

THE GREAT GIRAFFE

AFRICAN MAMMAL · TALLEST LIVING TERRESTRIAL ANIMAL

LARGEST RUMINANT

GIRAFFA CAMELOPARDALIS

9 SUBSPECIES · 7 EXTINCT SPECIES KNOWN FROM FOSSILS



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Legs, Locomotion and Posture

Legs and Pelvis

The front and back legs of a giraffe are about the same length. The radius and ulna of the front legs are articulated by the carpus, which, while structurally equivalent to the human wrist, functions as a knee.

It appears that a suspensory ligament allows the lanky legs to support the animal's great weight. The giraffe's pelvis, though relatively short, has an ilium that is outspread at the upper ends.

Feet and Hooves

The foot of the giraffe reaches a diameter of 30 cm (12 in), and the hoof is 15 cm (5.9 in) high in males and 10 cm (3.9 in) in females.

The rear of each hoof is low and the fetlock is close to the ground, allowing the foot to provide additional support to the animal's weight. Giraffes lack dewclaws and interdigital glands.

Walking and Galloping

A giraffe has two gaits: walking and galloping. Walking is done by moving the legs on one side of the body at the same time, then doing the same on the other side.

When galloping, the hind legs move around the front legs before the latter move forward, and the tail will curl up. The giraffe can reach a sprint speed of up to 60 km/h (37 mph), and can sustain 50 km/h (31 mph) for several kilometres.

Head, Neck and Posture

The animal relies on the forward and backward motions of its head and neck to maintain balance and the counter momentum while galloping.