

**Giraffes in Captivity**  
From [IDA In Defense of Animals](#)  
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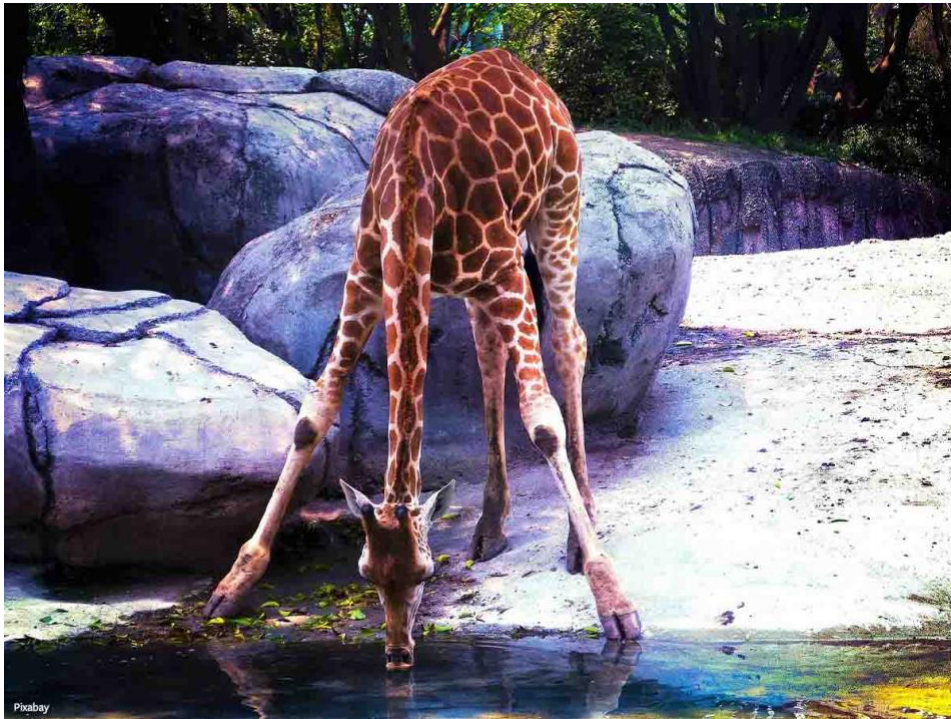


For a giraffe, life in a zoo is often brutal and short. They are lucky to live to 15, and many die much younger, despite being able to live to 20-25 in the wild. But dying young is far from the worst thing to happen to giraffes. They suffer from physical and psychological problems and live in shockingly small enclosures. Like the Earth's largest land mammals, elephants, the Earth's tallest are extremely ill-suited for captivity. The Association of Zoos & Aquariums should phase out confining these gentle creatures who suffer so much in captivity.

Giraffes can easily reach the height of a second-story window and peek in. This ability is often a liability in captivity, where they stick their necks in hard to get out of places. There are many examples of giraffes getting their tall necks trapped in zoo fences, wires, tree branches, and even “enrichment” toys. They twist desperately to extricate themselves, breaking their spines or necks in the process.

In their homeland of Africa, they travel in tight-knit groups from as small as three individuals up to 175. In captivity, they have no choice about who they live with, and they are confined in the same miniature space for their entire lives. That space is a fraction of what they use in the wild and prevents them from expressing their natural instincts including galloping at their top speed of 35 mph. In zoos, giraffes suffer from arthritis, fractures, lameness, and nutritional diseases from the lack of a proper diet.

Despite zoo conservation claims, some giraffes are even put to death for the crime of having “undesirable” genes, which happens when zoos suddenly have too many of certain subspecies. At the Copenhagen Zoo in Denmark, two-year-old Marius was killed for this “flaw” and then fed to the zoo's lions.



Born Free recently produced a thorough [study of giraffes in captivity](#) and concluded, as In Defense of Animals does, that giraffes do not belong in zoos. Breeding programs should be ended, and exhibits should be phased out. In the meantime, zoos should be required to provide adequate diets, and giraffes who are currently in captivity should be moved to the best possible facilities that can improve their care and opportunities to socialize.

