

Wildlife

W O N D E R S

ANIMAL SERIES : GIRAFFE

GIRAFFE

# The Tallest Land Animal

Tall, graceful and gentle – the giraffe is one of the most admired animals. Since ancient times, this extraordinary creature has intrigued human beings. Giraffes have always been popular zoo animals. The first zoo created 3,500 years ago in Egypt had a giraffe. The animal had to be shipped 2,419km down the Nile River to the zoo.

The giraffe is the tallest living land animal. Males (bulls) can grow to almost 6m tall; females (cows) are generally shorter by a metre. The record height of the giraffe is 6.1m. The most outstanding feature of giraffes is their long necks.

Giraffes live in Africa. They are usually found on the plains or in open forests. They avoid dense forests - with a long neck, it is easy to get caught amongst branches and vines. Each herd comprises 2 to 50 animals. Individuals within a herd may wander off by themselves or join another herd. Giraffes are great wanderers – they travel great distances in search of food.

In the wild, the average life span of the giraffe is 10 years although they can live up to 28 years in captivity.

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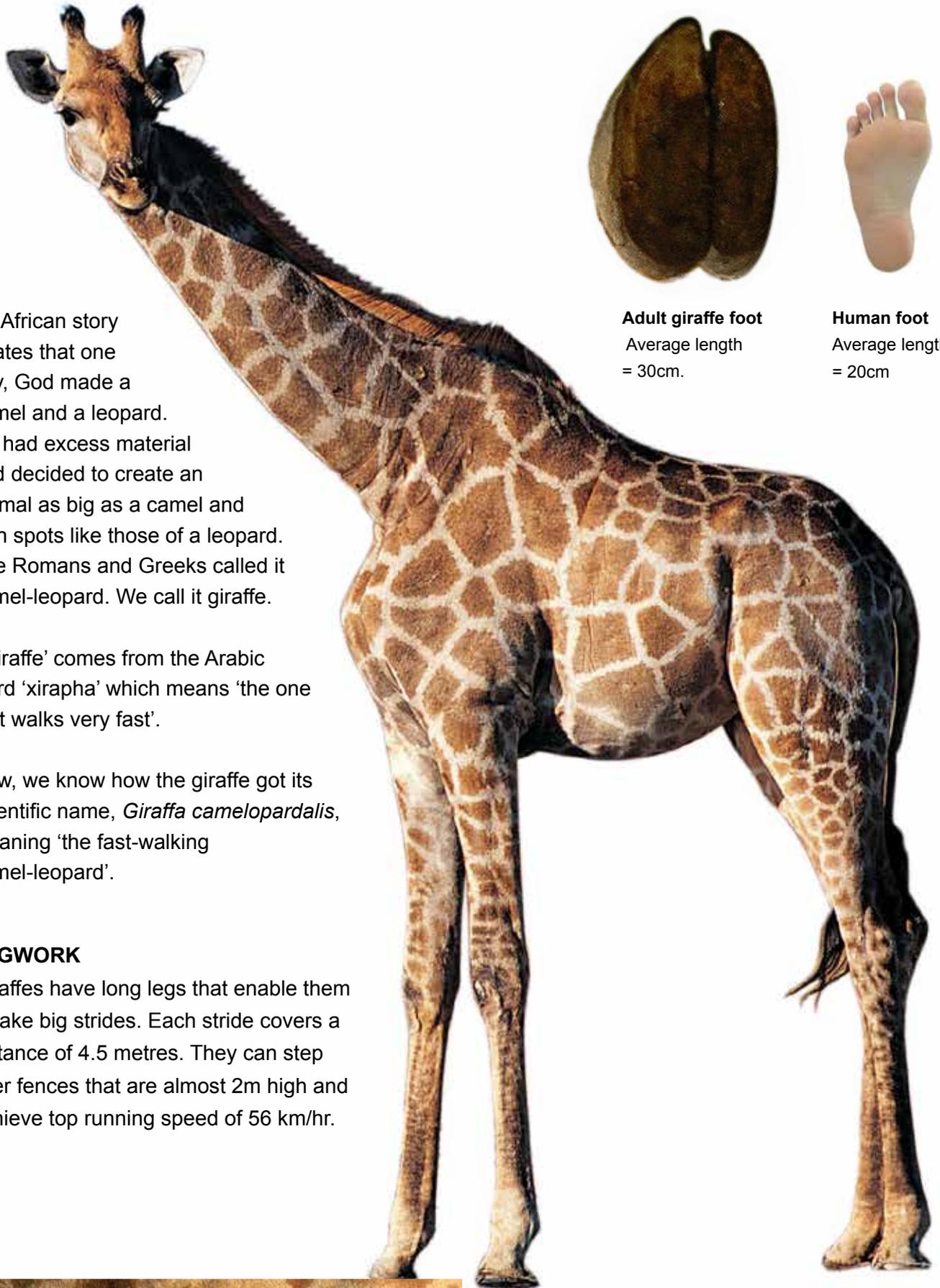


**DID YOU KNOW**  
**Riot In Paris**

When a giraffe first arrived in Paris in 1827, it caused a near-riot. The French rushed to view the animal and soldiers had to be deployed to control the crowd.



# The Fast-Walking Camel-Leopard



An African story relates that one day, God made a camel and a leopard.

He had excess material and decided to create an animal as big as a camel and with spots like those of a leopard. The Romans and Greeks called it camel-leopard. We call it giraffe.

'Giraffe' comes from the Arabic word 'xirapha' which means 'the one that walks very fast'.

Now, we know how the giraffe got its scientific name, *Giraffa camelopardalis*, meaning 'the fast-walking camel-leopard'.

## LEGWORK

Giraffes have long legs that enable them to take big strides. Each stride covers a distance of 4.5 metres. They can step over fences that are almost 2m high and achieve top running speed of 56 km/hr.

**Adult giraffe foot**  
Average length  
= 30cm.

**Human foot**  
Average length  
= 20cm



# Patterns & Patches

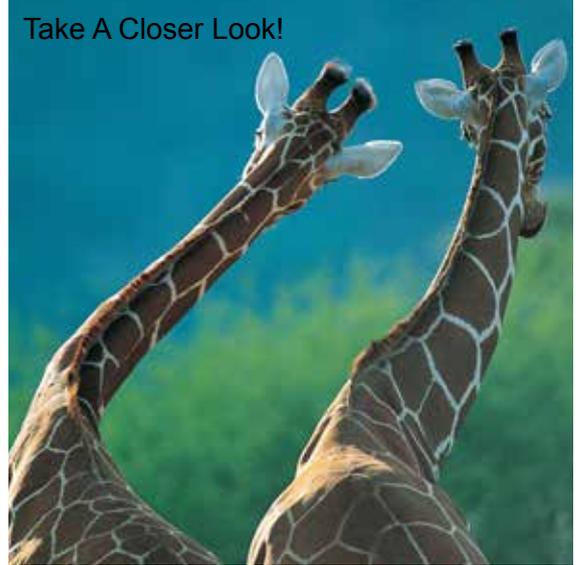
## IT'S ONLY SKIN-DEEP

There are 9 subspecies or 'races' of giraffes in Africa. Each 'race' can be recognized by its coat pattern. Apart from the difference in coat pattern and colour, and the location where they originate, all the 'races' of giraffes are pretty much the same.

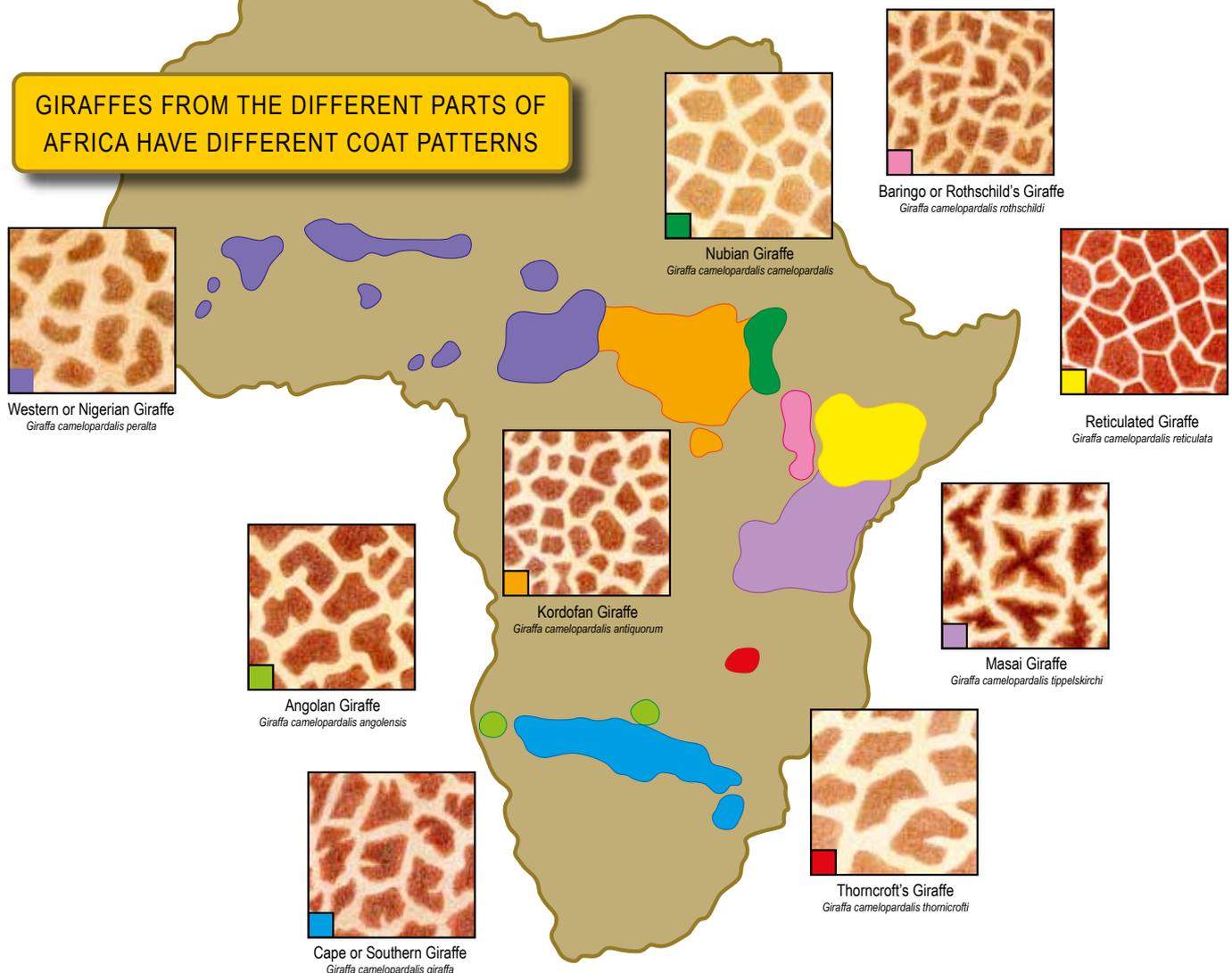
## MY COAT PATTERN, YOUR FINGERPRINTS

Within a 'race', the coat pattern on every giraffe is unique, just like our fingerprints. No two giraffes have the same pattern.

Take A Closer Look!



GIRAFFES FROM THE DIFFERENT PARTS OF AFRICA HAVE DIFFERENT COAT PATTERNS



# Necks

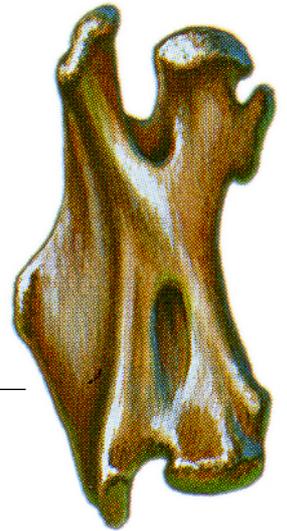


## THE MAGICAL NUMBER

Do you notice that the neck of a giraffe makes up almost half its height? Can you guess how many bones there are in its neck?



Human neck bone



Giraffe Bone

Each neck bone can be 25cm long.

A giraffe has the same number of neck bones as a mouse or human – only 7.

## NECKING

Male giraffes establish rank by wrapping or slamming their necks. This is known as necking. The fight goes on for 30 minutes or more until one of them is defeated.

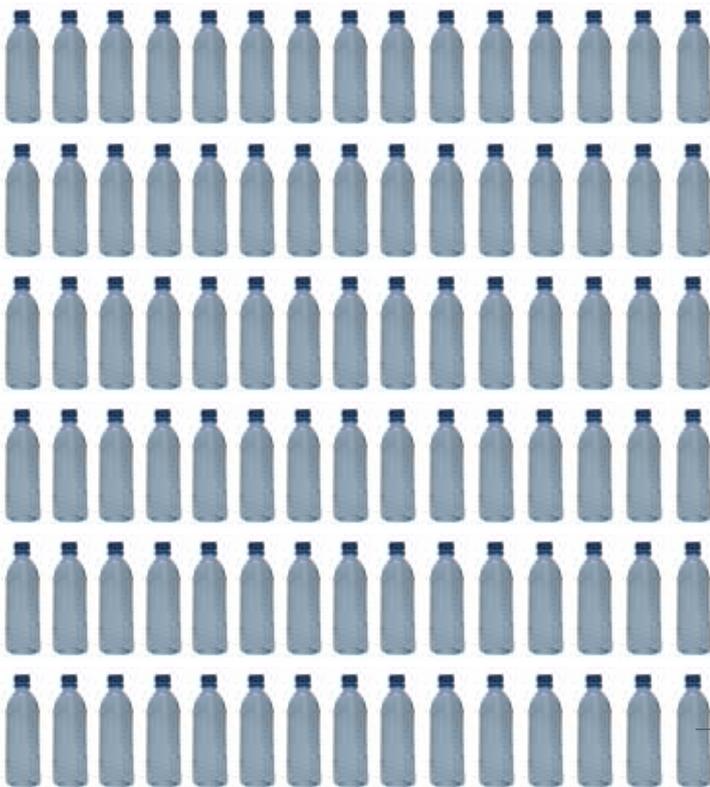
# Huge Heart

Photo: Fong Chee Wai

The giraffe has a huge heart – up to 60cm in length. It needs a strong heart with thick muscles to pump blood to its brain. The force is so great that its blood pressure is three times higher than that of ours!

What happens when the giraffe bends over to drink? Does the strong blood pressure cause a sudden rush of blood to its brain? The answer is No. The giraffe has valves in the blood vessels of its neck to regulate blood flow. The valves slow down blood flow when the giraffe bends over and prevent blood from flowing back to the heart when it raises its head.

Imagine having a heart that is able to pump enough blood each minute to fill all these one-litre bottles! Well, the giraffe's heart does just that – it can pump up to 90 litres of blood every minute.







# Giraffe!

Being the tallest animal, the giraffe has the privilege of feasting on vegetation that no other animal can reach. It is also able to enjoy a 'bird's eye view' of its surroundings and see what's coming long before other animals can.

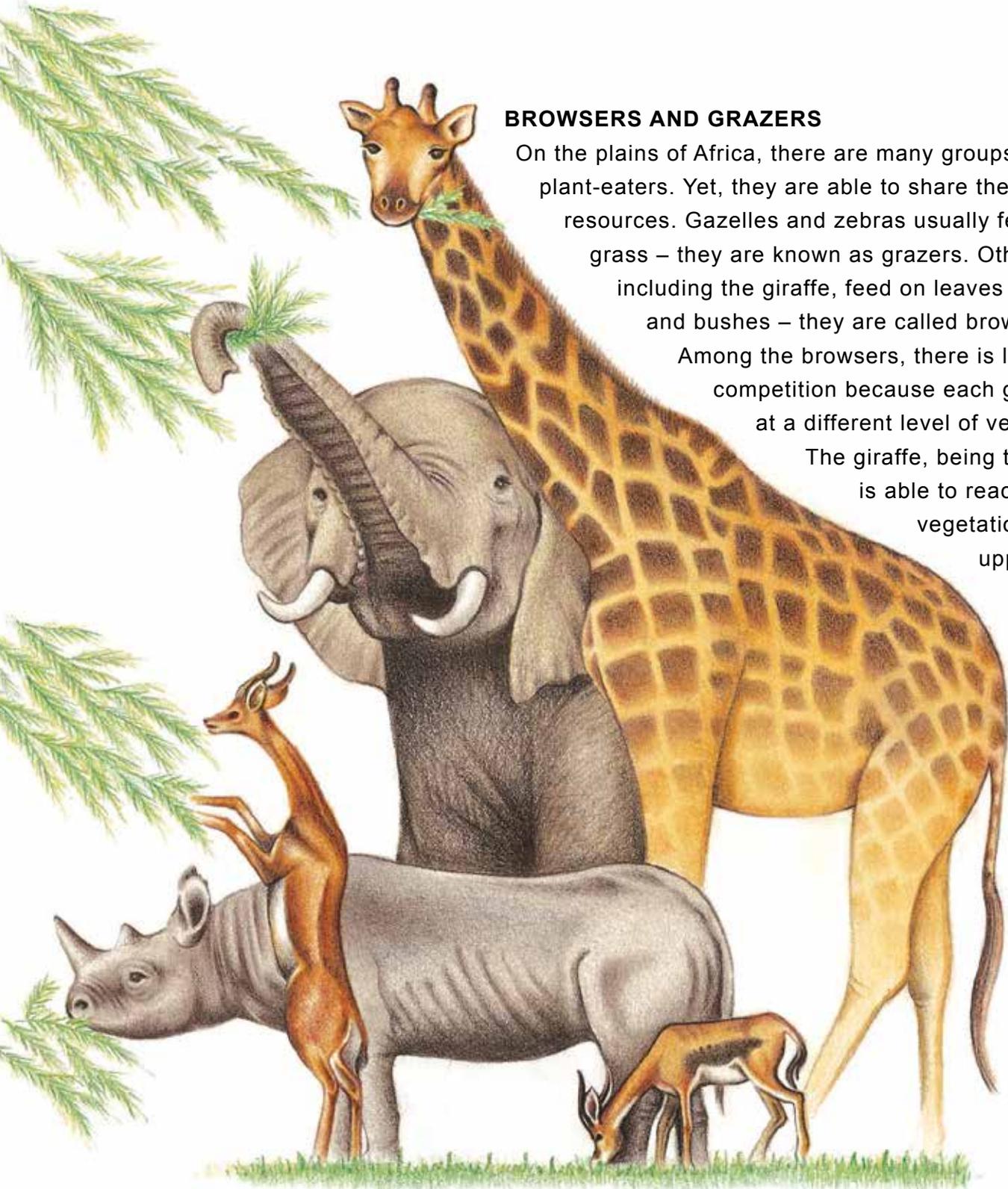
# Thorny Meals

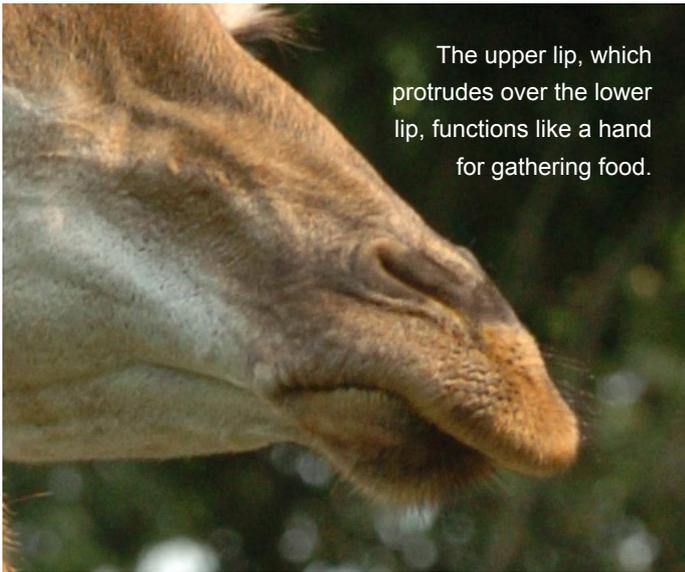
## BROWSERS AND GRAZERS

On the plains of Africa, there are many groups of plant-eaters. Yet, they are able to share the food resources. Gazelles and zebras usually feed on grass – they are known as grazers. Others, including the giraffe, feed on leaves from trees and bushes – they are called browsers.

Among the browsers, there is little competition because each group feeds at a different level of vegetation.

The giraffe, being the tallest, is able to reach the vegetation at the uppermost level.





The upper lip, which protrudes over the lower lip, functions like a hand for gathering food.



### **GRASP THEM!**

The giraffe has the most flexible tongue of all animals. Its prehensile tongue and upper lip function like a hand to grasp leaves and strip them off branches. A giraffe can extend its tongue for a maximum length of 53cm!

### **CHOOSING FOOD OVER SLEEP**

Food or sleep? Giraffes prefer the former. They spend 16 to 20 hours a day eating and less than four hours sleeping. They seldom go into deep sleep for more than a minute each time.

### **CHEWING CUD**

When a giraffe is not feeding, it is likely to be chewing. It spends few hours a day chewing cud, which is food regurgitated from the stomach. This behaviour is known as ruminating. The giraffe swallows its food without chewing it thoroughly. Later, the food is regurgitated and chewed once more before it is re-swallowed.

### **TONGUE FOR THORNS**

<< Would you feast on this plant? Giraffes love to feed on it – the acacia tree. It is full of thorns but the giraffes do not seem to be bothered by them. The meals may be prickly but they have a leathery tongue to cope with the thorns.



# Drinking Problem

Giraffes get most of the moisture they require from the leaves that they eat. Therefore, they do not need to visit water holes everyday like most other animals on the African plains do. When they do, they have to splay their legs so that their mouth can reach the water. In this position, they cannot deliver the deadly kicks to protect themselves from lions.

Stopping at a water hole to drink can be dangerous. Lions may lie in wait for giraffes as they splay out their legs to reach the water. In this vulnerable position, they are easy prey for lions. Therefore, giraffes have to drink fast.



Photo: Photo Researchers, Inc



An adult giraffe is capable of killing a lion with just one kick. But giraffes, especially the young or sickly, do fall prey to lions, leopards and hyaenas.



# How Many Horns?

Photo by: Lim Aikheng



The horns or ossicones are bony outgrowths from the skull.

Teeth are absent on the upper jaw. Giraffes rely on their flexible upper lip and tongue to grasp leaves.

Both male and female giraffes have horns. As the males grow older, they may develop more horns. Some of them have as many as five horns.

## HAIRLESS HORNS

The horns of adult males are usually hairless at the top. This is because they rub or bash their horns against each other during fights and the hair gets rubbed off in the process.



Photo by: Fong Chee Wai

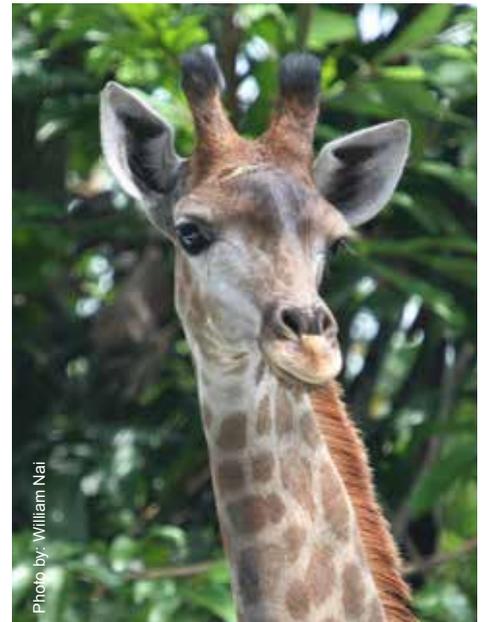


Photo by: William Nai



# Dropped Into The World



Giraffes give birth while standing. The calf is 'dropped' into the world, head first, from a height of 2m. We would have died falling from this height at birth!



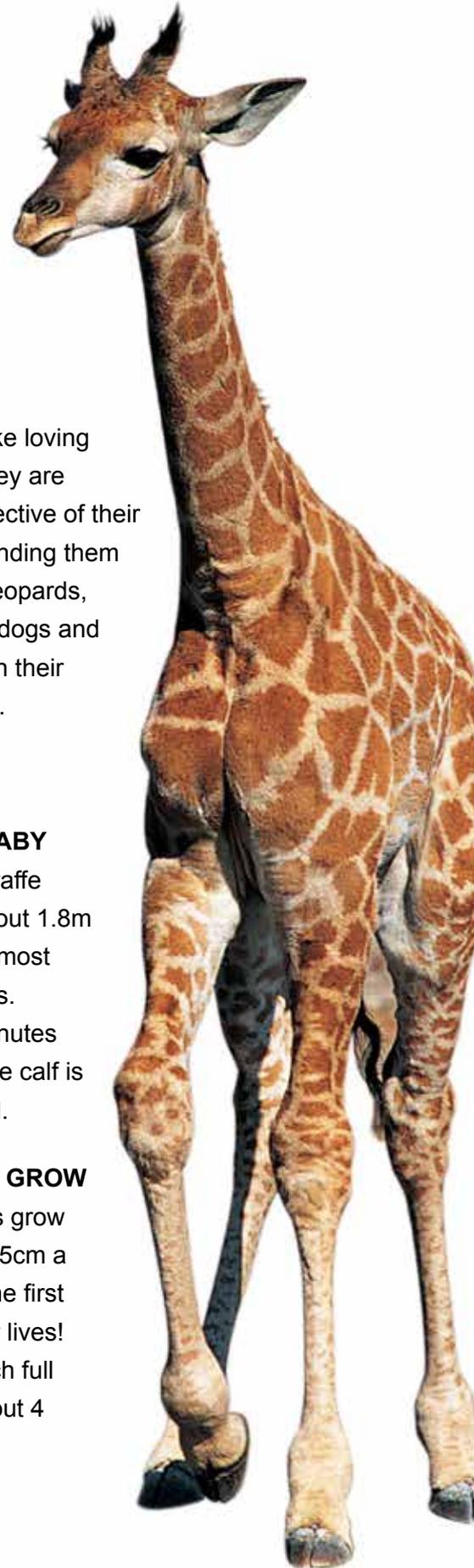
Giraffes make loving mothers. They are fiercely protective of their calves, defending them from lions, leopards, African wild dogs and hyaenas with their deadly kicks.

## **TALLEST BABY**

At birth, a giraffe stands at about 1.8m – taller than most human adults. Within 15 minutes after birth, the calf is able to stand.

## **GROW AND GROW**

Baby giraffes grow more than 2.5cm a day during the first week of their lives! Giraffes reach full height at about 4 years old.



# Okapi

A giraffe, horse and zebra rolled into one – this strange animal is the okapi. It is the only living relative of the giraffe.

The okapi has a face like that of a giraffe and it also uses its prehensile tongue to grasp leaves from branches. It can extend its tongue up to a maximum length of 50cm to lick and clean its eyes. Unlike the giraffe, it does not have a long neck and long limbs. It lives alone in the dense tropical forest of Zaire, Africa.

The okapi was first described in a book in 1890 but was not named scientifically until 1901.

Okapis are being hunted for their meat and skin. Their natural habitats are also being destroyed. It is estimated that there are only 30,000 individuals left, of which about 5,000 are kept in wildlife reserves. Okapis are protected by law but they are still threatened by poachers and habitat destruction.



# Giraffe Goggle

Click here <https://bit.ly/SZGGiraffe>  
to learn more about the giraffes at Singapore Zoo.

1 What do our giraffes eat?

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2 Why do the keepers provide salt lick blocks for our giraffes?

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3 Jubilee was born on 31 August 2015.

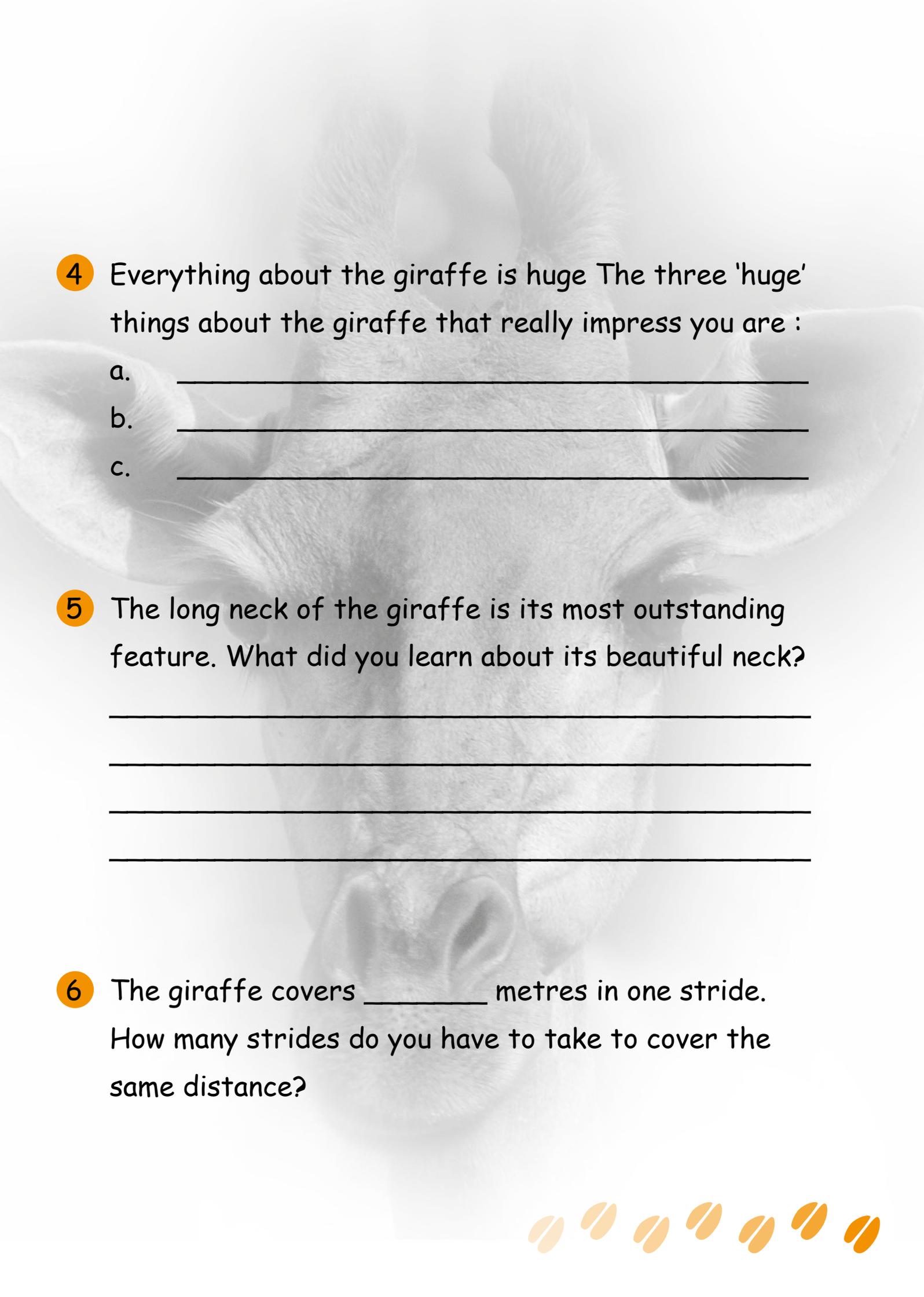
He was a perfect gift to us  
as we celebrated

Singapore's 50th birthday!

How old is Jubilee now?

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4 Everything about the giraffe is huge. The three 'huge' things about the giraffe that really impress you are :

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

5 The long neck of the giraffe is its most outstanding feature. What did you learn about its beautiful neck?

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6 The giraffe covers \_\_\_\_\_ metres in one stride. How many strides do you have to take to cover the same distance?



# Standing Tall

In prehistoric times, giraffes were widespread in Europe, Asia and Africa. Today, they are found only in certain parts of Africa. In the last 100 years, giraffes have disappeared from most of western and southern Africa because of the changes in the giraffe's habitat brought about by human activities. Human population in Africa continues to grow rapidly. This means that there is less living space for the giraffe.

Giraffes do not compete with livestock for grass and therefore are not persecuted by farmers for this reason. However, they are hunted for their skin, meat, sinews and tails. In some parts of Africa, people believe that ornaments made of giraffe's tail hair keep their owner healthy and safe from danger. Bushmen in southern Africa hunt giraffes for their leg sinews, which are used as bow strings.

Eventually, giraffes may exist only in zoos and nature reserves. We certainly hope that the stately giraffe will always stand tall on the African plains. It is hard to imagine the world without the tall, graceful giraffe.







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