Care For Us

Giraffe (Giraffa camelopardalis)
Animal welfare refers to an animal’s state or its feelings.

An animal’s welfare state can be positive, neutral or negative.

An animal’s welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis.

When an animal’s needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they can have good welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare throughout their entire life.
Understanding that animals are sentient and have cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry for all captive animals, to ensure they have good welfare.

In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the physical and behavioural environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.

It is therefore very important we understand their behavioural and physiological needs, so we can meet those needs in captivity.
Giraffe are the world's tallest animal, they can reach 5.8 metres tall.

They are found across sub-Saharan Africa in dry forest, shrubland and savannah habitats.

The current understanding is there are nine sub-species of giraffe although it is now thought they are separated into four distinct species.

The giraffe is classified by the IUCN as vulnerable to extinction.

It is estimated there are less than 70,000 giraffe left in the wild and the population is declining. This is due to habitat loss and hunting.
Giraffes like to Eat
Giraffes are herbivores, they can eat up to 45 kg of leaves, bark and twigs a day. They will spend a large part of the day and night browsing from trees - up to 75% of their time is spent feeding.

Giraffes are ruminants so it is very important they can eat leaves, bark and twigs throughout the year. They eat very little grass so should not be part of their diet.

Positive behaviours to encourage
Feeding browse regularly (in multiple places around the enclosure) throughout the day and night allows for natural feeding behaviours and helps healthy rumination. Their food must be raised up to allow them to feed naturally as they would in the wild. Always make sure the plants are not poisonous to giraffe.
Giraffes like to Socialise

Giraffes live in social groups made up of mainly females and their calves. Young males live in groups and tend to be more solitary as they get older. Giraffes can live up to 40 years old in captivity.

**Positive behaviours to encourage**
Keeping giraffe in appropriate family groups encourages natural behaviours between individuals and rewarding relationships and interactions.
Giraffes like to Lay Down

Although giraffe only lay down to sleep for a few minutes at a time it is important to give them appropriate bedding or substrate to rest on. Sand areas are also good for their hooves.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Providing different substrate and bedding choice in a giraffe enclosure allows them to decide when and where they wish to walk, stand, rest or sleep. This gives them control over their environment which is important to their well-being.
Giraffes like to communicate

Giraffes do communicate using body language but also with vocalisations which humans might not register. They can multiple different noises to communicate, including humming, snorting, grunting and moaning.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Keeping giraffe in appropriate family groups encourages natural and rewarding communication opportunities and interactions.
Giraffes like to use their Tongues

Giraffe tongues can be up to 50cm long. They use their tongues to strip leaves from branches that often have thorns on them, helping them get to the food but preventing injury. This is an important part of their natural feeding behaviour.

**Positive behaviours to encourage**

By offering feed in barrels with holes in and mesh feeders the giraffe have to manipulate the feed with their tongues to obtain the food items. This is rewarding for them and encourages natural feeding behaviours
Giraffes enjoy…

Eating! They love eating leaves, bark, shoots, twigs, flowers and small amounts of fruit and vegetables.

By giving giraffe more opportunities to browse the better their physical and psychological welfare will be.

In captivity we should always try and replicate their natural and normal behaviours, so they are happy and healthy throughout their lives.