

AFRICA'S GIRAFFE

Subspecies

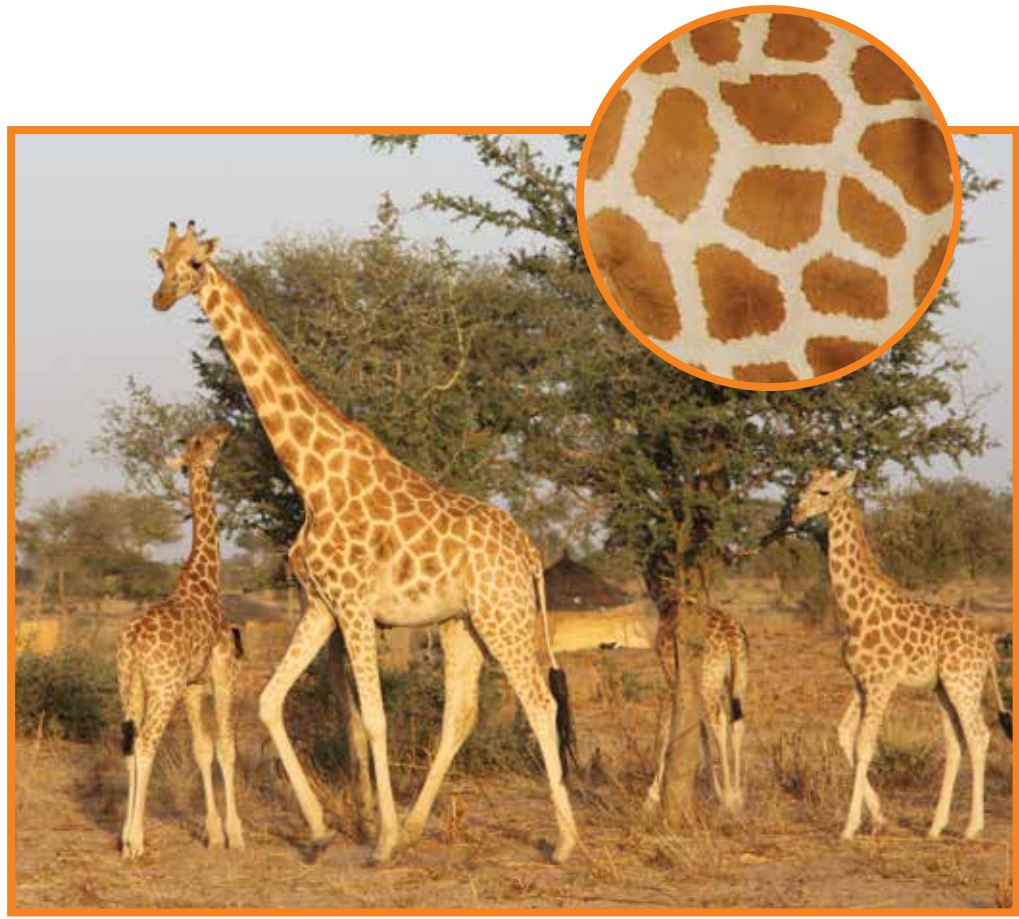
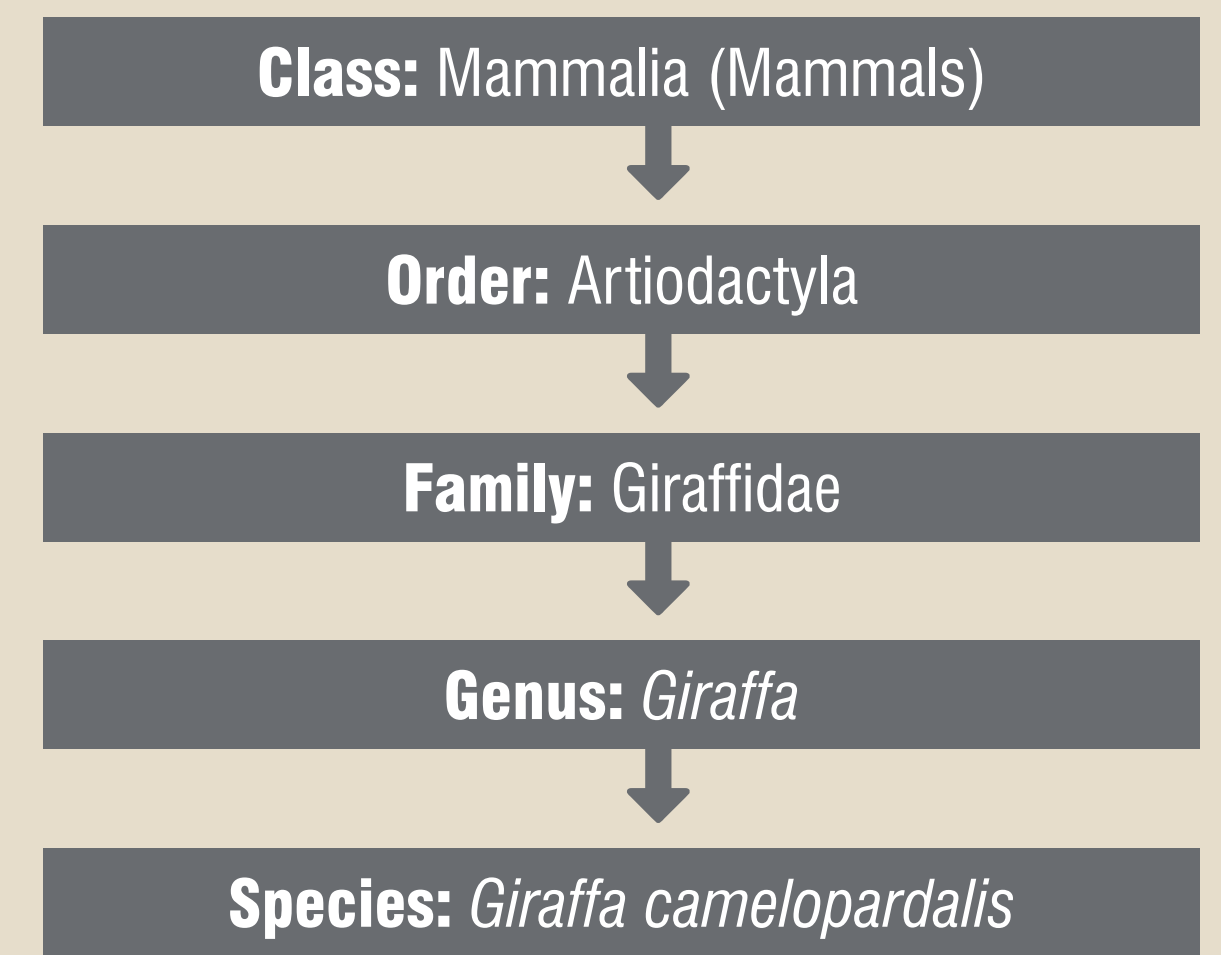
We are grateful for the support of all the photographers who have generously allowed us to reproduce their images free of charge: Daniel Cornelis, Anja Denker, Billy Dodson, Joe Dodson, Ludwig Siege, Nico Smit, Megan Strauss, Christopher Wade, as well as Cindy Armstrong for producing the map.

Currently there are nine recognised subspecies of giraffe in Africa. All subspecies live in geographically distinct areas across Africa and while some of the subspecies have been reported to cross-breed in zoos, there is no evidence that this occurs regularly in the wild.

However, there is increasing evidence to suggest that some of these subspecies may not in fact be different from others, while some might be distinct species in their own right. Thus there might be fewer than nine subspecies and/or even a few separate species. For over a decade now, the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) has spearheaded a long-term effort to unravel the mystery of giraffe genetics. To date samples from most major giraffe populations across Africa have been collected and analysed. Soon we should be able to solve the mystery of giraffe taxonomy once and for all.



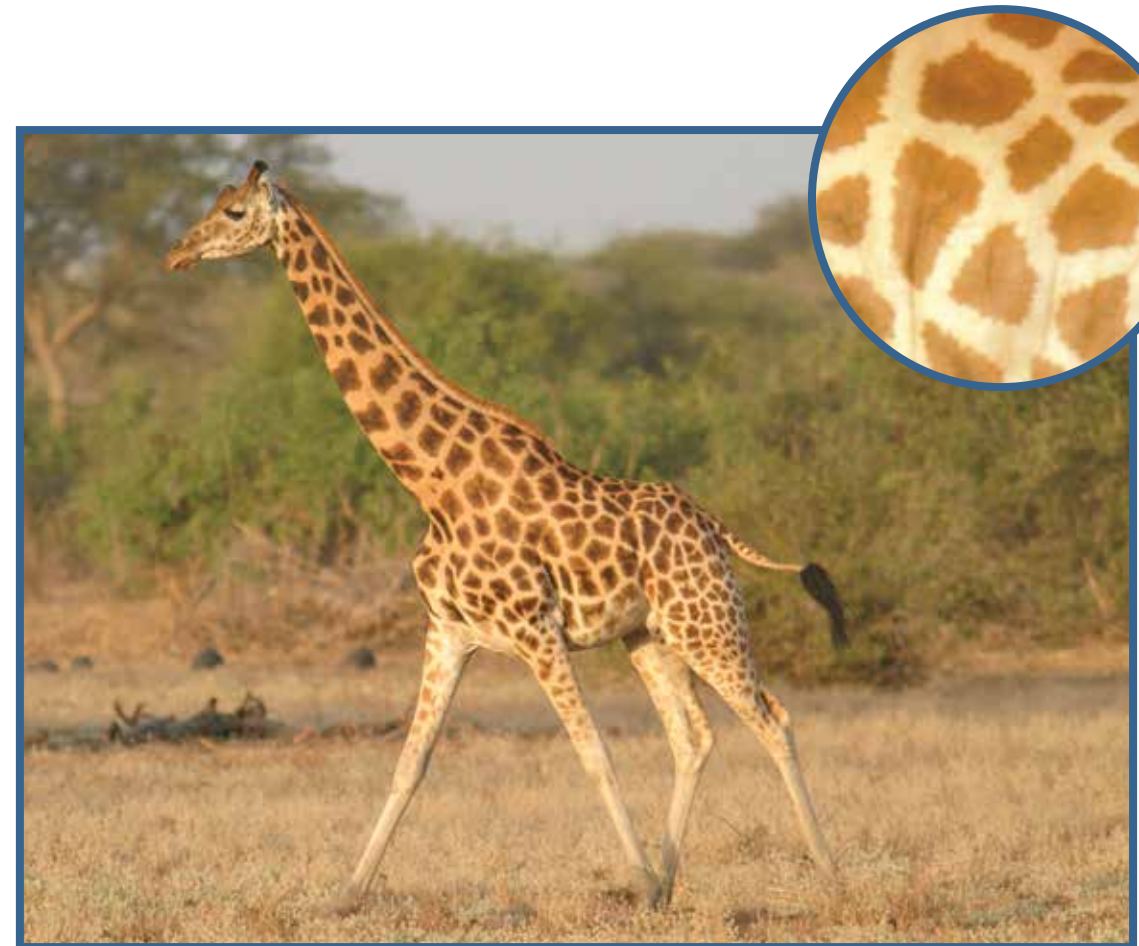
Taxonomy & Populations



West African giraffe *G. c. peralta*

At the beginning of the 20th century West African giraffe were widely distributed from Nigeria to Senegal, but by the late 1990s only 50 individuals remained in the whole of West Africa. These few survivors are now formally protected by the Niger government and their number has risen to approximately 400 individuals, which live in an isolated pocket east of the capital Niamey, sharing their living space with local villagers. No other large wild mammals still occur in this region. West African giraffe were classified as Endangered and of high conservation importance on the IUCN Red List in 2008.

The West African giraffe is noticeably light in appearance, which rectangular tan blotches separated by thick, cream-coloured lines.



Kordofan giraffe *G. c. antiquorum*

The Kordofan giraffe's range includes some of Africa's more hostile areas: southern Chad, Central African Republic, northern Cameroon, northern Democratic Republic of Congo and likely South Sudan. It is estimated that fewer than 2,000 individuals survive in these war-ravaged countries. Most of these populations were formerly assumed to be *G. c. peralta*, but recent research has proved this to be incorrect and ongoing assessment of Nubian giraffe and their range may also shed light on the true range of Kordofan giraffe.

The Kordofan giraffe's spots are pale and irregular. It has no markings below the hocks.

Nubian giraffe *G. c. camelopardalis*

The Nubian giraffe is the nominate subspecies, meaning its Latin specific name is the same as that of the entire species, because it was the first specimen recorded. The estimated number of Nubian giraffe is below 650, of which fewer than 200 are believed to occur in western Ethiopia and 450 or less may be in the South Sudan. However, recent genetic research indicates that Nubian giraffe may not be genetically distinct. Large herds have been reported in South Sudan, but while thought to be Nubian giraffe, these might actually belong to two other subspecies. Exact information about this precariously small and fragmented population is extremely difficult to ascertain and their numbers might be much lower due to increased poaching in the region.

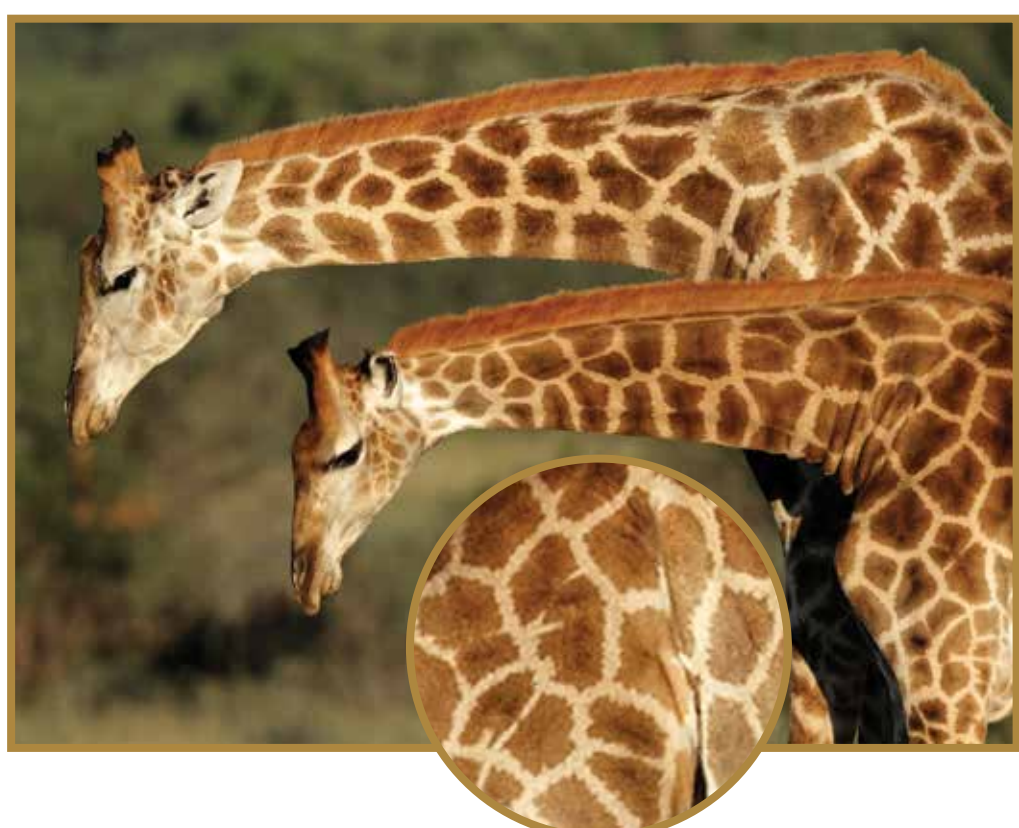
The coat of the Nubian giraffe has large, irregular, chestnut-brown blotches on an off-white to beige background. It has no markings below the hocks.



South African giraffe *G. c. giraffa*

The South African (or Cape) giraffe ranges from west to east across northern South Africa, southern Botswana and southern Zimbabwe, and there are re-introduction efforts underway into Mozambique. Previous reintroductions of this subspecies and of Angolan giraffe into their known range are likely to have resulted in hybrid populations in those areas. There have also been extralimital introductions of South African giraffe across South Africa, Angola, Senegal, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. There are likely more than 17,000 South African giraffe.

The South African giraffe's pattern extends all the way down the legs and is made up of star-shaped blotches on a background that is more tan-coloured than cream or white.



Angolan giraffe *G. c. angolensis*

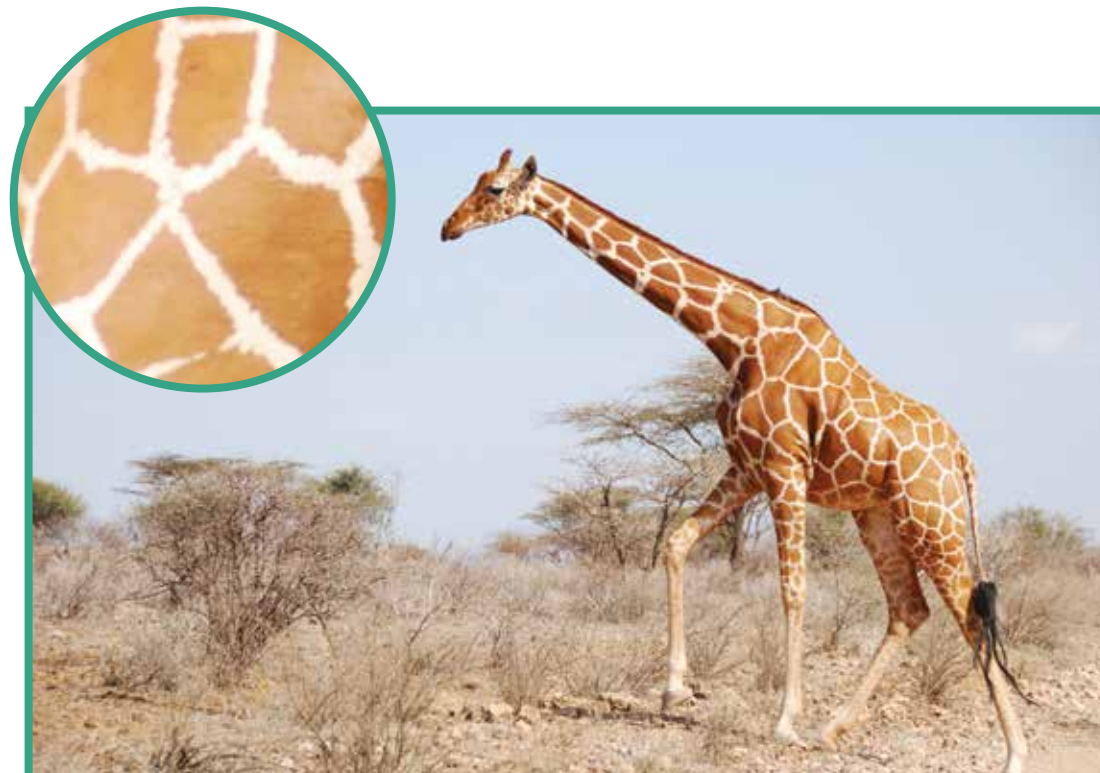
Despite their name, Angolan (or smoky) giraffe are thought to be extinct in Angola. Their range includes most parts of Namibia and central Botswana, but ongoing genetic research will determine whether this proposed distribution is accurate and how different South African and Angolan giraffe are in the region. Extralimital populations (those outside their natural range) have been translocated into South Africa and likely also Botswana and Zimbabwe. This new understanding will also help to assess the true size of the population, which is currently estimated at 15,000 in the wild.

The Angolan giraffe is relatively light in colour and has large, uneven and notched spots that cover the whole leg.

Reticulated giraffe *G. c. reticulata*

Although sometimes also called netted or Somali giraffe, this subspecies is better known as reticulated giraffe. It is now found predominantly in north-eastern Kenya, but small populations persist in southern Somalia and possibly southern Ethiopia. It has been estimated that about 4,700 individuals remain in the wild – down from an approximate 31,000 as recently as 1998. The subspecies' numbers (and range) in Somalia and Ethiopia are assumed to be low.

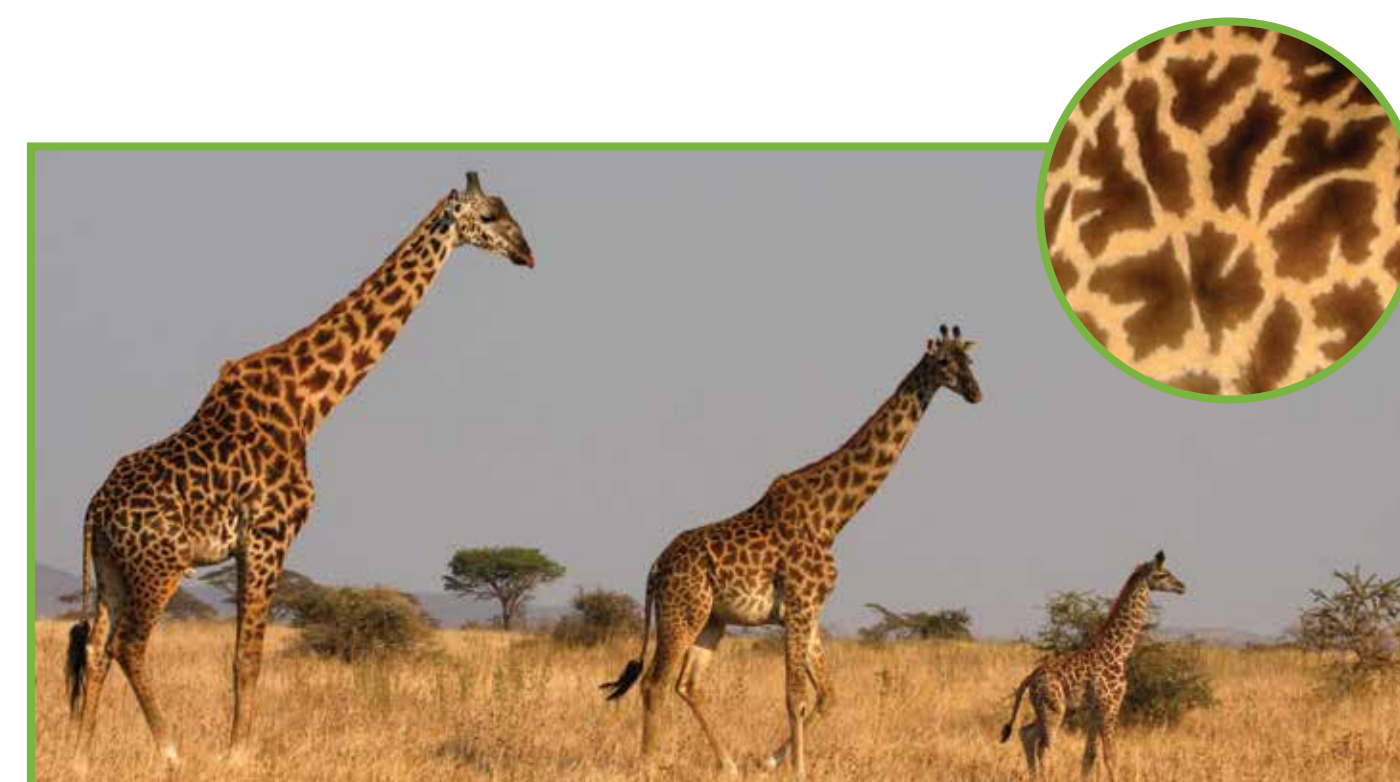
It is easy to see why this subspecies is called the reticulated giraffe, with its brown-orange patches clearly defined by a network of thick and striking white lines.



Thornicroft's giraffe *G. c. thornicrofti*

Thornicroft's (or Rhodesian) giraffe survive as an entirely isolated population in a small area of north-eastern Zambia. Occurring only in the South Luangwa Valley, this giraffe population is geographically separated from any other giraffe by at least 400 kilometres in any direction. However, recent genetic research indicates that the subspecies is not as distinct as previously assumed, and its taxonomy needs to be reviewed further before it is either 'lumped' with Masai giraffe *G. c. tippelskirchi* or remain 'split' on ecological grounds. Estimates suggest that approximately 550 individuals remain, although the population appears to be both stable and genetically viable.

Thornicroft's giraffe have a pattern of large, dark, ragged leaf-shaped blotches on a cream background that continues down the length of their legs.



Masai giraffe *G. c. tippelskirchi*

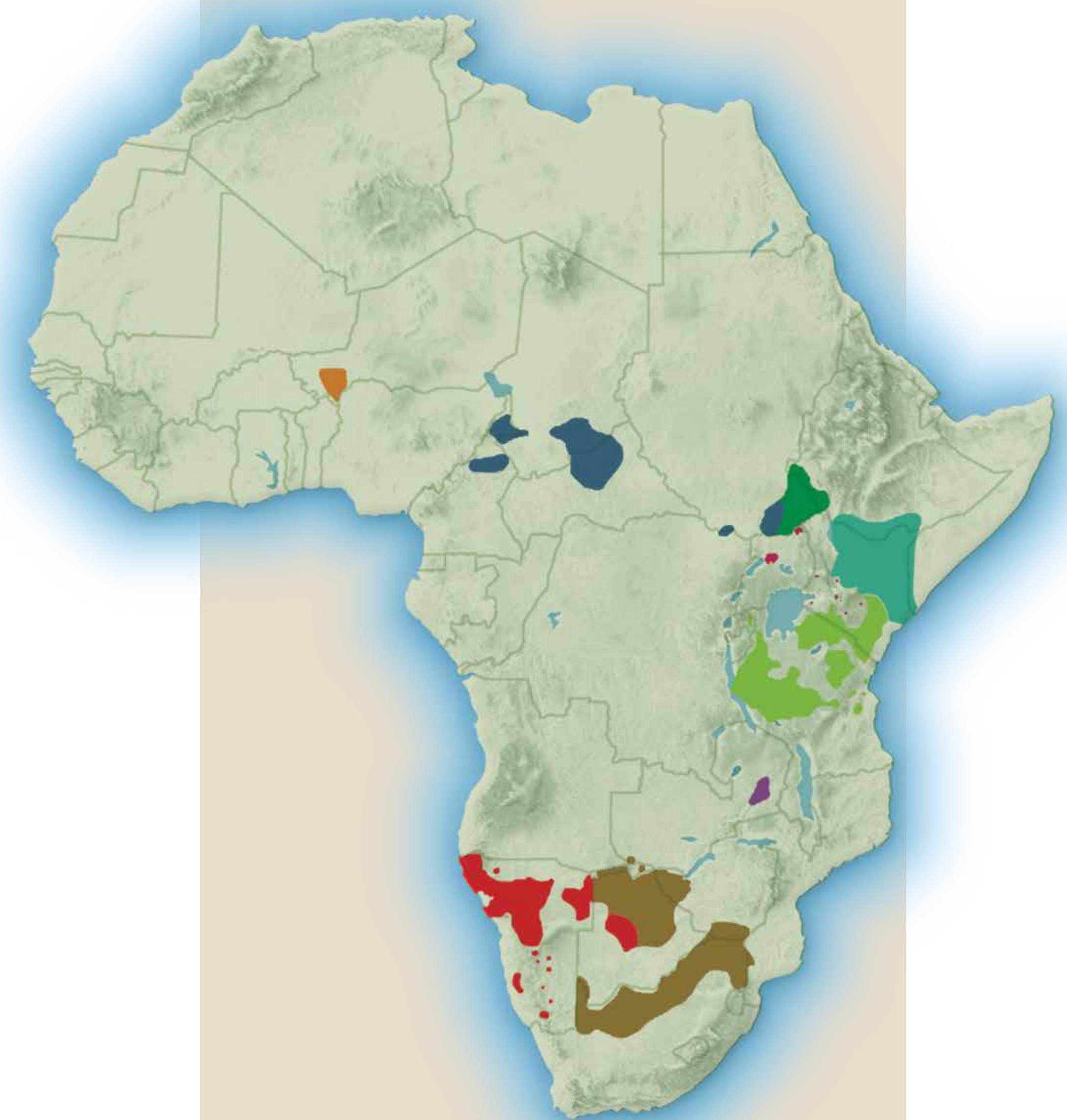
Masai (or Kilimanjaro) giraffe range across central and southern Kenya and throughout Tanzania. Extralimital populations have been translocated into Rwanda. This is the most populous of the subspecies, numbering an estimated 37,000 in the wild. However, recent reports of poaching would suggest that their population might be decreasing.

The Masai giraffe is often noticeably darker than other subspecies. Its blotches are large, dark brown and distinctively vine leaf-shaped with jagged edges, and separated by irregular, creamy brown lines.

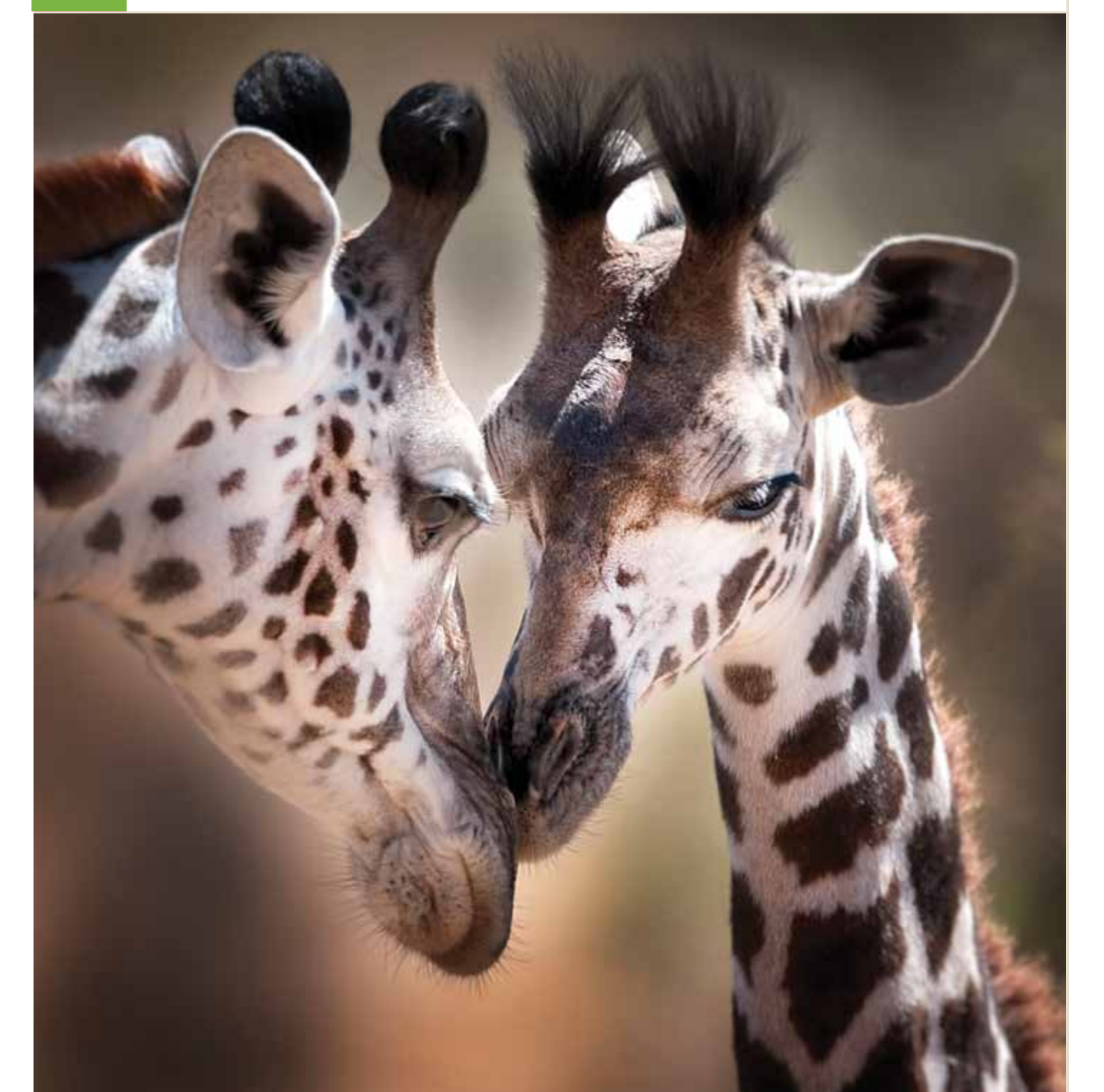
Rothschild's giraffe *G. c. rothschildi*

Rothschild's giraffe, also known as Baringo or Ugandan giraffe, range through northern Uganda and west-central Kenya. Reports of them occurring (or having occurred) in South Sudan have not yet been confirmed due to the difficulty of access in the country. Interestingly, the majority of Rothschild's giraffe in Kenya are outside their natural range (extralimital), in contrast to those in Uganda. Fewer than 1,100 individuals remain in the wild and in 2010 the subspecies was classified as Endangered and of high conservation importance on the IUCN Red List. Efforts in 2011 to reintroduce a small number of these giraffe into their native range on an island in Lake Baringo, Kenya, have proven successful.

Rothschild's giraffe have large, dark, rectangular blotches set irregularly against a cream background. The lower legs are noticeably white and not patterned.



Angolan giraffe	<i>G. c. angolensis</i>	<15,000
Kordofan giraffe	<i>G. c. antiquorum</i>	<2,000
Nubian giraffe	<i>G. c. camelopardalis</i>	<650
South African giraffe	<i>G. c. giraffa</i>	<17,000
West African giraffe	<i>G. c. peralta</i>	<400
Reticulated giraffe	<i>G. c. reticulata</i>	<4,700
Rothschild's giraffe	<i>G. c. rothschildi</i>	<1,100
Thornicroft's giraffe	<i>G. c. thornicrofti</i>	<550
Masai giraffe	<i>G. c. tippelskirchi</i>	<37,000



Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) is dedicated to securing a future for all giraffe populations in the wild. GCF is the only charity in the world that concentrates solely on the conservation of this most quintessential of Africa's mega-herbivores and its habitat.

www.giraffeconservation.org