

Happy World Giraffe Day – Meet the SCZ’s Tower of Giraffes

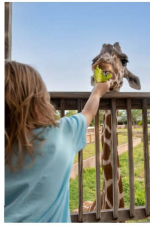
Jun 21, 2023 Animal Story



A short walk from the Sedgwick County Zoo's entrance plaza is Twiga Feeding Station. Here you can buy shirts, stuffed animals, and soft pretzels. But for just five dollars (four for members), you can buy an experience.

Paper ticket in hand, you then climb eight wooden steps to a platform where you exchange your ticket for a piece of romaine lettuce. Next, come face-to-face with the tallest animal in the world.

"We're glad that the guests can get the opportunity to feed them as well," zookeeper Jonathan Miller said. "Giraffes eat a ton. Hundreds of pounds of leaves in the wild."



The Sedgwick County Zoo is home to two *reticulated giraffes*, MJ and Kumi.

The reticulated giraffe is one of nine species of giraffe. Along with the Rothschild's giraffe, it is the most common giraffe found at zoos. They can be identified from other giraffes due to their sharp-edged spots that are reddish-brown in color.

On average, reticulated giraffes are 15-17 feet tall. Kumi falls in this range being 16ft tall, but MJ is on the smaller side at only 14ft.

"Everyone thinks MJ is a baby. Naturally, females are smaller than males," zookeeper Kayla Jordan said. "MJ has always been on the petite side. A lot of our guests think that it's baby and mom, but it is very much not."

Despite her smaller stature, MJ doesn't let anyone make her feel small. She has a sassy and spunky personality, refusing to let other giraffes push her around.

"She does what she wants, she'll go where she wants, and nobody's going to tell her otherwise," Miller said.



Kumi is very laid back. He has a calm demeanor, and unlike typical giraffe bulls, he doesn't really have aggressive tendencies.

"He is just goofy. He does funny things," Miller said.

Jordan said one quirk of Kumi's is that he likes to chew on things.

"He likes to chew on everything, including the feeding station itself," Jordan said.

The giraffe is a social animal and prefers to cohabitate with other giraffes than be on their own. At SCZ, MJ and Kumi live in the *African Veldt* habitat.



The African Veldt, seen here during construction, opened in 1972

"It's the second oldest building at the Zoo," Miller said. "This area was built for giraffes."

While Kumi and MJ are safe and sound at the Zoo, reticulated giraffes are endangered in the wild. It is estimated that there are fewer than 8,500 reticulated giraffes in the wild.

Organizations like the *Giraffe Conservation Foundation* work to help save the giraffe population in Africa. The Sedgwick County Zoo contributes financially this organization to aid their mission.



"They're weird. They're cool. They're weird in a cool way," Miller said. "They're goofy-looking animals."

So, the next time you visit the Sedgwick County Zoo, be sure to stop by the African Veldt. You might see MJ exploring the moat or Kumi examining his surroundings. And if you want, you can climb those eight wooden steps and look a giraffe in its big brown eyes as it takes the romaine lettuce from your hand.