North American Giraffe Body Score Project

Introduction

In May of 2005 the Lincoln Park Zoo, through the efforts of Dr. Deb Schmidt, hosted a Giraffe Nutrition Workshop. One of the findings of the group was the lack of a consistent visual assessment tool for determining optimal body condition for captive giraffe. As a result, a request was sent to all AZA giraffe holders for standardized photos of their giraffes. The following criteria were set:

Three photos of each animal are needed –
- Full front
- Left full side
- Full rear

An evaluation panel was selected, based on their giraffe experience and interest in assisting with the project. Each animal was evaluated by each reviewer and given a score from one to five. All reviewers' scores were combined for each animal and the average of all reviews was used as a final score.

The following criteria were used in determining the score:

Note

This assessment is subjective, and is meant to be a guide for managers to assess the condition of their animals in comparison to a wide range of specimens. Many factors come into play in the body condition of any animal – climatic conditions, physiological state, reproductive state, age, availability of feed, diet, exercise and activity levels, stress level, genetics, social dynamics, parasite loads etc. – all of these should be carefully weighed and taken into consideration while making management decisions.

All assessments should be made taking into consideration the entire animal's body and not a single aspect – an enlarged abdomen may be due to pregnancy, bloat or parasitization, while the animal may actually be in less than ideal condition.

Multiple reviewers were used in this project to minimize personal bias. What you may see as an acceptable body condition may be viewed by others as too thin.

The following body score conditions were adapted from the domestic hoofstock industry and have been modified for use with giraffe.
Score 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neck &amp; Shoulders</td>
<td>Emaciated; Bone structure is easily visible; No fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withers</td>
<td>Emaciated; Bone structure is easily visible; No fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loin &amp; Back</td>
<td>Emaciated; Spinous processes are easily identifiable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailhead &amp; Hips</td>
<td>Hooks and pins are very prominent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribs</td>
<td>Emaciated; Rib spacing appears wide and depressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Score 2

**Neck & Shoulders**
- Neck is thin; Decreased girth

**Withers**
- Thin; Bone structure is evident

**Loin & Back**
- Spinous processes are not individually identifiable, but spine is still prominent;
  - Transverse processes faintly discernible

**Tailhead & Hips**
- Hooks are round, but still evident; Pins may be slightly discernible

**Ribs**
- Ribs are still discernible, but fat is discernible by touch
Score 3

Neck & Shoulders: Neck is thick; Shoulders are flat
Withers: Withers has fat deposits; Decreasing visibility of bone structure
Loin & Back: Back is sloped to withers
Tailhead & Hips: Fat is present around tailhead; Hips are flat
Ribs: Ribs are not visible, but discernible by touch
Score 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neck &amp; Shoulders</td>
<td>Neck is thick; Fat deposits are evident; Shoulders are slightly rounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withers</td>
<td>Fat deposits are evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loin &amp; Back</td>
<td>Fat deposits are present; Back appears flatter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailhead &amp; Hips</td>
<td>Hips are rounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribs</td>
<td>Ribs are not visible; Fat deposits may be evident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Score 5

**Neck & Shoulders**  Fat is evident along neck; Bulging fat; Neck is thick; Neck blends into shoulder; Shoulders are rounded

**Withers**  Fat deposits make withers appear flatter/ less discernible

**Loin & Back**  Wide back; Patchy fat; Back is flat

**Tailhead & Hips**  Hips/thighs are very round

**Ribs**  Fat deposits may be present, easily evident