

Niger rare giraffe population makes a comeback

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A giraffe forages in the Serengeti reserve in 2010. The last West African giraffes, now living in the wild only in southwestern Niger, are making a comeback with numbers standing at 310 last year, the environment ministry said Wednesday.

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Only 50 of them, their lowest number, was recorded in 1996.

The 'giraffa camelopardalis peralta', distinguished by its light-coloured spots and found only in the Sahel, was nearly extinct when a campaign was launched to protect it from poachers.

"Efforts deployed by the government to protect the giraffes have borne fruit as their population has increased from about 50 in 1996 to 310 in 2011," the ministry said quoting the result of the latest [census](#).

The giraffes -- 146 males and 164 females -- live in the vicinity of Koure, a little over an hour by road from the capital Niamey.

The Association to Safeguard the Giraffes of Niger (ASGN), a non-governmental organisation which works along with the French [zoo](#) of Doue La Fontaine, has set up community projects in the area to encourage the local population to preserve the giraffes.

They have offered seed to [farmers](#), dug wells, and granted interest-free micro-loans to women to help them set up small businesses.

Two giraffes were killed by [poachers](#) in 2010, but [highway traffic](#), especially at night, is even more of a threat to the animals.

The ASGN attempted in 2010 to keep track of the giraffes by way of satellite-radio transmitters attached to their necks, but these had to be removed after several animals developed problems wearing them.

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