

## **Reticulated Giraffe**

*Giraffa camelopardalis reticulata*

**I'm Just Browsing...** - Everything about a giraffe is longer or taller than other animals! Because of their height, giraffes do not have to compete for food. The giraffe's legs are longer than an average man is tall (six feet), and their front legs are longer than their back legs. Even the giraffe's tongue is long – as much as 18 inches. The tongue is strong and flexible allowing them to grasp and strip leaves from thorny branches.

**Pacing and Galloping** - Because of their long legs, giraffe walk by moving both legs on one side of the body forward at the same time – a movement called pacing. When they run or gallop, their back legs are brought forward and ahead of their front legs. Giraffe can run up to 35 miles per hour over short distances.

### **Classification**

One of nine described subspecies, all of which can easily interbreed. The closest living relative is the okapi.

Class: Mammalia

Order: Artiodactyla

Family: Giraffidae

Genus: *Giraffa*

Species: *camelopardalis*

Subspecies: *reticulata*

### **Distribution**

Inhabits Eastern Africa and game reserves in South Africa.

### **Habitat**

Dry savannah and open woodlands.

### **Physical Description**

- Male giraffes are 16-18 feet (4.8-5.5 m) tall; females are 14-16 feet (4.2-4.8 m) tall.
- Males can weigh up to 4,200 pounds (1,900 kg), and females weigh up to 2,600 pounds (1,180 kg).
- Their coat has a regular box-like pattern of brown patches against a white background.
- Their dark prehensile tongue is about 18 inches (45 cm) long.
- Both males and females have fur-covered horns called "ossicones" on the head.

### **Diet**

What Does It Eat?

*In the wild:* Acacia leaves, shoots of trees and shrubs, and some fruits.

*At the zoo:* Alfalfa and grain plus vitamin and mineral supplements.

What Eats It?

Lions, leopards, crocodiles, and hyenas prey on the young, sick or elderly.

### **Social Organization**

Giraffe live in loosely structured herds of three to 40 individuals. The composition of the herds changes constantly. The only close social bond is between a mother and her calf. Bulls are not territorial but do establish a dominance hierarchy by ritualized neck sparring. Bulls will generally guard an estrous female from other male giraffes before courtship.

### **Life Cycle**

Breeding can occur throughout the year. After a gestation of 15 months, females give birth to a single calf standing six feet (1.8 m) tall and weighing up to 150 pounds (68 kg). Calves are able to stand within an hour after birth. When calves are about a month old they join a nursery group consisting of several mothers with offspring. An adult female always protects the calves while other females go off to feed nearby; mothers do return often to nurse their calves. The calves nurse for up to 13 months and stay with the mother until they are about 16 months old when they are able to live on their own. Lifespan for giraffe is about 26 years in the wild and 25-28 years in captivity.

### **Adaptations**

#### **I'm Just Browsing...**

Everything about a giraffe is longer or taller than other animals! Giraffes are browsers that eat the leaves of trees and shrubs. Because of their height, giraffes do not have to compete for food. They can reach the treetops and eat food other browsers cannot reach. The giraffe's neck comprises

almost half its total height. Even though the neck is so long, a giraffe has the same number of neck bones as a human but the giraffe neck bones are much larger. The giraffe's legs are longer than an average man is tall (six feet), and their front legs are longer than their back legs. The long neck and legs allow a giraffe to reach food high up in the treetops. Even the giraffe's tongue is long – as much as 18 inches. The tongue is strong and flexible allowing them to grasp and strip leaves from thorny branches. Their favorite foods include the leaves, fruits and seedpods from acacia, mimosa and wild apricot.

### **I Can See Clearly Now**

Giraffe have excellent eyesight, and from their lofty height they can see long distances. They can spot a moving person or other animal from a mile away. Their large mobile ears also provide excellent hearing and help giraffe stay alert for predators such as lions.

### **Pacing and Galloping**

Because of their long legs, giraffe walk by moving both legs on one side of the body forward at the same time – a movement called pacing. When they run or gallop, their back legs are brought forward and ahead of their front legs. Giraffe can run up to 35 miles per hour over short distances.

### **Conservation Connection**

*IUCN Status: Lower Risk-Conservation Dependent.*

Though giraffes aren't in immediate danger of extinction they are threatened by habitat loss and hunting. They are poached for their meat, hair, skin and sinew. Populations remain stable in east and southern Africa, but have fallen drastically in west Africa.

### **Fun Facts**

- The giraffe is the tallest living land animal.
- A giraffe's heart can weigh 22 pounds (10 kg) and measure up to two feet (60 cm) long.
- Giraffe sleep between 3-5 hours a day in short intervals of 12-15 minutes.
- The pattern of spots on every giraffe is unique – like human fingerprints.
- The name giraffe comes from the Arabic word "zarafah," which means "one who walks swiftly."