

The Giraffe

Each giraffe's body is totally covered by a unique pattern of spot, except for the underbelly.

Giraffes are the tallest of all land animals and are related to cattle and deer. Males can be up to 5.5 metres high and weigh up to 1,360 kg. Females are usually shorter and weight less.

They are native to Africa, living in the dry savanna and semi-desert



Giraffes have short horns known as "ossicones". They are made from ossified cartilage - cartilage that has changed into bone. They are similar to the horns of antelope but are covered by skin rather than horn. The horns can help you identify whether a giraffe is male or female.

Females have tufts of hair at the top. Males tend to be bald on top, as a result of "necking". "Necking" is when male giraffes fight with their necks.

regions, from Sudan to Somalia and westwards to northern Nigeria.

While it takes humans nine months to produce a baby, giraffes take 14 to 15 months, after which time a single calf is born. Newborn giraffes are about 1.8m long and can run around within hours of being born. However they spend most of their first few weeks of life lying near their mother as they are prey to lions, leopards and hyenas.

A giraffe has a large heart to keep blood flowing to the brain. It pumps at a pressure two or three times that of a healthy man.

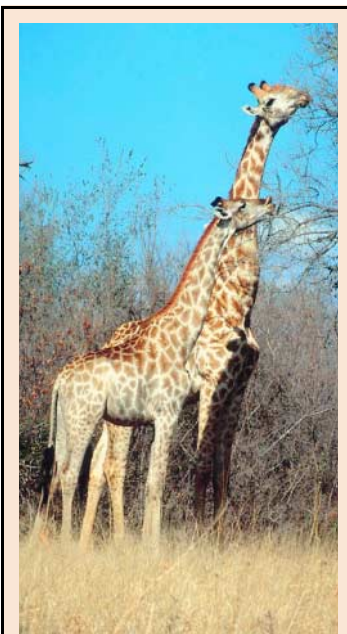
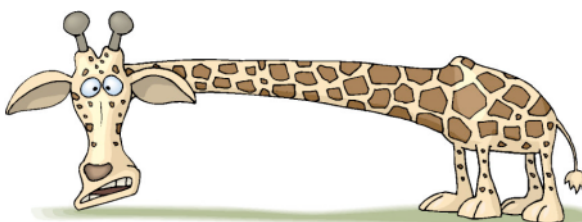
When pursued, a giraffe can run extremely fast but not for any length of time. It defends itself using its powerful legs and can deliver a fatal blow to a lion with well-placed kick.

Generally giraffes are thought to be mute (cannot make sound) but they have been heard to grunt and snort.

They need very little sleep, between 10 minutes and two hours in 24 hours. Giraffes can live for 20-30 years.

What's in a name?

All animals and plants are given a latin name. Even though scientists around the world speak in different languages, when they use latin names they are able to understand each other and know which animals or plants are being discussed. The giraffe's latin name is *Giraffa camelopardalis*. "Giraffa" mean "one who walks swiftly". The name "camelopardalis" is because it was once described as having the characteristics of a camel and a leopard.



They have a long tongue, especially designed for grasping and holding. Its long neck allows them graze on the leaves of trees, particularly the acacia tree, whose long thorn are no problem for the giraffe's tongue. Giraffes can eat 63kg of leaves and twigs per day!