

# GIRAFFES BROUGHT TO INDIA BY BRITISH MAY BELONG TO ENDANGERED SPECIES

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Tracking the roots: A genome sequencing study was conducted on 10 giraffes in Kolkata's Alipore Zoological Garden. PTISwapan Mahapatra

About 150 years ago, British colonialists brought batches of what they thought were a single species of the northern giraffe to India, from their other colonial possessions in Africa. These now comprise a captive population of 29 northern giraffes across the country.

A recent genealogical study of the largest captive herd in India at the Alipore Zoological Garden in Kolkata has confirmed that the giraffes in this facility, at least, are most likely "critically endangered" Nubian giraffes ( *Giraffa camelopardalis camelopardalis* ) or the endangered Rothschild giraffe ( *Giraffa camelopardalis rothschildi* ).

Speaking to *The Hindu* , R. Sanil, Associate Professor, Molecular Biology Laboratory, Government Arts College, Udhagamandalam, where dung samples of the 10 giraffes from Kolkata were analysed, said that the Nubian giraffes are believed to be among three sub-species of the northern giraffe, according to a whole genome sequencing study conducted in 2021. He pointed out that there were giraffes in captivity in Mysuru, Chennai, Patna, Guwahati, and Hyderabad, and it was imperative to identify their species too.

A genetic distance analysis of the giraffes in Alipore showed that they were most closely related to Nubian and Rothschild giraffes. "As both the Nubian and Rothschild giraffes are listed as 'critically endangered' and 'endangered' by the IUCN [respectively], we think it's imperative that the Central Zoo Authority conducts further studies of giraffes in captivity so that the species are not interbred with each other and the giraffes' germplasm is preserved," Mr. Sanil added.

Sulekha J. Backer, research scholar and one of the lead authors of the paper titled 'Captive giraffes in Alipore Zoological Garden, Kolkata are Nubian!', said "stud-books" maintained in zoos across India had little to no information on where the giraffes brought from Africa had been captured; so the only way to identify the species would be through a mitochondrial gene study.

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