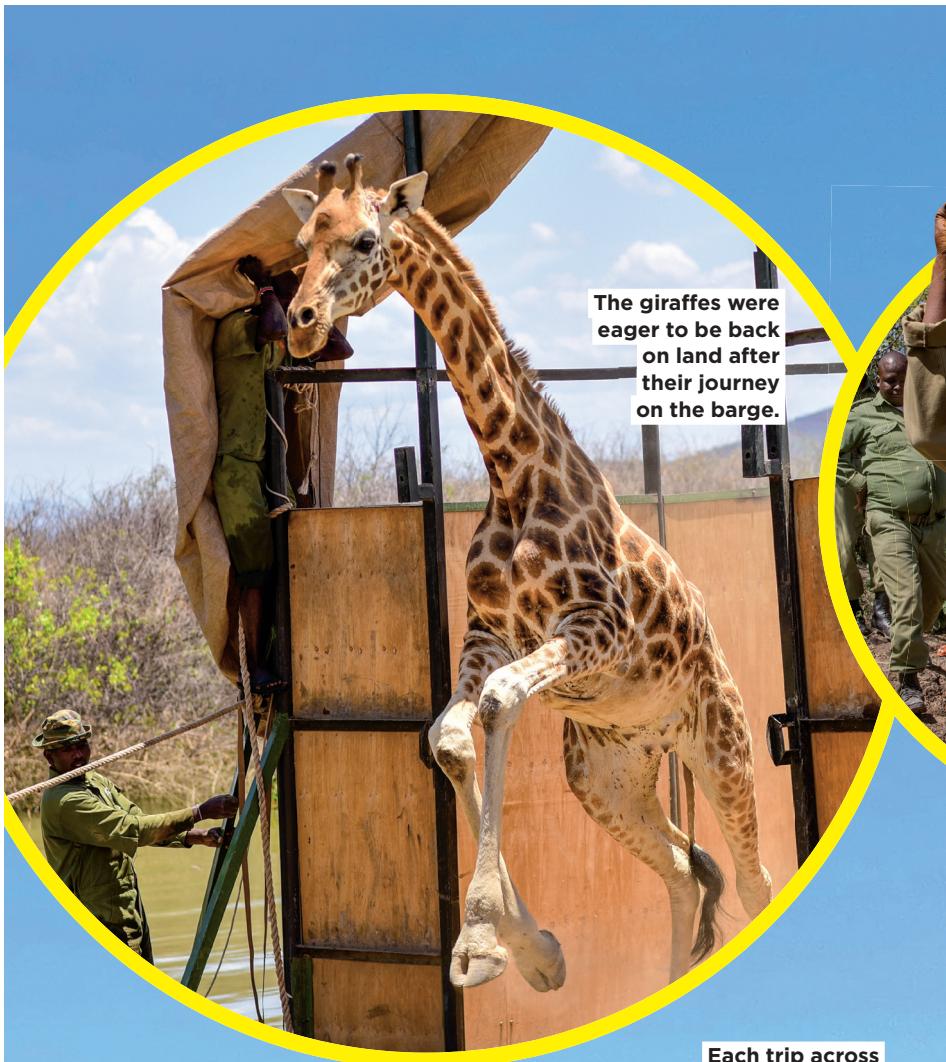


DARING GIRAFFE RESCUE

Wildlife experts recently came up with a unique solution to save a group of giraffes trapped on an island. **BY LISA M. HERRINGTON**





The giraffes were eager to be back on land after their journey on the barge.



The team celebrated after the giraffes arrived safely at their new home.

Each trip across Lake Baringo took about an hour.



VIDEO

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How do you get the world's tallest animal off an island? That's the problem wildlife experts in the African nation of Kenya faced last fall. Months of heavy rain had left nine giraffes stranded on an island in Lake Baringo. Swimming to safety wasn't an option. The lake is too wide for the giraffes to swim across, and hungry crocodiles lurk in its waters.

The animals—a type of Northern giraffe known as Rothschild's giraffes—had been living on a peninsula that stretched into Lake Baringo. Conservationists had brought the animals there in 2011 to protect them from poachers who illegally hunt giraffes for their meat and spotted coats.

For years, the animals could safely roam from the peninsula to the mainland to find →

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Shrinking Habitats

Giraffes are native to the forests and grasslands of Africa. Since the 1980s, their population has fallen by nearly 40 percent. This map, called a habitat map, shows the current ranges of the four species of giraffes as well as the extent of their habitat in the 1700s. Habitat maps show where animals naturally live. Use the map to answer the questions.

Map Skills

1. What does the light green color on the map indicate?
2. Which type of giraffe lives in Niger?
3. Reticulated giraffes live in which three countries?
4. Which desert stretches across much of northern Africa?
5. In which direction would you travel to get from Senegal to Angola?
6. Which type of giraffe might drink from the Zambezi River?
7. Where would you be more likely to see a giraffe today: Namibia or Sudan?
8. Which four countries border Lake Tanganyika?
9. Which type of giraffe might you see near that lake?
10. Which type of giraffe can be found north of the equator and west of the White Nile?

food. But starting in late 2019, heavy rains caused the lake to swell, turning the peninsula into an island and cutting the giraffes off from the mainland—and their food supply.

So wildlife experts came up with a plan to safely get the towering creatures off the island. The team would float the giraffes across the lake on a raft—a type of rescue that had never been tried before.

David O'Connor, the president of Save Giraffes Now, a nonprofit that helped lead the mission, says rescuing those nine giraffes was important to protecting the species.

Only about 3,000 Rothschild's giraffes are left in the wild. Like other types of giraffes, their population has dropped in recent decades because of poaching and habitat loss. Humans now use many of the areas where giraffes once lived for farming and logging. War in some countries has also driven giraffes from their habitats.

"We felt a great sense of urgency to complete this rescue," says O'Connor. "With giraffes undergoing a silent extinction, every one we can protect matters."

Planning a Rescue

The months-long rescue operation got under way this past December. Workers built

a special steel barge to transport the massive animals one at a time. Nicknamed the "GiRaft," the barge featured tall sides to keep the giraffes from falling into the water. It was towed by a motorboat for the hour-long trip across the lake.

Getting the giraffes comfortable with the barge wasn't easy. Workers tried luring them aboard with treats, including fruit. "Mango was really successful," says O'Connor. "Giraffes have a bit of a sweet tooth."

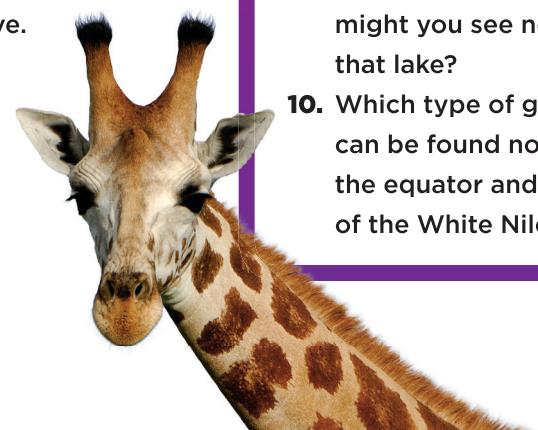
The animals were also given medicine to help keep them calm for parts of the journey.

A New Home

By mid-April, all nine giraffes had been successfully reunited at their new home, a wildlife reserve on the mainland. Conservationists now plan to move other Rothschild's giraffes to the reserve. The goal is that the two groups breed, to help build up their population.

"These giraffes are the heart of our homeland," says Mike Parkei, a ranger at the reserve where the rescued giraffes now live.

"We knew we had to come together and do everything possible to save them." ♦



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Note: About 800 Rothschild's giraffes live in Kenya today, outside their natural range. Conservationists sometimes move animals outside their natural habitats in an effort to protect them.

SOURCE: Save Giraffes Now