

Assessment of giraffe populations and conservation status in East Africa

Update report: March 2015



Background

Giraffe have been largely overlooked in terms of research and conservation in the past, however it appears that in the last ten years, some populations may have declined by as much as 80%. Giraffe are beginning to emerge as a real conservation concern and priority; only two of the nine subspecies (*G.c. rothschildi* and *G.c. peralta*) have been assessed for the IUCN Red List at the subspecies level, and have both been listed as Endangered. The seven remaining subspecies await assessment and it is likely that several of them will also be listed as threatened due to their restricted range and declining habitat. Giraffe populations are clearly under threat in the wild and it is vital we increase our understanding of their current status in order to develop focused conservation strategies.

This project aims to conduct a complete review of the giraffe populations found in Kenya, to collate many sources and document evidence of population size and distribution. Without accurate information of population range, distribution and size, it is impossible to make any effective conservation plans or monitor changes to assess the effects of conservation measures.

Project timeline

The project will be undertaking an extensive review of published literature to collate information on past and present giraffe distributions and population sizes across Kenya. Population surveys will be carried out for some populations to gather more recent counts and estimates of giraffe abundance. The project will be completed in October 2015.

Progress so far

A large volume of information and resources has already been gathered, including survey data, wildlife journal articles, wildlife reports, newsletters and any source containing information about giraffe population size and distribution in Kenya. Project members are working through the large volume of resources gathered, to extract the relevant population counts and distribution data.

Population surveys have been completed for all populations of the Rothschild's giraffe, *G.c. rothschildi*. Population surveys for the Masaai giraffe, *G.c. tippelskirchi* and reticulated giraffe, *G.c. reticulata* are underway and will be completed by October 2015.



Volunteers assisting with population counts in Kenya

COMPLETED WORK

Rothschild's giraffe: status in Kenya



There are currently thought to be twelve populations of Rothschild's giraffe remaining in Kenya. This project has been able to conduct direct counts of seven populations in Kenya, counting a total of 320 individuals. We have been unable to verify the survival or size of five populations. The most recent estimate for these five populations is from 2010 and totals fewer than 90 individuals. Therefore the total remaining population of Rothschild's giraffe in Kenya is 320 ± 90 individuals. Table 1 shows remaining locations and population figures.

Table 1. The total population of Rothschild's giraffe in Kenya. Table displays actual count data for seven confirmed populations and estimated data for five unverified populations.

<i>Giraffa Camelopardalis rothschildi</i>			
IUCN status: Endangered			
	Population size	Status	Threats
ACTUAL COUNT DATA 2014/15			
Ruma National Park	68	Stable	Poaching, habitat loss
Lake Nakuru National Park	89	Stable / declining	Predation
Soysambu Conservancy	78	Increasing	Inbreeding, disease
Kigio Conservancy	32	Increasing	Inbreeding, disease
Ruko Conservancy	9	Increasing	None
Giraffe Centre, Nairobi	10	Stable	Inbreeding, predation
Mwea National Reserve	34	Stable / increasing	Poaching, habitat loss
TOTAL	320		
ESTIMATE DATA 2010 – UNVERIFIED 2014/15			
Mt. Elgon NP	<20	Unknown	Habitat loss, poaching
Murgor Farm, Iten	<20	Unknown	Habitat loss, poaching
Sergoit -Kruger Farm, Iten	<20	Unknown	Habitat loss, poaching
Kitale area farm	<10	Unknown	Habitat loss, poaching
Nasalot National Reserve	<10	Unknown	Habitat loss, poaching
TOTAL	<90		

ONGOING WORK

Masaai giraffe: status in Kenya



The Masaai giraffe is found in southern Kenya and throughout Tanzania. In Kenya, the Masaai giraffe is found in the Masaai Mara, Tsavo and Amboseli conservation areas. Currently there are an estimated 37,000 remaining in the wild, but there is little data available on how many individuals are located in Kenya. The Masaai giraffe has not yet been assessed at the subspecies level for inclusion in the IUCN Red List, but an assessment is currently underway.

Recent research uncovered a 95% decline in wildlife population figures in the Masaai Mara, with giraffe populations thought to have fallen by as much as 80%. There is a clear and urgent need for clarification over population figures of the Masaai giraffe in Kenya, which this project will contribute.

Reticulated giraffe: status in Kenya



The reticulated giraffe is found in northern Kenya. There are estimated to be fewer than 4,700 individuals remaining in the wild. This subspecies is confined to northern Kenya in a region where there is widespread food insecurity and drought, making the reticulated giraffe vulnerable to population decline due to poaching and climatic changes. The reticulated giraffe has not yet been assessed at the subspecies level for inclusion in the IUCN Red List, but an assessment is currently underway. This project aims to collate information and data on population status and distribution to identify priorities for conservation.

Full report to be completed in October 2015.