Masai Giraffe
Giraffa tippelskirchi

Scientific Name
Giraffa tippelskirchi

Range
Southern Kenya and Tanzania

Habitat
Savannas, grasslands and sparse woodlands

Average Size
Height: 16 – 19 ft.
Weight: 1500 - 4000 lbs.

Description
Large giraffe with jagged, medium-brown to rust spots that fade into creamy white just below the knees. Males are substantially larger and have darker spots than females, with older males being the darkest.

Lifespan
In the wild: 20 years
In captivity: Up to 25 years

Diet
In the wild: Leaves from trees, shrubs and vines
In captivity: Alfalfa hay, prepared herbivore pellets, browse, and assorted fruits and vegetables as treats

Gestation
14 – 14 ½ months

Sexual Maturity
Males: 7 years
Females: 4 years

Offspring
1 calf

Predators
Lions, hyena, wild dog and other large carnivores

Population Status
Threatened

Behavior
Masai giraffes can be found alone or in small, open herds of individuals coming and going freely, with herds comprised of one gender or mixed gender. Herds can contain as many as 100 giraffes. Both males and females have ossicones, knob-like structures covered with fur on their heads that are used in “necking.” Because they lack a keratin sheath, these are not true horns. Giraffes wrestle with their necks and strike one another with their ossicone fortified heads, allowing the stronger of the two competitors to overpower the weaker. Only males engage in necking.

Masai giraffes are crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk), wandering their home range of roughly 50 miles in search of food, then resting during the hottest parts of the day. Giraffes are ruminants, meaning they have a multi-chambered stomach. Their four stomachs are designed to hold large amounts of foliage that they’ll digest later. This allows them to avoid the heat of the day and find a safe place before beginning digestion. Giraffes bring small amounts of food back into their mouth, in the form of a bolus (cud), to re-chew before sending it down to the next stomach compartment.

There are many special adaptations that allow the giraffe to be so successful in the African savanna. Their height, along with their long, prehensile tongue, allows them to reach treetop foliage not available to other browsers. They have a constant supply of food and therefore do not migrate with the seasons as other hoofstock must do. Because giraffes are so tall, they can see for up to 20 miles and spy ambushing lions before they are a worry. This advanced warning, combined with sharp hooves for kicking and running speeds of 35 miles per hour, is enough to keep the giraffe relatively safe from predators.

Reproduction and Breeding
Giraffes breed throughout the year. The female will leave other giraffes to give birth alone in a secluded spot free from predators. The mother stands while giving birth so the new baby drops approximately six feet to the ground. This breaks the umbilical cord and helps the calf to start to breathe. At birth, the calf may already be six feet tall and weigh 150 pounds. Within minutes, the baby is able to stand on its own; in a few hours, it will be able to run with the adult giraffes. During its first year of life, the young giraffe may not drink any water, getting all the moisture it needs from its mother’s milk and the green plants it eats.

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Giraffes are very good mothers. They leave their babies in a nursery-like arrangement, with one or two females watching the young while the rest go off to feed. With their long necks and excellent eyesight, they can also keep watch from a long distance. Although males do not directly help with rearing the young, they are useful in alerting other giraffes to danger. The young giraffe must grow quickly to survive and during its first week of life and will grow almost one inch per day. In the first year, it will grow more than three feet, and by age four it will reach adult size.

**Conservation**

There are nine different subspecies of giraffe estimated to be living in different regions of Africa, with two recognized as threatened (Rothchild’s and Nubian). Although Masai giraffe numbers are currently listed as stable according to the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), they have been eliminated from vast areas of their former range in the last century.

The main threat continues to be poaching, both for their tail hair and hide for use in bracelets and trinkets and as a source of meat. In some areas, people regard giraffes as free-range cows, available for consumption when needed. Loss of habitat is also a continuing threat to this species.

**Amazing Facts**

A full-grown giraffe can eat 35 pounds of leaves each day and drink 10 gallons of water at a time.

Giraffes are not silent, but make a variety of grunts, coughs, whistles, growls and bellows.

In captivity, females may breed as early as 1.2 years, and males as early as 2.3 years.