

Niger's giraffe population on the rise again

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A Niger giraffe named Houbou feeds her baby on August 24, 2005 at the Zoo des Sables d'Olonne in France

The small number of surviving giraffes in western Africa is on the rise again, after 366 were counted in southwest Niger in 2012, up from 311 the previous year, official figures published Tuesday showed.

The latest figure includes 177 males and 189 females, said Niger's ASGN department for the environment and preservation of giraffes.

ASGN, which cooperates closely with a zoo in the northwestern French town of Doue La Fontaine, finances projects to raise awareness among local populations that the world's tallest living terrestrial animal and largest ruminant should be better protected.

Giraffe numbers were down to a mere 50 just 15 years ago when a protected habitat was established in scrubland around Koure, about a one-hour drive from the capital Niamey.

In 2006, studies found that population was the last of the peralta giraffe variety which is threatened by extinction due to an advancing desert and farming, environmentalists say.

Their shrinking habitat pushes them to migrate hundreds of kilometres (miles) from their usual grounds, as far as neighbouring Nigeria, making them an easier prey for poachers.

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