

40% DROP IN 15 YEARS

# Giraffe numbers shrink alarmingly

Tony Carnie

THE population of the world's tallest animal species, the giraffe, is shrinking fast.

In just 15 years, numbers have plummeted by more than 40%.

The Giraffe Conservation Foundation says there were 140 000 of these iconic animals spread across Africa at the turn of the 20th century.

Now there are just 80 000 left.

"This is an alarming trend, which continues to go largely unnoticed by the wider public, including well-versed conservationists," the foundation warns. The giraffe's only living cousin, the elusive okapi, is in an even worse state.

Restricted to the rain forests of a single country, the world population of okapis in the wild has dropped by almost 50% in the past two decades largely due to civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Writing in the latest special issue of the African Journal of Ecology, giraffe and okapi experts reported that neither species was considered seriously threatened until fairly recently.

However, giraffes have become extinct in seven African countries in the past 30 years (Nigeria, Malawi, Mali, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Guinea and Mauritania). Ethiopia had almost 2 000 giraffe in the 1970s. Today just 270 are left.

One of the biggest concerns is that there are nine official sub-species of giraffe.

Two of these sub-species have been particularly hard-hit, with the total number of Nubian giraffes down to less than 650, and the West African sub-species down to just 300.

Giraffe and okapi researchers Noëlle Kümpe, Sophie Grange and Julian Fennessy say there is still a paucity of information about these two emblematic species, at a time when giraffe appear to have

slipped underneath the conservation radar.

Far more attention was still focused on elephant, rhino, big cats and great apes, and these species were likely to continue to attract a disproportionate amount of conservation attention and funding.

The Giraffe Conservation Society, set up in 2009, suggests that the degradation and fragmentation of former living spaces – accompanied by rapidly expanding human populations – is one of the main reasons giraffe numbers have declined so fast in the past few decades.

Giraffe habitat is degraded or destroyed by farmers and cattle herders, while war, civil unrest and the bush meat trade have added to the pressure.

As they are pushed into smaller living spaces, giraffe were becoming increasingly isolated and could become vulnerable to in-breeding.

Fred Bercovitch and Francois Deacon, two giraffid experts who are trying to improve scientific knowledge about the tallest creatures on the planet, say very little is known about the social dynamics of giraffes.

## No clue

"We have no clue as to how giraffe decide to join a herd, remain in a herd, leave a herd, follow a herd or stay behind when a herd wanders away," they say, although older males were more likely to be solitary.

Very little is known about how they communicate with one another.

They emit very few audible vocal sounds other than snorting and sneezing, leading some researchers to believe that giraffes spend a great deal of time watching and monitoring the behaviour of other giraffes to avoid predators such as lion and hyena.

Some scientists also suggest that, like elephants, giraffes may communicate using infrasound – a sound wavelength



A female giraffe calf, born in June, gets some attention from her mother Ellie at the Oklahoma City Zoo.

PICTURE: AP

below the range of human hearing.

Meredith Bashaw, who studied captive giraffes in the San Diego Wild Animal Park, has suggested that the peculiar neck-stretching behaviour of giraffe cows may indicate that they use infrasound to communicate with their calves.

Other research groups have suggested that female giraffes in oestrous may also use infrasound to attract males from great distances.

Later this week several researchers from across the world are meeting in Hoedspruit, Limpopo province, to discuss better ways to protect giraffe and okapi.

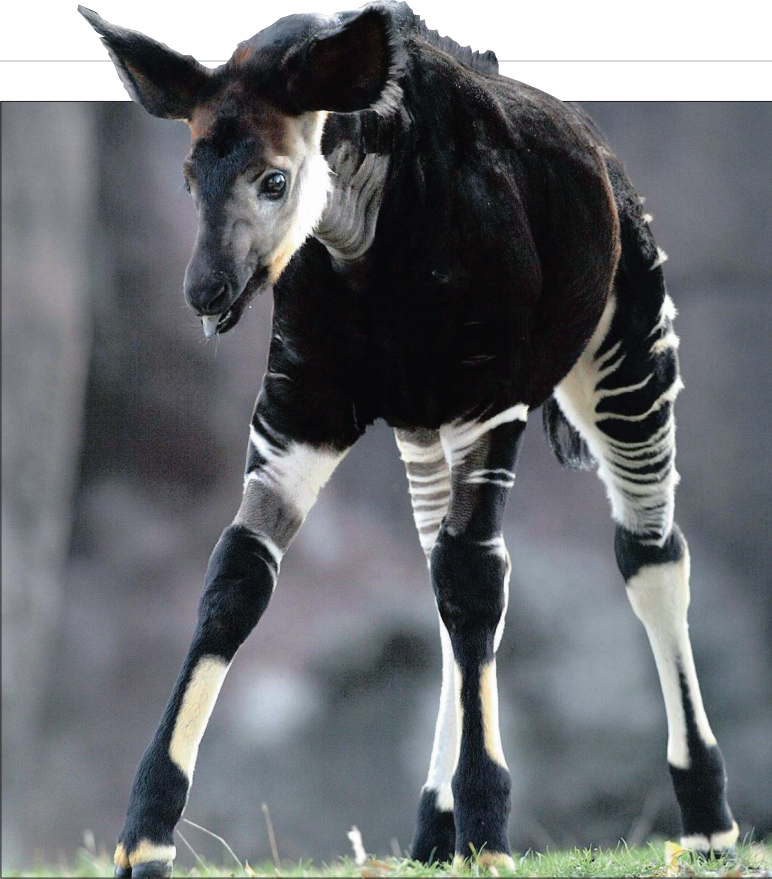
These include captive breeding in zoos across the world and possibly trophy-hunting in some countries.

Among the researchers is Bloemfontein-based researcher Francois Deacon, who says wildlife managers across Africa will have to work more closely with each other as giraffes get squeezed into smaller living spaces in most parts of the continent.

"We need to start thinking out of the box, as this time around, saving giraffes from extinction might just be our last chance to get it right."

GIRAFFE FACTS	
<b>Height (average adult)</b>	♂ 5.3 m (17 ft 4 in) ♀ 4.3 m (14 ft 2 in)
<b>Weight (average adult)</b>	♂ 1 200 kg (2 600 lb) ♀ 830 kg (1 800 lb)
<b>Largest</b>	♂ recorded at 6 m (19+ ft); heaviest recorded at 1 900 kg (4 200 lb).
<b>Foot size</b>	30 cm diameter; hoof ♂ 15 cm, ♀ 10 cm.
<b>Defence</b>	Forelegs and hind legs can deliver a lethal kick.
<b>Speed</b>	50 kph for sustained periods; calves less than 3 m high can easily outrun adults.
<b>Means of feeding</b>	Browsing, with a prehensile tongue (50 cm long) and upper lip.
<b>Diet</b>	Tree leaves, fruits, pods and shoots.
<b>Senses</b>	Colour vision, acute sense of smell, good hearing.
<b>Sleep</b>	4.5 hours, mainly at night; either standing or lying down.
<b>Longevity</b>	+/- 25 years
Source: Giraffe Conversation Foundation	

Weighing more than a ton and reaching heights of almost 6m, giraffes can run at 50km/h – but their numbers have dropped dramatically across Africa over the last few decades and some sub-species are now classified as endangered.



This baby okapi was born at the St Louis Zoo in Missouri, US. The okapi is the only relative of the giraffe and its head resembles that of the giraffe. But the okapi has a shorter neck, a reddish chestnut colour on the trunk, and stripes on its legs. Researchers are not sure exactly how many okapis remain in the wild, although the total population is thought to have dropped by more than 50% since 1995.

PICTURE: AP

## Inattention linked to online fiddling

Tom Bawden

WHETHER watching the rugby match on Saturday, commuting, or having dinner at a restaurant, many people find it hard to stop fiddling with their cellphones – firing off a never-ending stream of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter posts.

If this online hyperactivity looks exhausting, it's no surprise to discover that high-frequency internet users find it much more difficult to pay attention to what's going on around them than the rest of us – even when they are not consumed by the web.

New research finds that the most frequent cellphone and internet users are the most likely to be distracted, for example by being prone to missing important appointments and daydreaming while having a conversation.

In the first study of its kind, an academic from Leicester's De Montfort University has found that the more times a person uses the internet or their cellphone, the more likely they are to experience "cognitive failures".

These include a whole range of blunders, and a general lack of awareness of a person's surroundings which stretches as far as people forgetting why they have just gone from one part of the house to the other, says Dr Lee Hadlington, author of the research.

The study draws the same conclusions among users of cellphones without internet access as with it – suggesting that cellphone conversations and surfing the web are similarly associated with distraction.

But whether the most digitally active people are more distracted because their excessive online activity makes

them jittery or hyperactive, or whether it is the other way around – that they are more drawn to these activities because they naturally have short "attentional control" – is unclear at this stage, he says.

But Hadlington does have a theory: that it is a mix of the two. In other words, those people already suffering from short attention spans are drawn to the distractions of modern technology, which makes it even harder for them to pay attention to their surroundings.

His research has been published in the journal *Computers in Human Behaviour*.

He is now working on research to answer this question more comprehensively.

## Cognition

"This is an underexamined area. We are using technology on a daily basis but we don't understand its effect on us," Hadlington said.

"We don't know what's actually happening to our cognition when we are using this technology. What we do know from this research is that there are some statistically significant numbers of people who say they use the internet or their phone a lot and who experience cognitive failures," he added.

The study asked people a series of questions to determine whether they experienced certain types of "blunders" – defined as factors relating to their ability to focus, physical blunders such as bumping into things, and memory.

The study was conducted among 107 men and 103 women between the ages of 18 and 65, who spent an average of 22.95 hours a week online. – The Independent

## A passionate period drama

LONDON: *Downton Abbey* will be getting some hot new competition, quite literally, when the BBC's adaptation of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* hits the small screen.

Critics' reactions to an early screening of the one-off DH Lawrence period drama have been mixed, with some reports promising "sexual gymnastics" that "borders on porn" while others insist there will be no "explicit nude scenes" or "raised eyebrows over supper".

Holliday Grainger takes the lead as Lady Constance Chatterley, with James Norton playing her "war-wounded" impotent husband Sir Clifford Chatterley and former *Game of Thrones* star Richard Madden as gamekeeper Oliver Mellors.

The show tells the early 20th century story of Lady Chatterley's passionate love affair with Mellors despite their class differences.

The original 1928 novel was censored in Britain for more than 30 years for its obscene language and graphic sex scenes.



Gamekeeper Oliver Mellors and Lady Chatterley in a forbidden embrace in the new BBC drama.

But while the raunchiness of the three sex scenes is under debate, Lawrence's four-letter words do not feature in the new adaptation, as director Jed Mercurio did not see them as "groundbreaking" any more.

"That battle has been won. The idea was to tell this as a love story, a love triangle," Mercurio said at the advance screening. "I think that putting Lady Chatterley at the centre and making her a much more thinking person, much more decisive, was one of the most important things." – The Independent

## Babies help woman stay out of jail

LONDON: A Chinese woman has avoided jail for 10 years through 13 pregnancies, it has been reported.

Chinese media reports that the woman, then 29, was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to life imprisonment in October 2005.

But owing to her being pregnant at the time, the court decided to grant her probation for the duration of her pregnancy. When the probation

period ended, she reportedly told officials that she was pregnant again.

According to the People's Daily Online, she claimed she became pregnant 14 times, although she has since admitted one of the pregnancies had been fictitious. She maintains the other 13 pregnancies were authentic.

It is reported that she has now been imprisoned, almost a decade after first being sentenced. – The Independent

## Fears for okapi population

Tony Carnie

THOUGH it features on Congolese banknotes and has its own World Heritage Site, the forest-dwelling okapi was recently classified as endangered following a 50% drop in population size over the past 30 years.

The okapi, restricted to the war-ravaged rain forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo, is a distant cousin of the giraffe.

Though it is prized for its meat and skins, its living space is shrinking rapidly because of logging, mining and agriculture.

Two years ago it was classified officially as "endangered" on the Red List of Endangered Species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Because it is a

shy and secretive forest species, wildlife researchers say it is not possible to estimate its current population level accurately, but it is thought that numbers have halved in just three decades.

The largest remaining stronghold is the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and World Heritage Site, which was home to about 4 400 okapis in 1995. By 2007, this had dropped to around 2 500.

In Virunga National Park there were less than 100 okapis left in 2008, while the population in Maiko National Park has also dropped significantly.

Writing in the latest special issue of the Africa Journal of Ecology, okapi expert Dr Noëlle Kümpe calls for urgent action to prevent their extinction.

He said continued deforestation

and expansion of the mining industry was likely to slash remaining okapi habitat by almost one third.

Since 1980, the expansion of human settlements, deforestation and forest degradation have eliminated important sections of the okapi range, especially the Ituri Forest.

The IUCN says the biggest current threat to okapi is the presence of illegal armed groups in and around key protected areas.

These were preventing effective conservation and were involved in poaching and illegal logging.

In a notorious incident in June 2012, armed rebels attacked the headquarters of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, killing seven people and all 14 captive okapi.



# Ballito Junction

## REGIONAL MALL

### LEASING LAUNCH FOR BALLITO JUNCTION REGIONAL MALL

Ballito Junction is being expanded to a 65 000m2 regional mall, with the newly developed centre open for trading in April 2017 . The retail leasing launch for this significant retail project will be held on **Thursday, 10 September**. If you wish to attend, kindly register your interest by emailing [info@fgprop.com](mailto:info@fgprop.com). Access by invitation only.



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