brown lines all the way down

to their legs. They used to be the most numerous species but over the last 30 years their population has halved.

## Reticulated

Scientists are not sure how many of this species still survive in Eastern Africa. Some say there are as few as 8,500 while others estimate 16,000. It is obvious that there are far fewer of this species now than 30 years ago, so they are recognised as endangered. They have brown/orange patches separated by thick bright white lines.



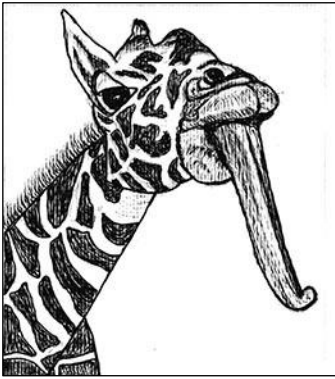
## Northern

These live in Northern Africa. There are about 5,000 of these left in the wild.

## What do they eat?

Their favourite leaves are from acacia trees. These trees have long thorns that keep most wildlife from eating them. But those thorns don't stop the giraffes!

They simply use their 46-centimeter (18-inch) tongues and lips to reach around the thorns. Their tongues are “prehensile” which means they can twist and grip things. Their mouths are covered in little hard bumps that protect them from sharp thorns.



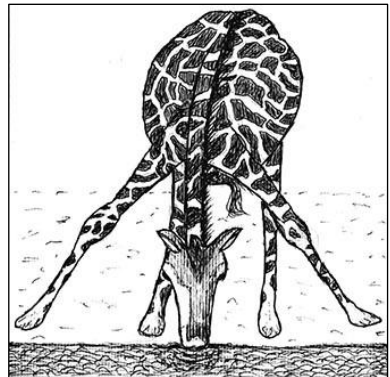
Their tongues are dark blue which gives them some protection from the sun. They have the same number of teeth as humans but don't have any upper front teeth. All their teeth are on the bottom of their mouth.

They use these teeth to grab a branch and then comb the leaves off.

Giraffes also eat the leaves and twigs of mimosa and wild apricot trees. They like herbs, flowers and fruit but very little grass. A giraffe will usually eat about 30 kilograms (66 pounds) of food a day but can survive on half that amount.

Male giraffes and female giraffes eat from different parts of the same tree. This is to prevent competition between the males and females.

Giraffe necks are too short to reach the ground, so they awkwardly spread their legs or kneel to reach water. Giraffes get most of their water from their food so they only need to drink every few days.



They lick and chew the bones of other animals. Giraffes don't kill other animals, but their skeletons do require more calcium than they can get from plants.

## **The life cycle**

A female giraffe is pregnant for 15 months. They usually breed all year round, and only one calf is born at a time.

Female giraffes are ready to have a baby when they are just four years old. Males are ready when they are six years old but they don't usually mate until they are teenagers. This is because they have to fight other, older giraffes before they can choose a mate.

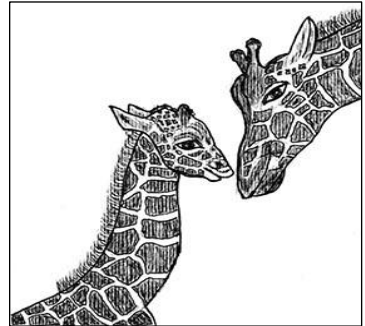
A new-born giraffe weighs around 50 to 70 kilograms (110 to 150 pounds). It is nearly 2 metres (6 feet) tall.

Giraffes give birth standing up, so the baby falls for around 2 metres (6 feet) headfirst. The big shock helps to start its internal system, and to start the baby breathing. This fall also helps to protect the baby's long neck.

The giraffe calf can stand up and walk after about an hour and, within a week, it starts to eat leaves.

Baby giraffes grow about 2.5 centimetres (1 inch) every week so they have doubled in size by their first birthday. Most of this new height is in its neck.

Young giraffes stay with their mothers for the first 18 to 24 months. After that, they usually leave the tower, but they will regularly return to their mother for a few days or weeks.



Mothers take turns to look after the youngsters. One mother will look over the group, while the others are out feeding and foraging.

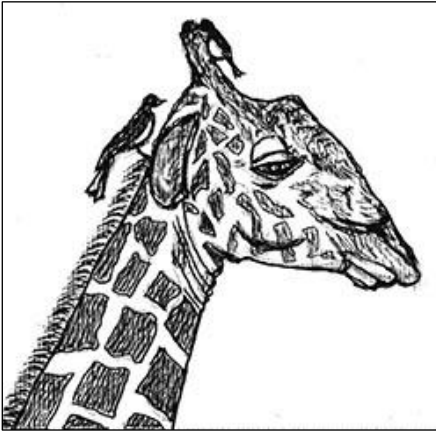
Males and fathers don't play any part in bringing up a baby giraffe. However, giraffe towers do travel together so the males do defend the babies against predators.

Giraffes live for about 25 years in the wild, although some live much longer in captivity.

### **Interesting facts**

No two giraffes have the same pattern of patches.

Of all land mammals, the giraffe boasts the longest tail. Adult giraffes can have tails up to 2.4 metres (8 feet) long.



Some birds feed off parasites on the giraffes' bodies. They are called oxpeckers.

An adult giraffe has a heart that weighs 12 kilograms (26 pounds). (Human hearts weigh 310 grams (11 ounces).)

A giraffe can move at only two speeds – walk and gallop. They can reach speeds of up to 60 kilometres per hour (37 miles per hour).

Even though a giraffe has a longer neck than all other mammals, it still only has seven vertebrae in its neck, which is the same amount as other animals.

Giraffes have amazing eyesight, which means that they can wander away from one another but find their way back very easily.

Male giraffes (called bulls) swing their long necks and butt heads to see who is stronger. This is known as “necking”. Very few giraffes get hurt doing it. Eventually one male will give up and walk away.

Both male and female giraffes have two ossicones. These look like giraffe horns but are actually cartilage covered with skin. Female ossicones are thinner with hairy tufts. Male giraffes have thicker ossicones that go bald on top, due to wear and tear from giraffe fights.

Giraffes sleep standing up. They only need 5 to 30 minutes of sleep a day. They often nap for just a minute at a time.

Giraffes' hooves have a diameter of 30 centimetres (11 inches) which help support them on soft ground. They also help them fight their predators.

## **Do they hunt or are they hunted?**

Giraffes do not hunt other animals.

Adult giraffes have very few predators, other than lions. They sometimes attack when the giraffe is at a watering hole as it has to bend awkwardly to reach the water. However, a giraffe's kick could easily kill a lion.

However, baby giraffes are very vulnerable to predators and many calves are killed in their first few months, despite their mothers' attempts to protect them. Hyenas, especially, hunt in packs.

## Are they endangered?

Yes. There are now only around 100,000 giraffes in Africa and their numbers have dropped by 30% over the last 30 years. They face threats from hunting and habitat loss caused by increasing agriculture.

### A children's story about a giraffe and an ant

There once was a giraffe who was very proud of his long neck.

“Look at me,” he said. “I am so tall I can see a long way.”

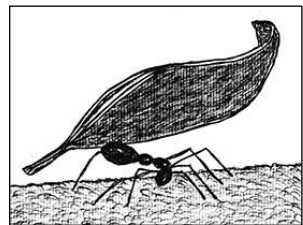
He met an ant.

“Ha, ha,” he laughed. “You are so small I could eat you in one mouthful.”

“I might be small,” said the ant, “but I can lift things which are much heavier than me.”

“Don't be silly,” said the giraffe.

“Look,” replied the ant. And he lifted a leaf that was much bigger than himself.



“Wow,” said the giraffe. “You are so strong. I am sorry I laughed at you.”

“That's ok,” replied the ant. “We're all different.”

And they became friends.

## Key words used in this book

**endangered** – species of animal or plant that may become extinct

**extinct** – no living member of the species exists

**habitat** – the natural home of an animal

**herbivore** – an animal which only eats plants

**life cycle** – time from the beginning of an animal's life until its death

**ossicone** – cone-shaped lump that looks like a short horn

**predator** – animal that kills and eats other animals

**prehensile** – able to grasp something by twisting round it

**pregnant** – having a baby developing in her body

**prey** – catch and kill for food

**skeleton** – structure of bones that support the body

**species** – distinct group of animals or plants that have common characteristics and can breed with each other

## Summary

*Giraffes live in Africa. They are well known for their long necks and great height.*

