

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

---



Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
Geneva (Switzerland), 17-28 August 2019

THE STATUS OF AND TRADE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION OF  
*GIRAFFA CAMELOPARDALIS GIRAFFA* (SOUTH AFRICAN GIRAFFE)

This document has been submitted by South Africa in relation to proposal CoP18 Prop. 5.\*

---

\* *The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.*

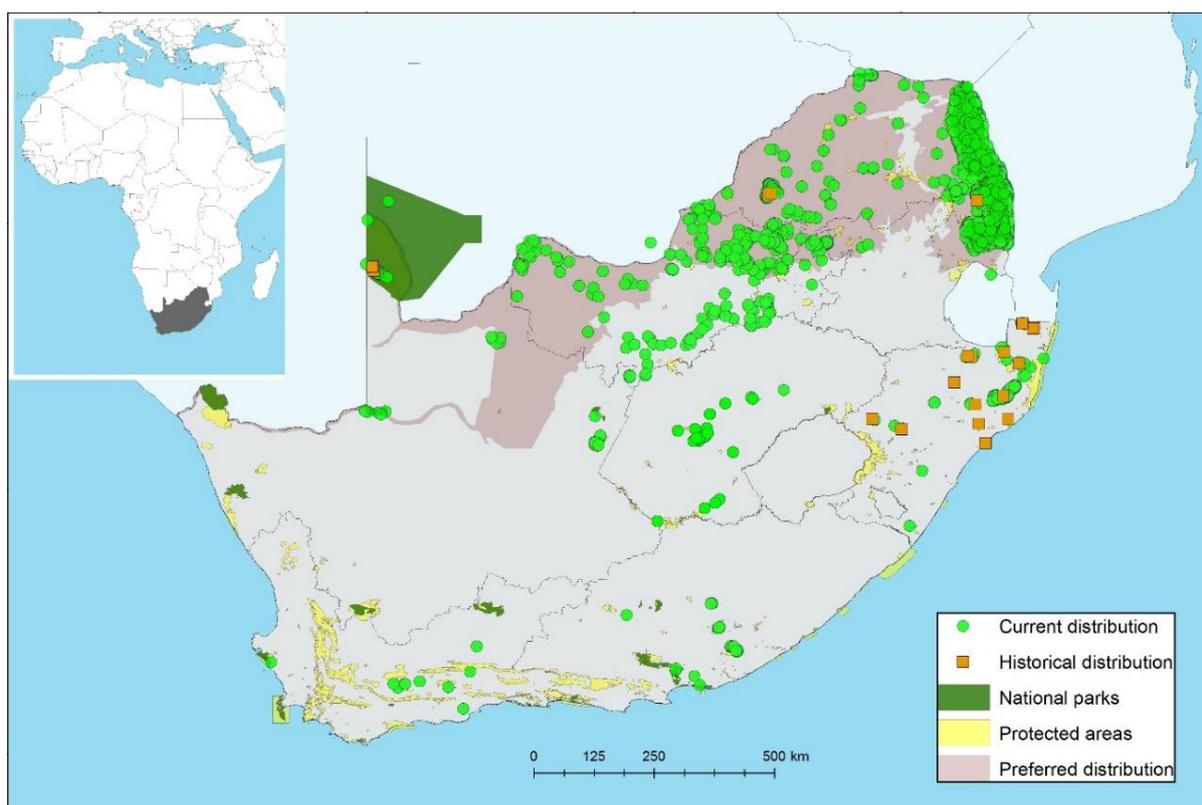
# THE STATUS OF AND TRADE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION OF *GIRAFFA CAMELOPARDALIS GIRAFFA* (SOUTH AFRICAN GIRAFFE)

J. Selier

Senior Scientist, Zoological support to Scientific Authority & Wildlife Economy  
Biodiversity Assessment and Monitoring  
July 2019

## 1. Population status a. Distribution

The South African giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis giraffa*) can be hailed as a southern African conservation success story. The subspecies is widespread across South Africa, occurring within all nine provinces (Fig. 1). The subspecies naturally occurs in the savannah/woodland areas of the Mpumalanga Lowveld and north into the Limpopo Province as well as westwards into the Northern Cape. Extra-limital populations have been introduced into the North West Province as well as all other provinces. The distribution of the South African giraffe in South Africa is fragmented, as most subpopulations exist in fenced protected areas or private/community game farms and reserves.



**Figure 1:** Current and historical records of the South African giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis giraffa*. Current counts include private game farms, private nature reserves, Provincial Nature Reserves and National Parks, totalling 21,053 - 26,919 individuals (Deacon & Tutchings, 2018).

## b. Population size

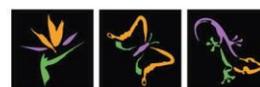


environmental affairs

Department:  
Environmental Affairs  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**SANBI**  
Biodiversity for Life



The South African giraffe is considered a common species within South Africa, with an estimated population of between 21,053 and 26,919 individuals. Approximately half of the population occurs on privately-owned land (Deacon, & Tutchings, 2018). Since the 1960s, wildlife numbers on South African commercial farms have continued to rise, as has their economic value (Carruthers, 2008). In the early 1980s there were approximately 250 privately-owned giraffes in South Africa, but following their introduction into numerous private and provincial game reserves (reserves managed by government nature conservation authorities; Theron, 2005) it is now estimated there are giraffes on most of South Africa's estimated 12,000 game farms and ranches. Populations on these properties comprise between one and 250 individuals, with a mean of 30 individuals per property (M. Child, unpubl. data).

The population within state protected areas is estimated between 11,411 and 14,860, individuals of which between 7,630 and 11,079 occur within national parks and an additional estimated 3,781 on provincial reserves. As a result, the subspecies was listed as Least Concern in the IUCN regional (South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho) Red List of Threatened Species (Deacon, & Parker, 2016).

#### c. Population trend

The population of *Giraffa camelopardalis giraffa* in South Africa is increasing. Data from 13 formally protected areas show an estimated population increase of 54% over three generations (1985–2015) (Deacon, & Parker, 2016). By 2013, the number of giraffes in the Kruger National Park had increased by approximately 150% from the 1979 estimate. An even greater increase occurred on many of the estimated 12,000 privately-owned game ranches, indicating that private ownership can help to conserve the subspecies. The increase in private ownership of giraffes across South Africa and the economic interest in conserving a thriving, healthy and viable population, and by default a suitable environment for giraffes, have stimulated an increase in giraffe numbers within South Africa (Deacon, & Tutchings, 2018).

#### d. Threats

There are no immediate threats severe enough to cause a population decline in the population of *G. c. giraffa* within South Africa in the foreseeable future (Deacon, & Parker, 2016; Deacon, & Tutchings, 2018). Minor threats include habitat fragmentation and degradation. Another potential threat is hybridization between different subspecies, which may threaten the genetic integrity of the southern subspecies *G. c. giraffa*. (Both the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and the Tuli Game Nature Reserve contain introduced *G. c. angolensis* and *G. c. giraffa*. Because the former subspecies is extralimital to the area, while the latter subspecies is endemic to the area, the combined population creates hazards for conservation management decisions (Deacon, & Parker, 2016).)

### 2. Population management

#### a. Legal status

The giraffe is listed as Protected in provincial nature conservation Ordinances/Acts in all nine provinces. Permits are therefore required to undertake a variety of activities in relation to giraffe, e.g. hunting and other forms of direct use. There are no national or provincial quotas for the off-take of giraffe in South Africa, but off-takes are managed on a local scale by the provincial Management Authorities through a permit system on a case-by-case basis, based on good local knowledge.

#### b. Management plan

Though there is no national management plan for the subspecies, the population of *G. c. giraffa* is well managed in South Africa. National and provincial parks do not have a specific management strategy for giraffe, although management of the subspecies follows the general policy for the management of large mammals in protected areas, as per general ecological management plans.

3. Trade  
 a. Legal trade

Giraffe are utilised non-consumptively for ecotourism and consumptively for trophy hunting by both local and international hunters. The tails are used by traditional leaders and tribesmen as a status symbol (Deacon, & Parker, 2016). Live animals are also traded privately and at government sanctioned game auctions across South Africa. Non-trophy products are generally sourced from the trophy hunting industry, or from natural deaths, or from animals culled or hunted for meat.

The USA and Europe are the major markets for giraffe trophies. Between 2010 and 2017 approximately 2,101 giraffe were hunted within South Africa by international clients, mainly from the EU (30%) and USA (55%), averaging 263±63 animals per year (South African Professional Hunters Register, DEFF) (Table 1). In addition, it is estimated that an additional 300 giraffe are hunted by local hunters or culled each year. In total, this equates to between 1.9% and 3.0% of the total population, and is thus sustainable. Hunting mainly takes place on wildlife ranches and private game reserves and virtually every part of the animal is utilised to produce products for sale, which are marketed locally and internationally. The long bones and scapula are mainly used for carvings and paintings, while the metatarsals and metacarpals are used for the cutting of knife handles (pers. comm. Pieter Swart, South African Taxidermy & Tannery Association). (See Annexure A for examples of giraffe products manufactured in South Africa). Approximately eight pieces can be cut per bone to make knife handles (pers. comm. Pieter Swart, South African Taxidermy & Tannery Association).

An estimated five to 11 bones per giraffe can on average be used for carving and the manufacturing of other curios such as knife handles (pers. comm. Pieter Swart, South African Taxidermy & Tannery Association, see examples of products in Annexure A). As such, South Africa could potentially export between 25,000 and 68,860 bones (and/or bone curios) over a 10 year period, sourced from the estimated 563±63 giraffe hunted or culled per year. (And this is a conservative estimate.) It is thus highly likely that a large percentage, if not all, of the 27,656 (non hunting trophy) giraffe specimens imported into the USA from South Africa between 2006 and 2015 (as reported in the listing proposal for giraffe (CoP18 Prop. 5); approximately 83% of the 33,321 giraffe specimens originate from South Africa) are by-products of a sustainable hunting industry in South Africa. South Africa can in fact sustainably supply the USA market and any other large international markets (such as the European Union) with giraffe specimens/curios.

**Table 1:** Number of giraffes trophy hunted by international clients in South Africa between 2010 and 2017.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number	122	232	278	260	300	285	323	301

It is thus evident that trade and utilisation of the South African population of *G. c. giraffa* is sustainable. It is likely that hunting has contributed to the overall increase in giraffe numbers across the country by providing important incentives to private landowners to stock giraffe on their game farms and private nature reserves.

b. Illegal trade

There is no evidence of illegal killing of giraffe for the international trade. The illegal killing for domestic use is considered small to negligible.

4. Conclusion: non-detriment finding

The South African population of *Giraffa camelopardalis giraffa* is estimated at between 21,053 and 26,919 individuals, of which between 11,411 and 14,860 individuals occur within national and provincial nature reserves. The species is listed as Least Concern in the IUCN Regional Red List, the national population is well managed and increasing, and the species is protected by provincial legislation throughout South Africa.

Inclusion of the giraffe in Appendix II to CITES will not benefit the conservation of the species, nor will it address the threats facing giraffes in East, West, North and Central Africa, i.e. habitat loss and fragmentation, civil unrest, illegal hunting for bushmeat and ecological changes. International trade is not an emerging threat to the giraffe and is in fact confined to southern Africa where a healthy wildlife economy, which is underpinned by sustainable use,

incentivizes communities and private landowners to conserve the species. International trade in giraffe specimens from other parts of Africa is negligible (to potentially non-existent).

## 5. References

- Carruthers, J., 2008.** Wilding the farm or farming the wild? The evolution of scientific game ranching in South Africa from the 1960s to the present. *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 63, 160–181.
- Deacon, F., Parker, D., 2016.** A conservation assessment of *Giraffa camelopardalis giraffa*. In Child MF, Roxburgh L, Do Linh San E, Raimondo D, Davies-Mostert HT, editors. *The Red List of Mammals of South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho*. South African National Biodiversity Institute and Endangered Wildlife Trust, South Africa.
- Deacon, F. & Tutchings, A., 2018.** The South African giraffe *Giraffa Camelopardalis giraffe*: a conservation success story. *Oryx* 53(1): 45-48.
- Theron, M.E., 2005.** Voedingsgedrag van kameelperde (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) in die sentrale Vrystaat. Msc thesis. University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

**Annexure A:**  
**Examples of giraffe products produced in South Africa**  
*(All photographs provided by African Skins & Horns)*



Bone scales cut from the metacarpals and metatarsals of a giraffe for the manufacturing of knife handles. Scales are approximately 159 x 49 x 12 mm in size.







