

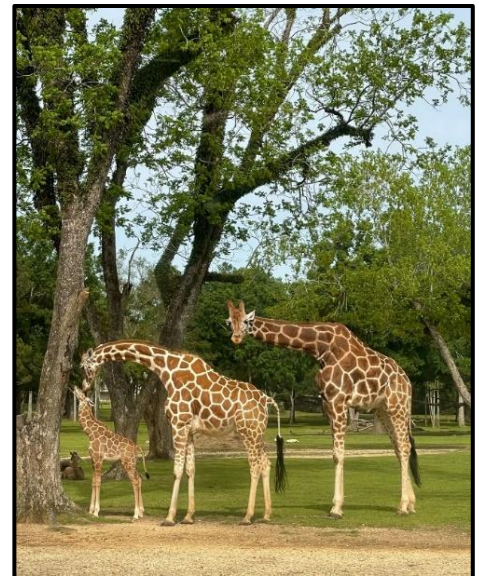


## The Skinny on Giraffes



### Giraffes in the Wild

- Giraffes are only found on one continent, Africa. They're in 21 different countries there, but they've become extinct in seven African countries where they used to exist.
- Giraffes live on the dry savanna, in dense scrubland, and on open grassland. Over the years, they've lost more than 90 percent of their natural habitat. This is due to both human and natural causes, including disease and poaching.
- The wild giraffe population has decreased by 30% in the past 35 years. As a result, giraffes are considered a "vulnerable" species, and some subspecies are now considered either "endangered" or "critically endangered." Global Wildlife Center's species, the reticulated giraffe, was added to the IUCN Red List as "endangered" in 2018.
- It's estimated that in the wild, there are three African elephants for every giraffe.



### Physical Features

- Giraffes are the tallest living land animal, with males standing at 16 to 18 feet high and females reaching 14 to 16 feet.
- Females can weigh up to 2,600 pounds and males can tip the scales at more than 4,000 pounds.
- You might mistakenly call them "horns," but giraffes have bony projections on their heads to help protect them from injury. These are called "ossicones," and they're covered with skin and hair. They're soft and flat on baby giraffes but eventually harden into bone and stand upright on adults.
- A giraffe's spots are there to act as camouflage. Like humans and fingerprints, each giraffe has a unique spotted pattern on its coat.



### Those Crazy Tongues

- Giraffes' tongues measure 18 to 20 inches long and are “prehensile,” meaning they have fine muscle control. This allows the animal to grasp foliage more easily.
- To protect themselves from thorny foliage, giraffes also have a thick layer of sticky saliva on their tongues.
- The first few inches of a giraffe's tongue are dark – black, blue or purple – but the back is pink.



### “High” Blood Pressure

- Giraffes' hearts can measure up to two feet long and weigh 25 pounds. The right ventricle is in charge of getting blood to the lungs; the left one, however, must pump blood everywhere else ... including all the way up that long neck and to the head.
- They have one of the highest blood pressures of any mammal – double that of humans – because of how hard that left ventricle is working.
- Giraffes boast an intricate internal system of valves and veins in their necks, which regulates blood flow to their brain when they bend down to drink. This prevents a head rush of gigantic proportions.



### Oh, Baby!

- A giraffe has a gestation period of 15 months, one of the longest of any mammal.
- Moms give birth standing up, and the babies drop about six feet on the way down.
- Despite that arrival, calves are generally up and running about an hour after they're born.
- Calves measure about 6 feet tall at birth and typically weigh at least 150 pounds.
- Male giraffes leave their moms when they're about 15 months old, but females might remain with their mother and her herd for their entire lives.

**SOURCES:** Giraffe Conservation Foundation and Global Wildlife Center's Employee Manual

**PHOTO CREDIT:** Global Wildlife Center