INTRODUCTION
Giraffes, *Giraffa camelopardalis*, are the tallest living mammals, averaging 15 ft (4.6 m.) in height and 1700 lb. (772 kg.) in weight. Males are larger than females. During the day, giraffes spend up to 50 percent of their time eating. Giraffes of both sexes fight by a behavior described as "necking." They can also kick effectively. Giraffes are sexually mature at three years of age although conception in females has been recorded as early as only two years.

GENERAL HUSBANDRY

**Temperature**: Giraffes are not especially cold tolerant and should not be kept outside when temperatures fall below 38 degrees F (4 C) for long periods of time. If kept outside in temperatures below 38 degrees F, heated shelters should be provided for protection from wind and rain.

Captive giraffes withstand temperatures at least as high as 117 degrees F (45 C) but under such conditions, trees or other structures should be available for shade. Indoor facilities should provide ventilation when temperatures exceed 90 degrees F (32 C).

**Enclosure**: Outdoor enclosures should provide at least 900 sq. ft. (83.7 sq. m.) of space for each animal. Indoor stalls, in situations where they are used primarily for nighttime housing, should measure at least 225 sq. ft. (21 sq. m.) per animal although some states (California) may require much more. Because of their height, ceiling height should be at least 20 ft. (6.1 m.) high, and more if extremely tall individuals are present. Bedding is needed for insulation and to prevent abrasions to their "elbows". Special care should be given to substrates as giraffes easily lose their footing. To counter this problem, abrasive flooring such as a broom-swept finish or decomposed granite should be used in indoor enclosures. This will also minimize foot problems, a recurring problem in giraffes.

Barriers may be constructed of cable, chainlink, wood, block or in moat form. Care should be given to barrier height to prevent the animal from running into or over it. Cable or chainlink may not be visible to excited animals and care should be given to ensure that animals perceive barriers as being solid.

Steep grades should be avoided to prevent slipping. If trees are present and wrapped with wire, care should be taken to insure that sharp ends are not present or dropped to the ground.

**Diet**: Giraffes should be fed commercial chows suitable for browsing species (ADF 16), supplemented by grain to offset selenium deficiencies common in some areas; they should also receive alfalfa free choice. When possible, natural, non-toxic browse should also be offered. All food should be fed in raised feeders, adjusted to the height of individual animals, to allow the animals to feed in a normal standing position. Food containers should be cleaned daily. Trace mineral salt blocks should be available ad lib. Elevated feeders have been known to cause death by hanging. Care must be given when placing ropes that raise or lower food to prevent animals from becoming entangled.

**Water**: Fresh water should be provided daily. Water should be located away from food to prevent contamination by dropped foodstuffs. Indoors water containers should be
placed well off the floor to prevent contamination by feces, and far enough from food sources to prevent contamination. Water containers should be placed high enough to permit animals to drink in a standing position.

**Social:** Giraffes are gregarious and should be kept in pairs or larger groups; they may be kept in herds of up to 30 animals as long as adequate space is available. Dominant males become aggressive toward young males when the latter reach 3-4 years of age. If females and young are separated from the herd, care should be taken to ensure that hazards are not present for inexperienced young. Also, females with young should not be returned to a male if the female is in estrus because of the potential for injury by the bull.

**SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS**

**Veterinary needs:** Services of an experienced veterinarian should be available prior to animal acquisition. Semiannual fecal examinations should be made and treated appropriately. All individuals should be vaccinated against tetanus and other clostridial diseases, and where geographically appropriate, rabies. A restraint device is desirable to facilitate routine veterinary care and physical examination. The average length of parturition is 2-3 hours. Periods longer than that should be viewed with concern; problems involving presentation of the neonate occasionally occur (front legs and muzzle is the norm) and may be fatal to the young if not corrected. Soft substrates should also be present during parturition to prevent leg splaying of neonates during parturition. The average life span of giraffes is 18-25 years. The longevity record is 36 years.