



Nine types of giraffe live in Africa. These six (above) may be genetically distinct.

Spot Check If on a savannah in East Africa a male Masai giraffe with jagged spots approaches a female reticulated giraffe with round patches, will they interbreed? In zoos they might, but something happens in the wild to keep them apart, according to recent genetic testing. Rather than one species, as long thought, there may be at least six species of giraffe. The giraffes stick to their own kind—a mark of speciation—probably in part by recognizing coat pattern. It will take years for giraffes to be declared multiple species. By then some could be near extinction; only a few hundred Masai and Western African giraffes remain, and total numbers have plunged 30 percent as habitat has dwindled. —Tom O'Neill

