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.

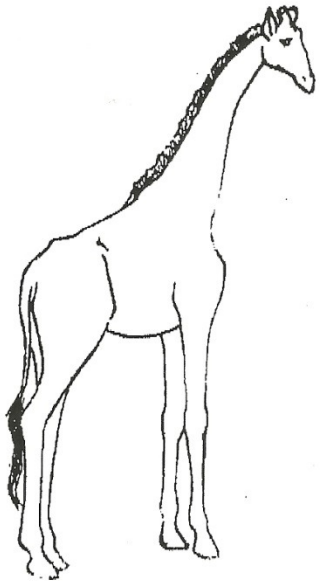
All assessments should be made taking into consideration the entire animal's body and not a single aspect – an enlarged abdomen may be due to pregnancy, bloat or parasitization, while the animal may actually be in less than ideal condition.

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.

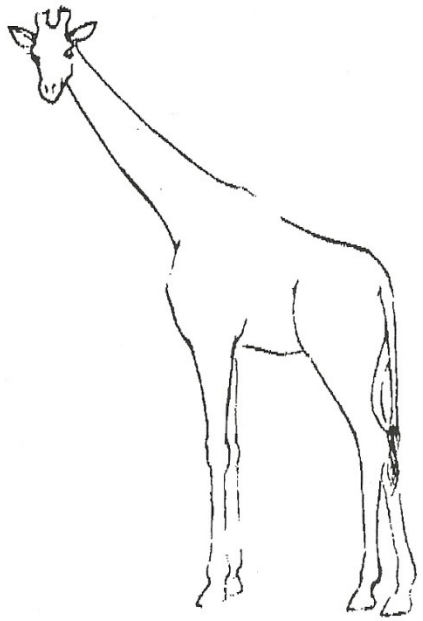
Score 1

Neck & Shoulders	Emaciated; Bone structure is easily visible; No fat
Withers	Emaciated; Bone structure is easily visible; No fat
Loin & Back	Emaciated; Spinous processes are easily identifiable
Tailhead & Hips	Hooks and pins are very prominent
Ribs	Emaciated; Rib spacing appears wide and depressed



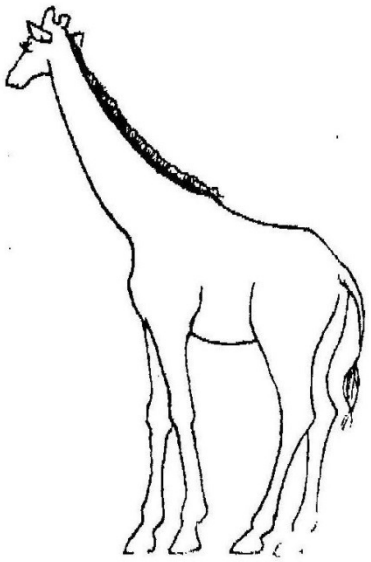
Score 2

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



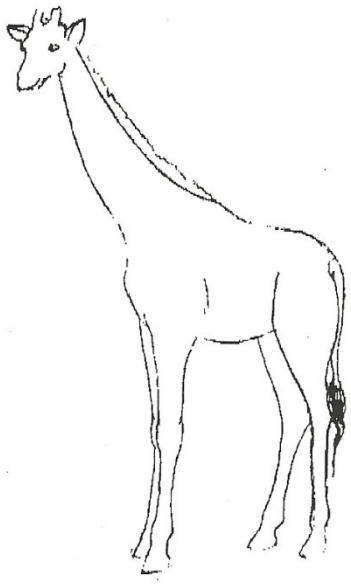
Score 3

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

Neck & Shoulders	Neck is thick; Fat deposits are evident; Shoulders are slightly rounded
Withers	Fat deposits are evident
Loin & Back	Fat deposits are present; Back appears flatter
Tailhead & Hips	Hips are rounded
Ribs	Ribs are not visible; Fat deposits may be evident



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