KEEP NATURE STANDING

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TACKLING EMERGING CONSERVATION THREATS IN AFRICA

AFRICAN WILDLIFE INITIATIVE

Rapid Action Grants 2019-2024

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FOREWORDS

Nowadays, wildlife loss is taking place at an unprecedented rate, menacing the very basis of sustainable development. About one million species are currently threatened with extinction on the Planet. With this in view, one of the long-term goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is for *"Human induced extinction of known threatened species to halt."*

It is undeniable that species are the fundamental component of ecosystems, and we all rely on their survival for existence. This is of particular importance for a continent like Africa which hosts some of the world's most biodiverse landscapes on the planet. With extraordinary endemism and biodiversity hotspots, Africa's biodiversity holds global importance for climate regulation and ecosystem services. With a demography growing faster in Africa than any other continent, threatened species are most at risk as the populations on the continent rely heavily on its natural resources for subsistence and livelihoods. Conservation in Africa faces a complex set of political, financial and infrastructure challenges – which have all been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its long-lasting impacts; putting threatened species and biodiversity at further risk. In addition, African biodiversity is confronted to emerging, severe ecological threats: from invasive alien species, habitat loss and degradation, poaching and human wildlife conflict, as well as water insecurity, droughts and other impacts of climate change.

For these reasons, the European Commission decided back in 2016 to co-fund, for an amount of 15.5 M EUR, the IUCN Save Our Species' SOS African Wildlife initiative to help save the most threatened species and support local communities to coexist and sustainably benefit from natural resources.

This initiative recognises that preserving wildlife requires a number of complementary approaches, with the civil society playing an essential role. Building the capacity of those people active on the frontline of conservation is key. As shown by the surge in poaching in the last years, conservation successes are fragile and support to civil society organisations needs to be increased in order to sustain long lasting conservation benefits.

This is why through the rapid action grants, the SOS African Wildlife initiative has supported interventions ranging from rescue and rehabilitation of species to disease management, habitat protection and restoration and public awareness raising and education. These interventions have allowed frontline conservation actors and grassroot groups to continue operate through times of crisis like the pandemic and to work hand in hand with local communities.

This report will showcase the variety of actions undertaken over the years and discuss some of the key lessons learnt, but above all it will provide a platform to appreciate the crucial role that civil society actors and local communities play in protecting threatened species in Africa.

I would therefore like to dedicate this report to all frontline conservation actors who relentlessly work to ensure that humans, species and ecosystems operate in harmony.

Chantal Marijnissen
Head of Unit (Environment, Sustainable Natural Resources), Directorate General for International Partnerships, European Commission

Africa is home to a quarter of the world's species and hosts some of the Earth's most biodiverse living landscapes. Its rich ecosystems support the livelihoods of millions of people, contribute to global economic, social and climate stability and are an essential part of the history, culture and traditions of communities across the continent and the world. Africa's wildlife and wildlands are a lifeline, generating over USD 29 billion annually and employing 3.6 million people in wildlife-based tourism.

Yet this natural wealth faces unprecedented dangers. Africa was not alone in being impacted by the global conservation challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the resulting reduction in tourism revenues, international donations and government funding, conservation staff, and equipment shortages have left wide reaching effects. Africa is facing weakened environmental protections and an increase in habitat destruction, with environmental challenges like plastic pollution, the illegal trade and harvesting of wild animals, worsening climate change impacts, invasive alien species, and human-wildlife conflict continuing to worsen. With drought and water stress rising to unprecedented levels in the last decade, it is estimated that African vertebrate species have declined by 39% since 1970.

While there have been important successes in species recovery through protected and conserved area management, and species conservation action, the biggest threats to the continent's biodiversity: land degradation, habitat loss and the overexploitation of natural resources are driving thousands of marine, terrestrial and freshwater species closer to extinction.

One year into the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), the urgency to conserve Africa's biodiversity, and support the health and functioning of communities and ecosystems alike, requires unprecedented collaboration, finance and frontline action. Programmes such as IUCN Save Our Species, that leverage the expertise, knowledge and the networks of IUCN and the Species Survival Commission, as well as multistakeholder partners, are essential. Actions funded through SOS African Wildlife aim to halt the decline of iconic African species of lion, leopard, cheetah, African wild dog and Ethiopian wolf, who are prized for their importance in maintaining and symbolising healthy ecosystems.

IUCN's rapid action grants, provided under the SOS African Wildlife initiative, recognise the importance of empowering communities to conserve. Amid increasing threats to African biodiversity, these grants have been essential in providing rapid protection for species, habitats and people. Grants have supported frontline actors such as civil society conservation experts, including local communities and Indigenous peoples, to respond rapidly to threats affecting species and habitats.

IUCN's rapid action grants have achieved important impacts for people and nature. Many projects have addressed serious threats to species, such as poaching, and have focused on solutions like enhancing law enforcement to stabilise fragile populations. These initiatives have also engaged local communities in sustainable livelihoods, created new jobs, and provided income, helping to avert the exploitation of natural resources.

As the case studies in this report illustrate, the importance of these grants cannot be overstated. Species conservation can only succeed in collaboration with the people who are the custodians of these areas of high diversity and who depend on them for the livelihoods and identity. Empowering individuals, who often face enormous resourcing, capacity and operational challenges, to deal with field level conservation emergencies, is delivering the vital conservation outcomes needed. Rapid financing for these projects must be a priority. IUCN is committed to continue working with our members and partners to continue to provide knowledge and support for our frontline conservation partners.

Trevor Sandwith
Director, IUCN Centre for Conservation Action

INTRODUCTION

IUCN

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is a membership Union uniquely composed of government and civil society organisations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.

Created in 1948, IUCN is now the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, harnessing the knowledge, resources and reach of more than 1,400 member organisations and more than 15,000 experts. It is a leading provider of conservation data, assessments and analysis. Its broad membership makes IUCN the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it. Working with many partners and supporters, IUCN implements a large and diverse portfolio of conservation projects worldwide. Combining the latest science with the traditional knowledge of local communities, these projects work to protect species, reverse habitat loss, restore ecosystems and improve people's well-being.

Photo: © Lesanne Dunlop/ IFAW

IUCN Save Our Species

IUCN Save Our Species supports science-based conservation action on the ground that saves animals, plants and fungi from extinction. We focus our efforts where they will have the biggest impact by funding frontline conservation organisations across the world who have unique knowledge of their region and their local biodiversity.

The alarm has been raised repeatedly about the decline in biodiversity across the planet. As one species falls, it takes with it the whole chain of species that depend on it. Be it tigers or bees, these act as dominos falling one after the other, ultimately leading back to us and putting all humans at risk. This is why we must do all we can to Keep Nature Standing.

We never look at species in isolation. All IUCN Save Our Species projects not only aim to protect threatened species, but also to preserve their habitats, and improve the livelihoods of the people who depend on them. To protect threatened species with sustainable, long-term results, all our projects are structured around a three-legged approach to conservation that focuses on Species, Habitat and People.

As a global union of governments, NGOs, local authorities, Indigenous Peoples and local communities' organisations, and scientific commissions, we mobilise IUCN's networks to scale effective conservation action through capacity building and knowledge development.

Our conservation initiatives are aligned with the Goals and Targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework to support its implementation, as well as regional and national biodiversity policies. IUCN Save Our Species projects also tackle urgent issues such as climate change, poverty, and food and water security, contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our objectives and commitments to each of the IUCN Save Our Species pillars are:

- **Species:** We are working to achieve a decline in target threatened species from illegal killing and human-wildlife conflict by 2030; and see it halted by 2050.
- **Habitat:** We aim to ensure the loss, fragmentation and degradation of threatened species' habitats is reduced by 2030 and halted by 2050.
- **People:** We are working to reduce human pressures on target threatened species by improving local communities' living conditions and providing them with alternative economic activities by 2030.

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of animal, fungi and plant species. The Red List shows where urgent conservation action needs to be taken and thus guides the selection of the IUCN Save Our Species projects.

1

SPECIES EXTINCTION: A GLOBAL CRISIS FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE

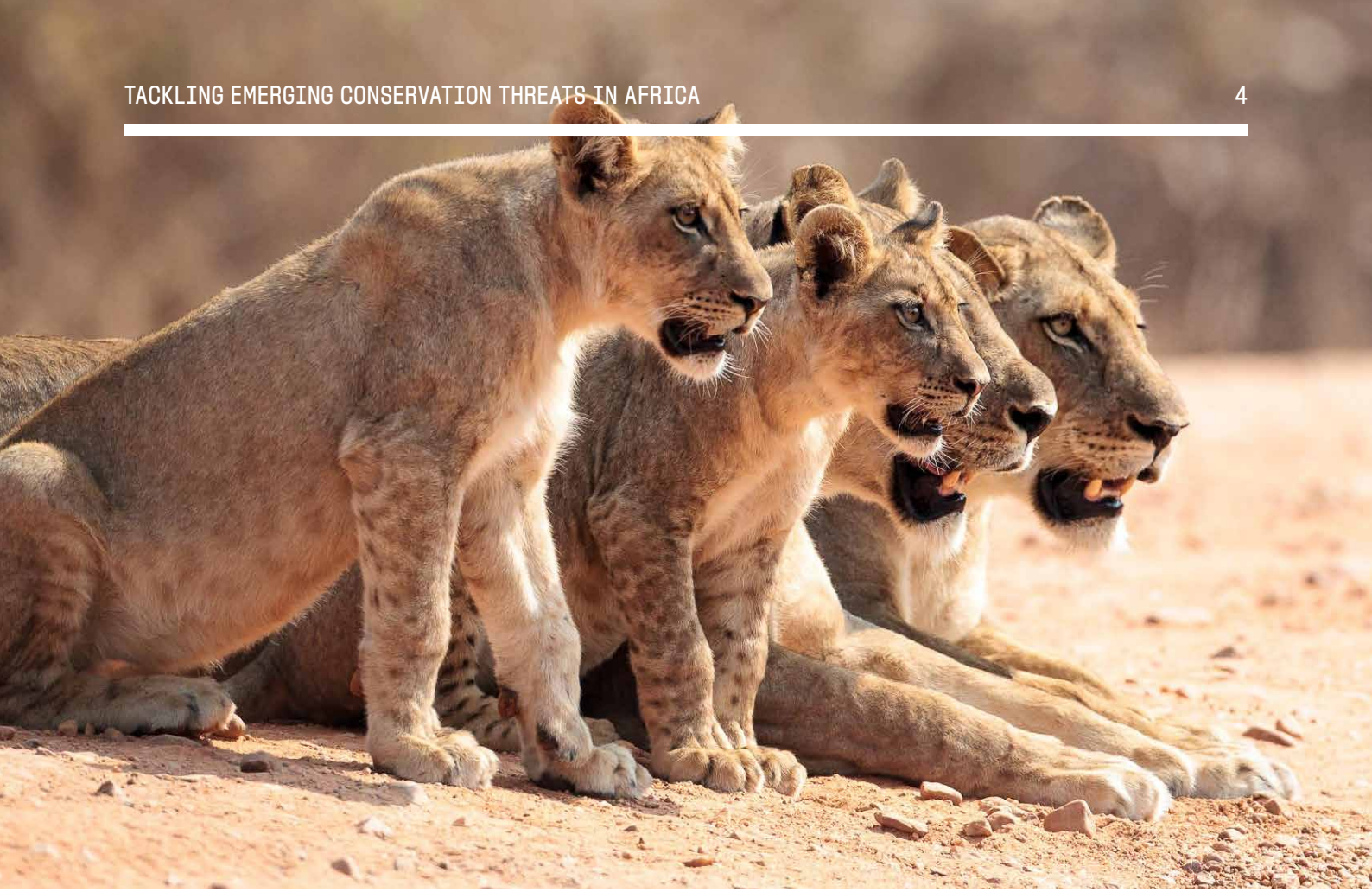


Photo: © Edward Selfe

Importance of species

Species and their populations are the building blocks of ecosystems, individually and collectively securing the conditions for life.

Conservation of wild species, and the ecosystems in which they are critical components, is essential to addressing the climate crisis, food and water security, and reducing the risks of extreme weather events and emerging zoonoses and risks of global pandemics.

Species provide the primary source of food, medicine, raw materials and other resources for Indigenous Peoples and local communities and hundreds of millions of other people around the world. One in five people globally rely on species for income and food and more than 70% of the world's poor are dependent on wild species.[1]

> "One in five people globally rely on species for income and foods."

Direct use of wild species forms the basis of fishing and forestry and other major economic sectors, and the wild relatives of crops and domestic livestock are a repository of irreplaceable genetic material with potential for future adaptation and therefore contribute significantly to food security, nutrition, and health.[1]

Species are an essential part of the history, culture, and tradition of every society on Earth and their aesthetic values and spiritual roles provide comfort, inspiration, and cultural well-being.[2]

1 Hereward, H.F.R., Martay, B., Barton, M.G., Pearce-Higgins, J.W., Robinson, R.A., Scott, S.E. & Williams, J.M (2023). *Climate change and migratory species: a review of impacts, conservation actions, indicators and ecosystem services. Part 3 – Migratory species and their role in ecosystems*. JNCC, Peterborough, ISBN 978-0-86139-003-8.

2 IUCN (2023). *Global Species Action Plan: Supporting implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

Biodiversity is declining across the planet

The 2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services[3] revealed that vertebrate species populations have declined on average by 68% since 1970, 75% of Earth's land surface has been significantly altered and 66% of the oceans are degraded. Globally, over a third of inland wetlands declined between 1970 and 2015.

More than 28% of all species assessed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ are threatened, suggesting that around one million species may already face extinction. The global rate of species extinction is already up to 100 times higher than the average background rate over the past 10 million years, suggesting that we are facing a sixth mass extinction.

Primary threats to species

Threats to species are diverse and often stem from human activities. Habitat loss and degradation driven by deforestation, urbanization, and land conversion, threaten many species by fragmenting and reducing their living spaces. Climate change exacerbates these challenges by altering ecosystems and disrupting species' natural behaviours.

Pollution from industrial, agricultural, and urban sources further imperils species by contaminating essential resources. Overexploitation, invasive alien species, wildlife diseases, and human-wildlife conflict also contribute to the threats faced by species worldwide.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving habitat conservation, sustainable resource management, pollution control, climate change mitigation, and establishing protected areas, along with policy interventions to ensure the preservation of species.

Photo: © Mount Kenya Trust

> More than 28% of all species assessed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ are threatened.

1.1 Biodiversity challenges in Africa

Conservation in Africa is affected by a unique and diverse range of challenges and opportunities. Its economic landscape comprises a wide spectrum of economies, from resource-rich nations to those heavily reliant on agriculture and tourism. Despite significant economic growth in some parts, the continent still battles with high unemployment, poverty, and a dependency on a limited range of exports, all of which are heavily influenced by global economic trends, commodity prices, and foreign investments. Governance in many African countries is also marred by corruption, political instability, and inadequate infrastructure. These issues, coupled with a lack of funding, hinder conservation, and sustainable development efforts.

The continent hosts a vast variety of landscapes, from expansive deserts and savannahs to rainforests that play a crucial role in shaping population distribution, urbanization patterns, and economic activities. It is home to nearly 2,000 Key Biodiversity Areas that support the world's most diverse and abundant large mammal populations.

3 IPBES (2019). *Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 1148 pages.

The most apparent value of Africa's biodiversity is its wildlife and wildlands which generate over USD 29 billion annually and employ 3.6 million people from wildlife-based tourism. Tourism in Africa generates 40% more full-time jobs per unit investment than agriculture, has twice the job creation power of the automotive, telecommunications and financial industries, and employs proportionally more women than other sectors. Africa's wildlife also attracts considerable foreign investment through funding for conservation efforts. Donor contributions account for 32% of protected area funding in Africa, reaching 70–90% in some countries.[4]

Protected areas, established to manage and conserve natural resources for environmental sustainability and biodiversity preservation, are also hindered by inefficient management, corruption, weak government policies, and political instability. While policies, laws, and legislation aimed at sustainable management exist, their implementation is often inadequate. In addition, Africa's population is expected to surpass one billion by 2050, meaning the reliance on natural resources for survival is set to increase. This will further strain the availability of land, water, species, renewable energy sources, and ecosystem services, highlighting the urgent need for effective conservation and sustainable resource management.[5]

Africa's wildlife and wildlands generate over USD 29 billion annually and employ 3.6 million people from wildlife-based tourism.

Photo: © James Lewin

4 Lindsey, P., Allan, J., Brehony, P. et al. Conserving Africa's wildlife and wildlands through the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. *Nat Ecol Evol*, 4, 1300–1310 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-020-1275-6

5 Nwaogu, Chukwudi & Diagi, Bridget & Agidi, Victor & Okweche, Simon. (2023). *Climate Change and Other Environmental Factors as Drivers of Fauna and Flora Biodiversity in Africa*. 10.1007/978-981-19-6974-4_16.

2

IMPACTS OF THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

One emerging threat to species appeared in 2020 with the first reports of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused major economic declines across the world, with global GDP shrinking by 4.3% in 2020 and regional GDP in Africa shrinking by 3.4%. These economic contractions and the political reactions to them further reduced the funding of already heavily underfinanced protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures in Africa.

Shrinking budgets, the redirection of domestic funds to the health sector, reduced tourism revenue for parks, decreasing philanthropic donations, fewer conservation personnel, and equipment shortages caused severe challenges for biodiversity protection and conservation globally. Governments' actions to deprioritise environmental issues during their economic recovery led to weakened environmental regulations and enforcement as well as reduced government funding for biodiversity protection and conservation. In turn, this led to increases in habitat destruction, plastic and other waste pollution, illegal harvesting of wild animals, and threats to the survival of conservation organisations.[6]

Furthermore, with pandemic-induced lockdowns, pressures on protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures increased tremendously as people lost jobs and income, food markets closed, and many transnational labourers and urban dwellers returned to their rural communities of origin. This led to many more people harvesting natural

"Among the major effects of the pandemic were increases in bushmeat poaching and consumption, logging for timber and charcoal, and habitat conversion for extractive purposes."

6 Gibbons, D. W., Sandbrook, C., Sutherland, W. J., Akter, R., Bradbury, R. B., Broad, S., Clements, A., Crick, H. Q. P., Elliott, J., Gyeltshen, N., Heath, M., Hughes, J., Jenkins, R. K. B., Jones, A. H., De La Lama, R. L., Macfarlane, N., Maunder, M., Prasad, R., Romero-Muñoz, A., . . . Ockendon, N. (2021). The relative importance of COVID-19 pandemic impacts on biodiversity conservation globally. *Conservation Biology*, 36(1). https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.13781

Photo: © KAFS/MBP

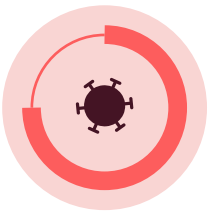
resources to survive. Among the major effects of the pandemic were increases in bushmeat poaching and consumption, logging for timber and charcoal, and habitat conversion for extractive purposes.

It is estimated that 75% of emerging infectious diseases worldwide are zoonotic in nature.[7] These diseases have become more prevalent owing to an increased proximity between humans and animals as a consequence of expanding human settlements, deforestation and climate change. The resultant loss of habitat and encroachment into wildlife habitats heightens the risk of zoonotic disease transmission.[7]

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 and the ensuing global pandemic is a demonstration of the devastating impact of zoonotic disease, whereby viruses are transmitted from wild animals to humans.[8]

The pandemic impacted the global social, economic, political, cultural and environmental spaces.[9] Some of these impacts included:

- **Conservation funding:** Among the key areas of impact was funding reductions for conservation, which was already considerably underfunded before COVID-19, due to the economic impacts of the pandemic. This reduced effectiveness of conservation efforts.
- **Tourism:** The USD 343 billion global wildlife tourism industry was substantially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with reduction in income affecting households throughout a range of countries and regions with high biodiversity, and wildlife-related tourism activity shutting down in some locations.
- **Illegal activities:** The economic and social impacts of the pandemic likely led to increased illegal resource extraction and wildlife poaching that fed into the illegal trade, both as a result of diminished capacity to patrol protected areas, and severe reductions in income that wildlife tourism provided to millions worldwide.
- **Increased resource use:** Lockdowns and restrictions brought diverse effects, with consequences for biodiversity and ecosystems. They reduced tourism pressure in many areas, but on the other hand, they simultaneously disrupted important environmental conservation programmes and increased reliance on natural resource extraction for their livelihoods.
- **Rural and low-income populations:** Due to financial, cultural, and other factors, people participated in activities promoting deforestation and wildlife trade to support their livelihoods.



It is estimated that 75% of emerging infectious diseases worldwide are zoonotic in nature.

7 Esposito, M. M., Turku, S., Lehrfield, L., & Shoman, A. (2023). The Impact of Human Activities on Zoonotic Infection Transmissions. *Animals : an open access journal from MDPI, 13*(10), 1646. https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13101646

8 Edward C. Holmes, COVID-19 - lessons for zoonotic disease. *Science 375*, 1114-1115 (2022). DOI: 10.1126/science.abn2222

9 Lawler, O. K., Allan, H. L., Baxter, P. W. J., Castagnino, R., Tor, M. C., Dann, L. E., Hungerford, J., Karmacharya, D., Lloyd, T. J., López-Jara, M. J., Massie, G. N., Novera, J., Rogers, A. M., & Kark, S. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic is intricately linked to biodiversity loss and ecosystem health. *The Lancet Planetary Health* (Vol. 5, Issue 11, pp. e840–e850). Elsevier BV. https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196(21)00258-8

2.1 The impact of COVID-19 on biodiversity conservation in Africa

In 2020, IUCN reported that measures taken to prevent or control the spread of COVID-19 introduced challenges in the management of Africa's protected areas (PAs) that had never been experienced before.[10] As a result, most operations were scaled down or suspended, visitor facilities closed to the public, workplaces shut, "non-essential PA staff" were withdrawn from their duty stations, and important supply chains disrupted, all significantly affecting critical day-to-day operations in protected areas.

In the same year, a survey of directors of protected area agencies in 19 African countries was undertaken by IUCN[10] to understand how measures taken to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted protection of threatened species, regular field patrols, managing human-wildlife conflicts, monitoring illegal wildlife trade, conducting anti-poaching operations, generating revenue and collaborations with stakeholders. Most countries reported high COVID-19 impacts in activities related to monitoring illegal wildlife trade, gathering security intelligence and carrying out security investigations specifically:

- **Revenue generation:** Nearly half of protected area agencies across Africa reported that they could only maintain basic operations for up to three months if the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 continued to be in force. This loss of income to already underfunded protected areas significantly affected their ability to perform essential functions, including payment of salaries and protecting threatened species, monitoring illegal wildlife trade and protecting local communities from damages caused by wildlife.
- **Partnerships:** Collaboration between protected areas and their key partners, including local communities, governmental and non-governmental organisations, researchers and private landowners were also impacted by diminished resources caused by the pandemic. These resources contribute to support protected areas and neighbouring communities.
- **Tourism income:** The sudden closure of tourism related community enterprises caused loss of jobs and undermined many development projects that were supported by income from tourism and weakened collaboration with investors. Loss of livelihoods forced some communities to turn to wildlife consumption as other means of survival dried up. The survey results strongly suggested that local people needed to be better supported and economically empowered for the roles they play in conserving nature for the benefit of humanity.

Photo: © International Fund for Animal Welfare Inc.

> Most countries reported high COVID-19 impacts in activities related to monitoring illegal wildlife trade, gathering security intelligence and carrying out security investigations.

10 IUCN (2020, July 31). *The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Africa's protected areas operations and programmes.* IUCN.org. Retrieved May 14, 2024, from https://www.iucn.org/news/protected-areas/202007/impact-covid-19-pandemic-africas-protected-areas-operations-and-programmes

- **Security:** The pandemic caused the deterioration of general security both inside and outside protected areas, increasing the vulnerability of protected areas and wildlife and other natural resources as neighbouring communities, suffering from livelihood losses, increased their reliance on nature. Resources provided to support security operations were reduced increasing the risk of an escalation of human wildlife conflict.

The results of IUCN's survey also identified the areas that needed urgent support to strengthen the ability of protected areas to respond to COVID-19 and future pandemics. They included funding, enhanced technical support, skill development, hiring of more staff, provision of relevant equipment, measures to stop the spread of the disease and strengthening and broadening partnerships. Urgent support was required for protected area agencies and other actors to help reduce poaching, eliminate illegal wildlife trade, minimize human-wildlife conflicts and support the livelihoods of local communities.

The pandemic had various detrimental effects on biodiversity. Skilled staff faced job losses, leading to reduced efficiency due to economic and psychological impacts. Furthermore, the economic downturn resulted in a loss of funding from philanthropic sources. Lockdowns and economic pressures also changed community behaviour, leading to an overreliance and overexploitation of natural resources. This shift in behaviour resulted in increased levels of poaching, tree cutting, agricultural conversion and mining, putting additional pressure on wildlife populations, especially those residing outside protected areas.[11]

11 Akinsorotan OA, Olaniyi OE, Adeyemi AA and Olasunkanmi AH (2021) Corona Virus Pandemic: Implication on Biodiversity Conservation. *Front. Water* 3:635529. doi: 10.3389/frwa.2021.635529

3

THE SOS AFRICAN WILDLIFE INITIATIVE

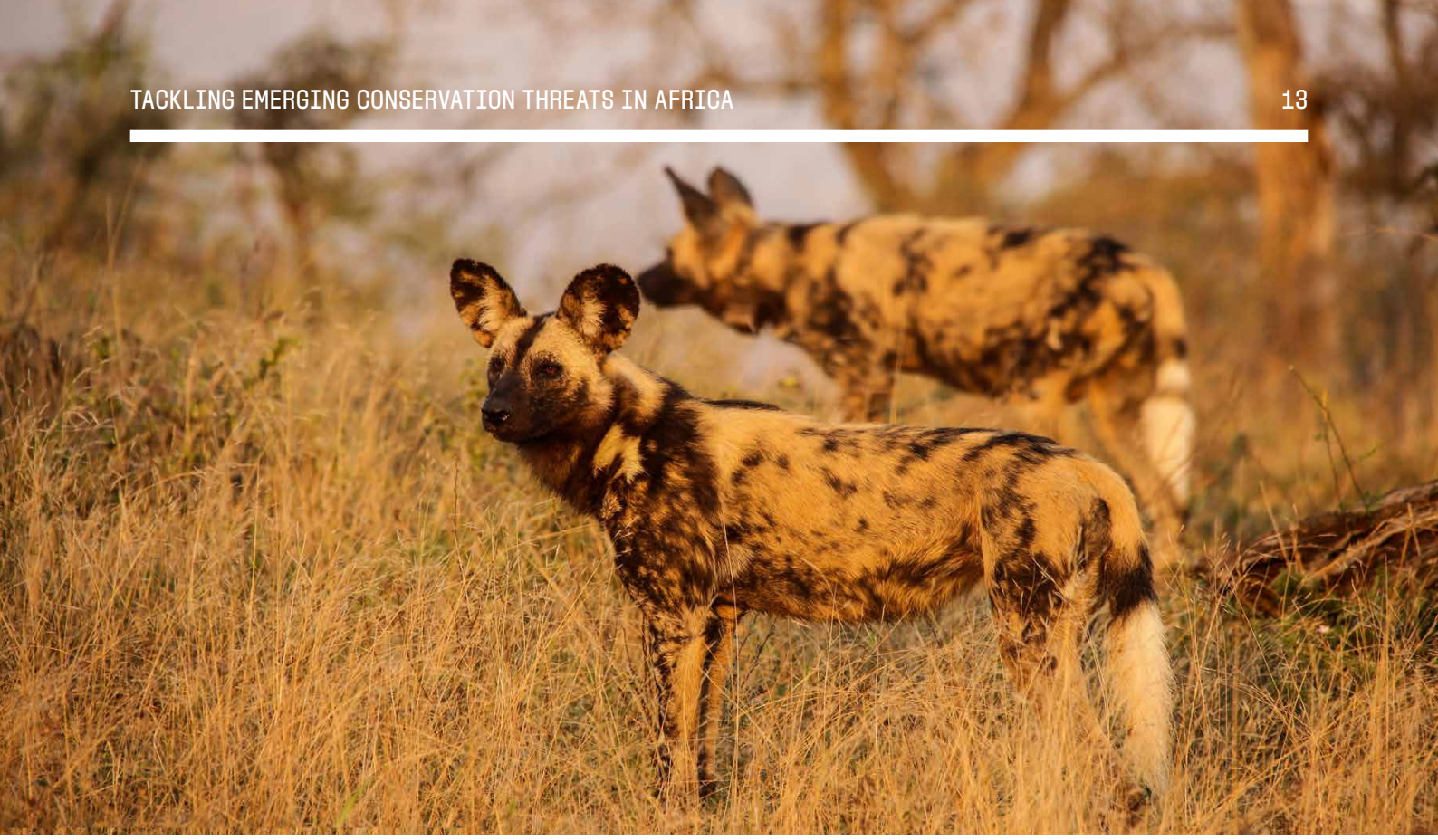


Photo: © Ryan Mitchell

3.1 Conservation action for species, habitat and people

The SOS African Wildlife initiative, a partnership between the European Union and IUCN Save Our Species, responds to conservation challenges faced by key threatened species in sub-Saharan Africa.

This initiative aims primarily to halt the decline of the Vulnerable species of lion (*Panthera leo*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) as well as the Endangered species of African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*) and Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*), increasingly threatened by poaching, habitat fragmentation and human encroachment on wild habitats. The initiative also contributes to ensuring the long-term survival of smaller carnivores and prey species, including the Critically Endangered African wild ass (*Equus africanus*), the Endangered Grevy's zebra (*Equus grevyi*), and various antelope species. SOS African Wildlife has enabled coordinated conservation work across the species' natural habitats.

Actions funded through SOS African Wildlife include those that address and reduce human-wildlife conflict, poaching of carnivores and their prey, wildlife trafficking, as well as those focused on enhancing law enforcement and implementing actions that empower communities to participate in conservation as part of innovative livelihood solutions.

The initiative aims to:

1. To empower and strengthen civil society organisations which are committed to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, particularly the conservation of threatened species, their habitats and the people depending on them, and;

2. To demonstrate the impact of conservation actions on threatened species and their habitats in Africa, in particular large carnivores.

SOS African Wildlife provided two main types of small to medium sized grants to frontline, civil society conservation actors:

- **Threatened Species Grants** were awarded through periodic calls for proposals for projects that have a programmatic approach to addressing existing conservation threats to carnivores and prey species and were available to civil society organisations only.
- **Rapid Action Grants** were awarded through ongoing calls for proposals. These grants were designed to enable immediate responses to new and emerging threats.

In addtion to providing funding for threatened species, the initiative also seeks to:

1. Provide support in the development or updating of species action plans of priority species.
2. Raise awareness on the extinction crisis and the importance of on-the-ground conservation action, emphasising conservation success stories.
3. Mobilise innovative financing, specifically through private sector engagement, with the aim to annually increase the total amount of funding allocated to species conservation.
4. Integrate capacity building across all projects to support the development and growth of both local communities and grant recipients.
5. Operate at the nexus between policy and on-the-ground action to both inform policy processes based on field experiences while unpacking the complexities of global policy to contribute to local efforts.

3.2 Increasing demand for emergency conservation response

Amid rising environmental emergencies, species face major disruptions and vulnerabilities.

In the past five years, IUCN has increased its funding and conservation action to support partners to address urgent needs triggered by drought, water shortages, typhoons and the global pandemic, to protect conservation gains and the communities who depend on them.

“Amid rising environmental emergencies, species face major disruptions and vulnerabilities.”

With drought and water stress peaking to unprecedented levels in the last decade, and projected to increase, a key priority for conservation must include increasing funding, resources and emergency response to protect fragile ecosystems and the communities that support them. Species conservation is also threatened by emerging crises such as disease, habitat loss, pollution, invasive alien species and human wildlife conflict.

3.3 Rapid action grants: Supporting emergency response through the African Wildlife initiative

Providing front line actors with emergency support to deal with field level emergencies affecting species and habitat management is key to conserving and furthering conservation impacts.

Emergency response involves coordinated efforts to address sudden and critical issues that pose a risk to wildlife populations, ecosystems, and sometimes human communities. These threats can arise from various factors, including natural disasters, disease outbreaks, habitat destruction, poaching, and human-wildlife conflicts.

IUCN's rapid action grants funded the following types of emergency responses to wildlife threats:

- **Rapid assessment:** When a wildlife threat emerges, it is crucial to conduct a rapid assessment to understand the scope and severity of the threat. This may involve evaluating the impact on wildlife populations, ecosystems, and the potential risks to human communities.
- **Mobilisation of resources:** Once the threat is identified, resources need to be mobilised quickly to address the issue. This can include deploying trained wildlife experts, veterinary teams, and other personnel, as well as acquiring necessary equipment and supplies.

Photo: © Sim Davis/UCF

- **Rescue and rehabilitation:** In situations such as oil spills, natural disasters, or wildlife trafficking, rescue and rehabilitation efforts may be necessary to treat and care for affected wildlife. This can involve setting up temporary rehabilitation facilities, providing medical care, and releasing animals back into the wild when they have recovered.
- **Disease management:** In cases of disease outbreaks that affect wildlife and human populations, emergency response may involve implementing measures to control the spread of disease, conducting surveillance, and providing medical treatment to affected animals.
- **Habitat protection and restoration:** Emergency response to wildlife threats may also include efforts to protect and restore habitats that have been negatively impacted, such as by wildfires or industrial accidents. This can involve reforestation, habitat rehabilitation, and measures to prevent further degradation.
- **Public awareness and education:** Communicating with the public about wildlife threats and promoting actions to mitigate the risks is an important aspect of emergency response. This can help to raise awareness, reduce human-wildlife conflicts, and encourage support for conservation efforts.
- **Collaboration and coordination:** Addressing wildlife threats often requires collaboration among government agencies, conservation organisations, local communities, and other stakeholders. Effective coordination can help ensure that resources are used efficiently and that actions are well-aligned to address the threat.
- **Long-term planning and prevention:** While immediate response is crucial, it is also important to consider long-term strategies for preventing and mitigating wildlife threats. This can include habitat conservation, anti-poaching measures, and land use planning that considers the needs of wildlife.

Overall, emergency response to wildlife threats aims to mitigate immediate impacts on wildlife and ecosystems, protect human communities, and promote the long-term conservation and sustainability of natural environments.

AT A GLANCE

RAPID ACTION GRANTS UNDER THE SOS AFRICAN WILDLIFE INITIATIVE

3,866,237 EUR SPENT

54 AWARDED GRANTS

46 GRANTEES

23 COUNTRIES

58 THREATENED SPECIES PROTECTED

TIMELINE OF RAPID ACTION GRANTS

2017

01 February 2017
Start of the SOS African Wildlife initiative

11 March 2020
COVID-19 declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation

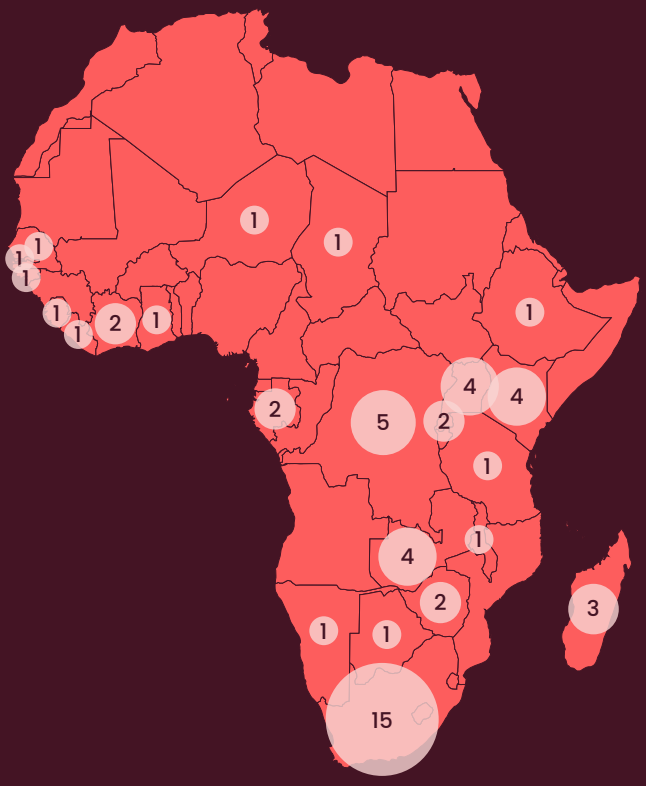
01 January 2019 – 21 December 2020
First rapid action grant call for proposals

17 August 2020 – 31 March 2022
Second rapid action grant call for proposals

31 January 2025
End of the SOS African Wildlife initiative

2025

MAP OF PROJECTS



Number of projects by country

4

IMPACTS ACHIEVED THROUGH RAPID ACTION GRANTS

Photo: © Catherine Nchimbi

IUCN's rapid action grants under the SOS African Wildlife initiative brought significant impacts for threatened species, their habitats and communities, in particular:

- Sustaining frontline conservation actors' institutional capacities and enabling conservation action to continue amid COVID-19 challenges.
- Maintaining biodiversity conservation action to tackle threats to species, such as illegal and unsustainable poaching, habitat degradation and natural resource exploitation.
- Supporting local communities with sustainable livelihood opportunities to support protected area management and community subsistence needs.
- Mitigating conservation emergencies: targeting drivers of species decline, such as invasive alien species and wildlife diseases that disrupt the ecological balance of ecosystems, impacting species and local communities who depend on ecosystem services.
- Addressing human—wildlife conflict: strengthening protections of threatened species populations that come into close proximity with humans and delivering conservation and coexistence strategies which enable and support local communities to coexist with wildlife.
- Habitat protection and management: action plans, training and patrols to improve ecological corridors and habitat integrity and restore degraded habitats for protected target species and broader biodiversity.

OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS

PROTECTION FOR 58 THREATENED SPECIES

- 40 MAMMALS
- 9 BIRDS
- 4 REPTILES
- 2 PLANTS
- 1 FISH

(see Annex 1 for full list of species)

Supported the management of **80 MILLION HECTARES** of protected and conserved areas

More than **272,000 PEOPLE** benefited from the development of sustainable livelihoods

More than **35,000 KM** covered through wildlife protection patrols

3,334 PEOPLE employed or otherwise financially assisted in carrying out conservation activities

28 frontline conservation organisations supported to improve their capacities to deliver conservation action

Photo: © Akello Caroline EGI

4.1 Rapid action to respond to COVID-19

To address COVID-19-induced challenges, conservation organisations needed to remain operational, especially during a global health crisis that could quickly repeat itself if ecosystem destruction continued at the same pace, and funding had to be made available for conservation activities.

The SOS African Wildlife initiative quickly responded and was one of the first mechanisms to provide rapid action support grants to civil society organisations (CSOs), and non-governmental organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa and the South African government during the pandemic.

In 2019, IUCN Save Our Species issued a first rapid action grant call to CSOs in Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) to submit proposals targeting emergencies for the conservation of large carnivores in Africa, particularly lions (*Panthera leo*), leopards (*Panthera pardus*), cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*), African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*), and Ethiopian wolves (*Canis simensis*), as well as other African species.

> A total of 54 rapid action grants were issued to support frontline conservation organisations during this time.

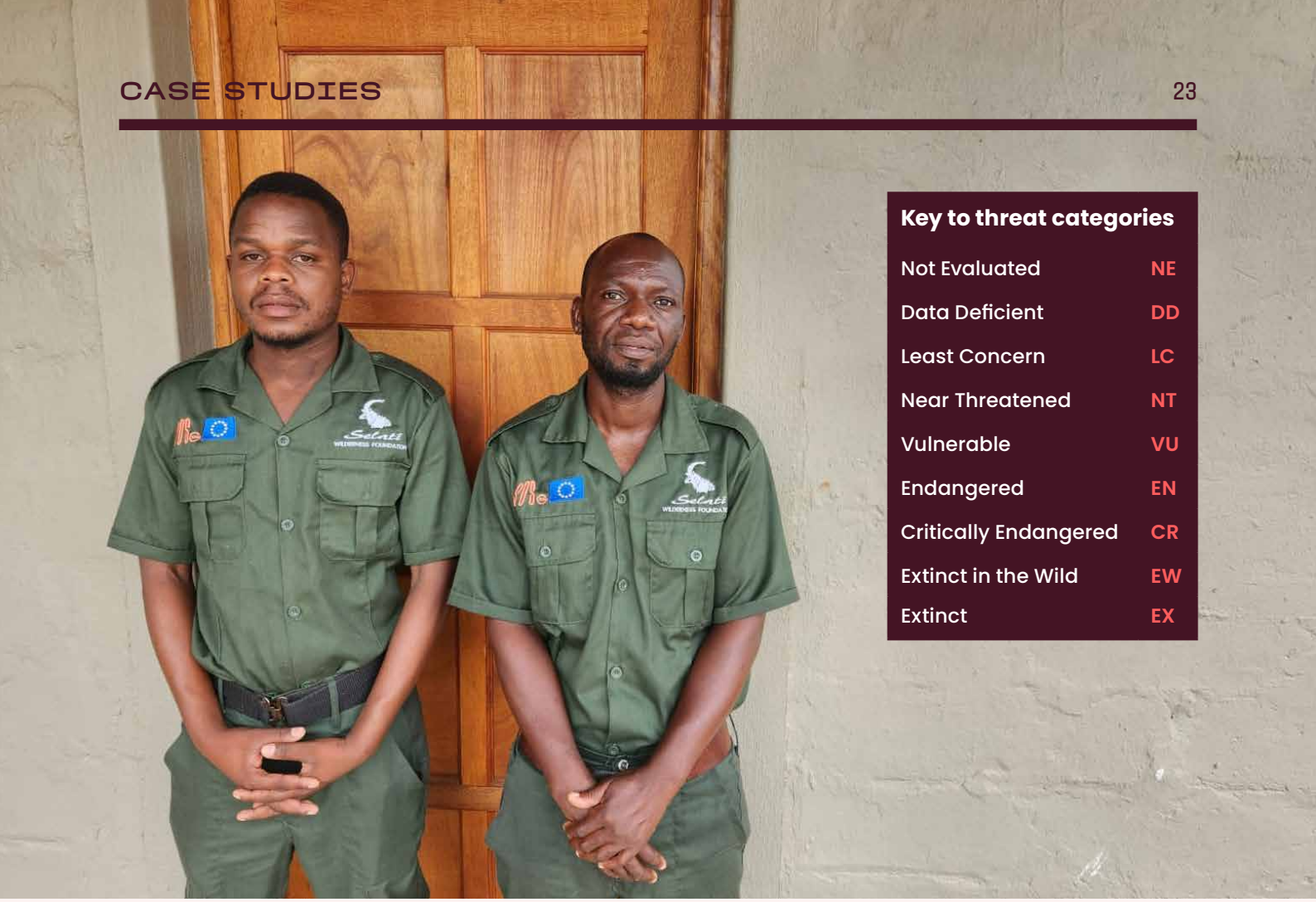
Following the World Health's Organisation declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, the European Union unlocked emergency funding designed to enable immediate responses to threats linked to the pandemic.

A second call was therefore issued in 2020 to CSOs as well as public entities in South Africa to submit proposals to carry out urgent conservation action at local level, protect species, their habitat and local communities from the onset of COVID-19.

A total of 54 rapid action grants were issued to support frontline conservation organisations during this time.

5

RAPID ACTION CASE STUDIES



Key to threat categories	
Not Evaluated	NE
Data Deficient	DD
Least Concern	LC
Near Threatened	NT
Vulnerable	VU
Endangered	EN
Critically Endangered	CR
Extinct in the Wild	EW
Extinct	EX

Photo: © Selati Wilderness Foundation

5.1 Sustaining frontline conservation actors' institutional capacities during COVID-19

Actions funded through SOS African Wildlife included maintaining the institutional and operational capacity of conservation organisations in Africa, allowing them to continue operations during the pandemic and carry out much needed conservation action to secure conservation gains. The SOS African Wildlife rapid action grants supported 12 organisations across 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa to respond to COVID-19-induced emergencies.

CASE STUDY

Sustainability during COVID-19: Protecting biodiversity through reforestation, livelihood development, and education in Kianjavato, Torotorofotsy, Mahafaly-Lavavolo and Montagne des Français, Madagascar

Partner	Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium
Target species	▪ Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur (*Varecia variegata*) CR ▪ Greater Bamboo Lemur (*Prolemur simus*) CR
Country	Madagascar

INTRODUCTION

Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium (OHDZA) and the Madagascar Biodiversity Partnership (MBP) have collaborated with local communities since 2010 to build a sustainable future in Madagascar. They have established four key project sites across the country, focusing on monitoring threatened species, research, reforestation, and education. OHDZA works with local communities to safeguard wildlife through education, habitat restoration, reducing slash-and-burn activities, and creating new livelihoods. With almost a decade of successful programs, employing nearly 200 people full-time, providing job opportunities for over 100 single mothers, and engaging more than 4,000 people in habitat protection, the initiatives have evolved to address community needs and adapt to challenges. However, the progression faced a significant setback with the onset of COVID-19.

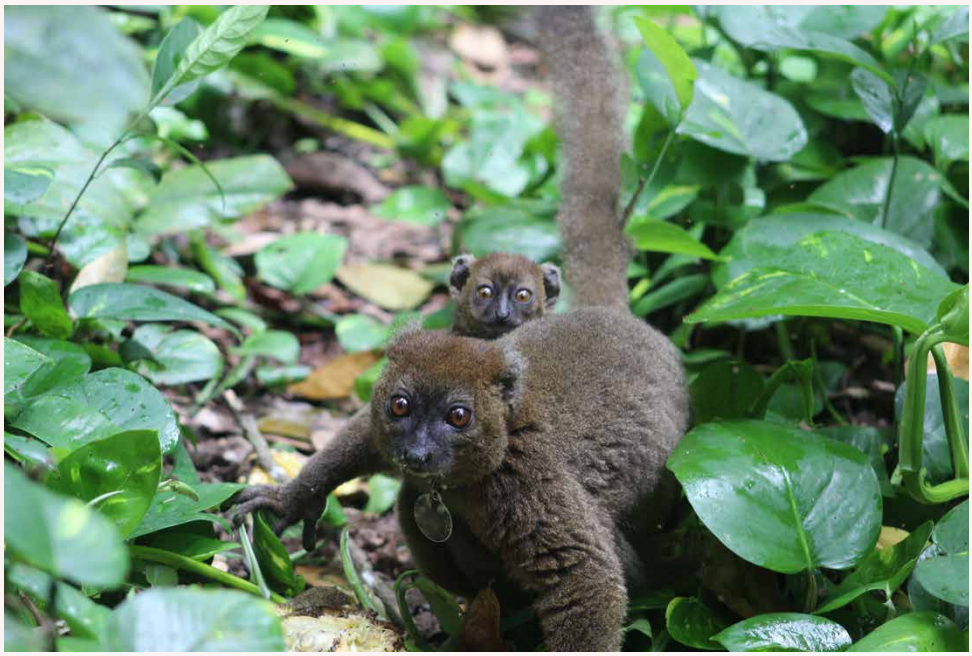


Photo: © S. Millar

PROBLEM

Government activities, including national park closures and halted patrols in protected areas, left Madagascar's forests vulnerable to resource harvesting. Community-run agencies like Vondron' Olona Ifotony (VOIs) faced financial instability, hindering their conservation efforts. The immediate response was to provide financial support to organisations aiding local communities in monitoring forests, expanding habitats, and enhancing resilience through ongoing education and livelihood development programs.

APPROACH

Affected by the impacts of COVID-19, OHDZA needed funding to:

- Organise monthly patrols with *gendarmes,* Eaux et Forêt officers, and local community members (VOI) ensuring communities had washable masks and practiced social distancing.
- Sustain lemur and tortoise monitoring programs to collect population data, habitat status, and trap information.
- Obtain radio telemetry equipment and support MBP's iTEAM in placing radio collars on animals to maintain full lemur monitoring during the pandemic.
- Ensure ongoing reforestation efforts by maintaining vehicles, purchasing fuel, and transporting compost, trees, and personnel to planting sites. Rigorous data collection with GPS coordinates for each tree is maintained.
- Provide financial support to approximately 70 men and 112 women working on a contractual basis in 20 reforestation nurseries. Many are single mothers who have become community leaders and wildlife advocates. Some use the funds for crop assistance, which provides income to others and supports their families, preventing potential negative impacts like increased wildlife hunting and forest exploitation due to lack of supplementary income.

RESULTS

OHDZA was able to achieve the following results from its conservation efforts during the COVID-19 period:

- 11 patrols were organised at the project sites, including wildlife monitoring activities;
- The population of Greater Bamboo Lemur (*Prolemur simus*) and Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur (*Varecia variegata*) recorded an increase of approximately 300-350 individuals each;
- More than 70,000 trees were planted during the funded period;
- More than 200 women and men earned supplemental income through casual labour opportunities. Maintaining a steady income, these communities contributed positive impacts for conservation in Madagascar.

These achievements meant OHDZA maintained its full capacity during the COVID-19 period despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

5.2 Enabling conservation action to continue amid COVID-19 challenges

The ability of conservation organisations in Africa to effectively plan, implement, and adapt conservation activities, manage resources, and achieve their mission amid the COVID-19 pandemic has been influenced by a range of factors, including their ability to navigate financial challenges, support their workforce, engage with stakeholders and communities as well as adapt to changing circumstances. Funding from IUCN Save Our Species helped 24 organisations in 20 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa navigate this changing operational landscape induced by the pandemic.

CASE STUDY

Support for conservation personnel and wildlife protection in the Lower Zambezi during COVID-19

Partner	Conservation Lower Zambezi
Target species	African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*) EN
Country	Zambia

INTRODUCTION

With more than 25 years of collaboration with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW), Conservation Lower Zambezi (CLZ) stands as a well established and effective conservation organisation in Zambia. Focused on wildlife protection, environmental education, and community empowerment, CLZ provides extensive support to DNPW, including foot and aerial patrols, equipment replacement, specialized unit aid, cross-border support, 24/7 radio communication, patrol team statistics management, legal assistance, and hosting annual operation meetings. In addition to its core protection activities, CLZ engages in significant environmental education and community initiatives in the Lower Zambezi region.

PROBLEM

In the Lower Zambezi region in Zambia, COVID-19 affected conservation operations and caused detrimental socio-economic impacts on rural communities. Through an unexpected and unplanned halt in the tourism industry due to the global pandemic, CLZ lost significant revenue from tourism. CLZ normally receives a generous amount of membership fees from tourism operators and due to the shutdown, they were receiving significantly less. This, coupled with the inability to conduct income-generating activities, led to a substantial loss of funds for 2020 with reduced donor funding only able to cover a small percentage of the operating and maintenance costs. Therefore, CLZ urgently needed funds to be able to continue operating and retain staff.

APPROACH

CLZ sought to operate at 100% capacity during COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021 by paying salaries of employees and carrying out procurements, as well as continuing law enforcement efforts to protect wildlife.

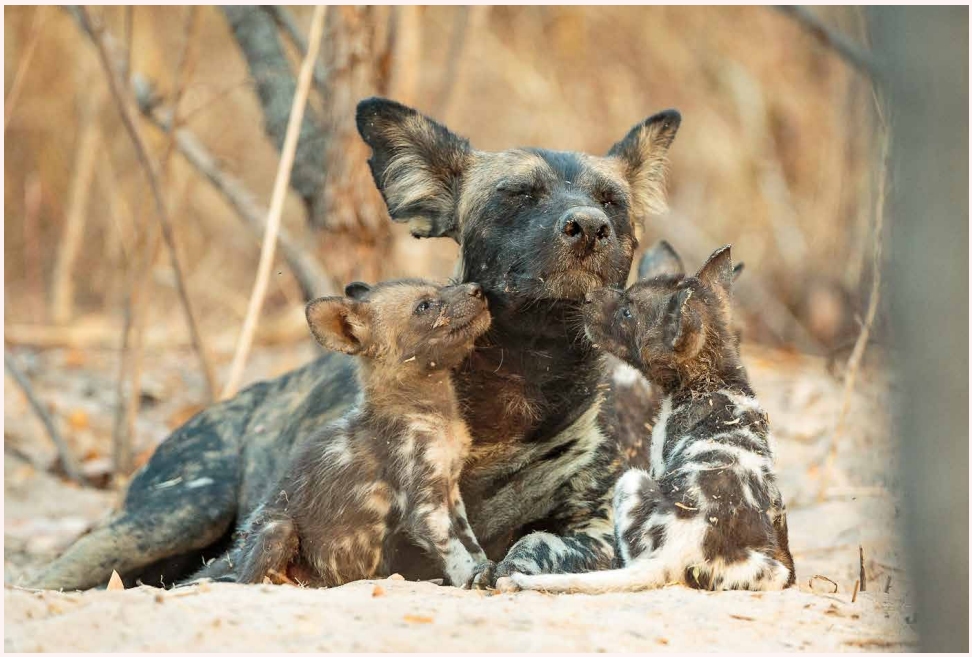


Photo: © Zambian Carnivore Programme

RESULTS

With the help of the IUCN Save Our Species grant, the CLZ Basecamp was able to continue operating at full capacity, despite continued COVID-19 effects. From February to December 2021, CLZ continued to pay salaries to law enforcement personnel. During this period, IUCN Save Our Species funds covered 17% of CLZ management salaries and 67% of CLZ staff salaries. Support was also provided for the maintenance of antipoaching patrols with CLZ vehicles. A total of 50 community scout patrols and 51 DNPW patrols were deployed through the grant period, resulting in 77 arrests and 115 confiscations (ivories, live pangolins, firearms, ammunitions, snares) as well as 361 kg of bushmeat seized.

5.3 Maintaining conservation action to tackle threats to species

Despite the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on conservation efforts such as funding constraints, increased poaching, and disruptions to fieldwork, some organisations reported conservation gains amid the pandemic. Most IUCN Save Our Species funded projects across Sub-Saharan Africa maintained their conservation activities such as anti-poaching patrols, awareness raising, and community engagement achieving impressive results.

CASE STUDY

Protecting threatened species in the Gola forest landscape from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

Partner	Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia
Target species	▪ Western Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*) CR ▪ Slender-snouted Crocodile (*Mecistops cataphractus*) CR ▪ Pygmy Hippopotamus (*Choeropsis liberiensis*) EN
Country	Liberia

INTRODUCTION

Established in 1986, Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL) is the leading civil society organisation for nature conservation in Liberia. SCNL worked closely with the Liberian Government and local communities to designate the Gola forest landscape in 2016, and brought together the Liberia and Sierra Leone governments to re-sign a memorandum of understanding in 2020 reconfirming a commitment to jointly manage the Gola rainforest as a transboundary peace park. SCNL collaborates closely with local communities around Gola through

Photo: © Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia

projects that have established 40,000 ha of important forest corridors linking the GFNP, the Foya Proposed Protected Area and the Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP) in Sierra Leone and directly addresses bushmeat hunting of protected species. By increasing capacity in community landscape management, SCNL has helped reduce deforestation and biodiversity loss.

PROBLEM

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a notable influx of people moving back to their communities, resulting in increased poaching and illegal activities in the Gola forest. The crisis prompted individuals to turn to hunting bushmeat for sustenance, leading to a surge in illegal activities, especially affecting species like Jentink's Duiker The forest experienced a similar impact during the Ebola crisis from 2014 to 2015, causing the loss of sustainable breeding populations and a significant reduction in global populations of key threatened species. Despite Gola's recognition as a critical ecosystem for many threatened species, there was limited understanding of their population sizes, posing a risk of losing key populations before the importance of GFNP and GRNP is fully understood. Patrolling resources in Liberia and Sierra Leone were strained, exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions, leading to reduced ranger forces and challenges in responding to illegal activity reports. States of emergency and movement restrictions further intensified difficulties for those living in poverty, increasing pressure from illegal incursions into national parks and jeopardising 60 globally threatened species.

APPROACH

During the pandemic and its immediate aftermath, there was a need to increase patrols and respond more rapidly to reports of illegal activity. SCNL needed funding to increase the intensity of ranger patrols in both Liberia and Sierra Leone, establish a rapid reaction team, and increase community involvement in activities protecting the Gola forest.

RESULTS

With the SOS African Wildlife rapid action grant, SCNL increased the number of ecoguards, community monitors and park rangers in GFNP and GRNP. An additional 13 ecoguards in Liberia and eight community monitors in Sierra Leone boosted the management presence in the two protected areas. They supported a total of 109 patrol missions in GFNP in Liberia and GRNP in Sierra Leone which led to a total of 49 human encounters; eight were arrested, prosecuted, and were either fined or imprisoned while 41 were warned and released. This also led to the deterrence of illegal occupants in the protected areas. SCNL also supported the confiscation of a total of nine firearms and the removal of 383 snares, thereby reducing threats to wildlife. To help sensitise local communities to conservation issues, several awareness-raising educational sessions for community members were organised through town hall meetings and poster demonstrations to increase awareness of the importance of wildlife to the environment and people. SCNL was able to support the salary of 10 staff members thanks to IUCN Save Our Species funding, furthermore, 1,351 farmers and community members, including youth, benefitted from food and cash for work carried out to maintain cocoa farms in Sierra Leone, roadside brushing and minor bridge repairs in Liberia.

5.4 Responding to conservation emergencies

a Addressing the impact of invasive alien species

In Africa, invasive alien species present significant challenges to native ecosystems, economies, and communities. These species compete fiercely for vital resources, leading to the decline or extinction of indigenous species. Predatory or herbivorous invasive species disrupt ecological balance by preying on or overexploiting native species and causing habitat degradation. Introducing new diseases and parasites, they contribute to population declines. Hybridisation poses a threat to the genetic uniqueness of native species. To tackle these issues, five projects supported under the rapid action grant employed strategies such as habitat restoration, biological control, awareness campaigns, and policy formulation to tackle the spread of invasive species in Africa.

CASE STUDY

Saving South Africa's most threatened migratory freshwater fish, the Clanwilliam Sandfish

Partner	Freshwater Research Centre
Target species	Clanwilliam Sandfish (*Labeo Seeberi*) EN
Country	South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The Clanwilliam Sandfish, South Africa's most threatened migratory freshwater fish, confronts critical challenges due to its "full migrant" life history and human-induced environmental impacts. Once widespread in the Olifants-Doring river system, it is likely extinct in the Olifants catchment and rapidly declining in the Doring river and its tributaries. Only two spawning tributaries, Oorlogskloof and Biedouw rivers, remain.

Photo: © Freshwater Research Centre

The Oorlogskloof population faces threats from invasive species in nearby dams, while the Biedouw river experiences heavy predation on sandfish offspring, worsened by water overuse. With minimal recruitment in the Doring river, urgent conservation efforts are needed to enhance juvenile survival and overall recruitment for the sandfish's future.

APPROACH

The initiative by Freshwater Research Centre (FRC) aimed to enhance the population of sandfish in their natural habitat, by focusing on improving the survival rates of juvenile sandfish. This was achieved through conservation translocations and the creation of safe havens by eliminating invasive fish species from aquatic environments.

The strategy included:

- Collaborating with landowners to clear alien fish from dams to establish sanctuaries for sandfish.
- A rescue operation for freshwater fish, where at-risk young sandfish were moved to these sanctuaries.
- Part of the project's efforts also involved disseminating information about their activities to a broader audience, with the goal of increasing awareness and support for the conservation of freshwater ecosystems.

RESULTS

1. Reintroduction and population enhancement

Releasing 1,634 bass-proof sandfish into the wild exceeded the target of 1,500, indicating successful rearing in sanctuaries. Out of these, 1,348 were tagged for monitoring, offering valuable data on their survival, movements, and contributing to future conservation efforts.

2. Creation and expansion of safe habitats

Four new sanctuary dams were established to provide safe habitats for sandfish, protecting them from predators and harsh environmental conditions.

Rescuing and relocating 25,692 juvenile sandfish from the Biedouw river to the sanctuary dams significantly contributed to the conservation of young, vulnerable individuals of the species.

3. Community engagement and capacity building

Nine community members were trained in fish rescue methods, building community ownership of the conservation efforts, while education efforts with 44 high school and university students fostered conservation awareness. Ongoing local capacity for conservation was established through skills development training for FRC staff, students, collaborators, and community members in fish surveys, data management, and tagging techniques.

4. Communication and advocacy

By utilising various media such as web series, photo stories, scientific papers and virtual reality experiences, the project successfully raised awareness about sandfish conservation among scientific and public audiences.

CASE STUDY

Emergency control of Salvinia molesta aquatic fern to save the African Manatee's habitat and lake Ossa's biodiversity

Partner	African Marine Mammal Conservation Organization
Target species	African Manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*) VU
Country	Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

The Salvinia molesta, commonly known as Kariba weed and once labelled as "possibly the world's worst weed" by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is a dominant species in lake Ossa.

It is known for its rapid growth, doubling in size every 7-10 days. This dense cover depletes oxygen levels in the water, adversely affecting the lake's ecosystem. It particularly harms the growth of Antelope Grass (*Echinochloa pyramidalis*), the main food source for the African manatees in the lake.

Without intervention, the situation threatened to destroy the lake's biodiversity, including its entire population of manatees.

Photo: © African Marine Mammal Conservation Organization

APPROACH

The project focused on controlling the invasive Kariba weed in lake Ossa to protect the African Manatee's habitat. At the heart of the approach was the use of the Cyrtobagous salvinia weevil for biological control. This was the first biological control project supported by the Government of Cameroon.

The project also engaged the local community in campaigns, and media outreach, raising awareness about the invasive species issue and the project's efforts.

RESULTS

Establishing two large-scale weevil breeding centers in Dizangue led to the successful breeding of over 20,000 weevils, a significant boost for biological control in the area. After a thorough risk assessment, government-approved weevils were introduced into a designated pilot area of lake Ossa. The project engaged 100 local fishermen in educational sessions, resulting in the removal of approximately 400 tons of Kariba weed from the lake. Training programmes on alternative livelihoods positively impacted 65 locals, contributing to a notable reduction in manatee hunting, with only one case reported in 2020 compared to 25 before the project. By combining biological control, community engagement and awareness, the project effectively diminished the impact of Kariba weed in lake Ossa, safeguarding the local ecosystem and the habitat of the African Manatee.

Photo: © Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust

b Addressing human-wildlife conflict

Human-wildlife interactions significantly impact species survival. Conflicts can lead to lethal outcomes, threatening certain populations and risking extinction. Loss of natural habitat prompts animals to migrate into human-inhabited areas, heightening conflict risks. Balancing the needs and safety of both humans and wildlife is crucial in addressing this complex conservation challenge. The SOS African Wildlife initiative supported 11 projects employing various methods to alleviate human-wildlife conflict.

CASE STUDY

Addressing multiple threats to elephants and people by reinstating the boundary fence of Zambia's Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park

Partner	Elephant Connection
Target species	African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) EN
Country	Zambia

INTRODUCTION

The Elephant Connection project in Zambia's Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, set within the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, aimed to tackle the escalating human-elephant conflict and the rising threat of poaching. The conflict had intensified due to damaged electrified fences, allowing elephants to roam into residential areas, leading to dangerous encounters and fatalities. This was also exacerbated by the impacts of climate change and the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges also heightened the risk of poaching, as communities affected by tourism decline sought alternative income sources.

Photo: © Elephant Connection

APPROACH

The project aimed to address the escalating human-elephant conflicts exacerbated by frequent power cuts that destabilised the electrified fence around the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park.

With funding support Elephant Connection were able to rebuild the barrier fence with a solar-powered electrification system providing a sustainable and reliable deterrent for elephants, independent of the unstable power grid, therefore helping to secure the park's boundaries and enhancing the safety of both the community and wildlife.

RESULTS

1. Reduction in crop damage and human-elephant incidents

With a 5 km fence in place, there was a marked reduction in the incidents of elephants entering agricultural lands. This led to improved crop productivity and reduced losses for local farmers. The decrease in elephant incursions into residential areas also lowered the risk of direct confrontations between humans and elephants, enhancing safety for both.

2. Economic impact and alternative livelihoods

The project's timing coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which had severely impacted local tourism, a major source of income for many households. In this context, the improved agricultural productivity offered a vital alternative income source.

3. Stabilisation of elephant population

The project contributed to stabilising the elephant population within the park, which numbered between 300 and 400 individuals. By reducing the need for elephants to venture into human-dominated landscapes for resources, the project indirectly helped in managing the elephant population within the confines of their natural habitat.

CASE STUDY

Saving the lions of Mpem and Djim National Park in Cameroon

Partner	Biodiversité-Environnement et Développement Durable
Target species	Lion (*Panthera leo*) VU
Country	Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

The project addressed an unusual conservation challenge: the arrival of lions in Mpem and Djim National Park (MDNP) in the central region of Cameroon. The natural reintroduction of lions to the park, spanning over 400 km, presents challenges, notably human-wildlife conflict. Livestock depredation incidents highlight the urgency for effective management strategies to address the evolving situation.

Photo: © Biodiversité-Environnement et Développement Durable

APPROACH

In MDNP in Cameroon, Biodiversité-Environnement et Développement Durable worked in partnership with the park authority to address the perennial challenge of human-wildlife conflict, particularly between humans and lions. This was achieved through setting up a monitoring system and engaging local communities in conflict mitigation measures.

RESULTS

1. Community engagement

A key achievement of the project was the substantial reduction in human–lion conflict. Through extensive sensitisation campaigns, the project reached around 2,500 locals, educating them about lion behaviour, habitat conservation, and coexistence strategies. This initiative not only heightened community awareness but also fostered a quicker response to potential conflict situations.

The project helped to significantly reduce livestock depredation by 80-95%. This was evident from the decrease in the number of cows killed, from 80-90 before project inception to just one during the project. This reduction was accomplished by providing tools and knowledge to the local population for mitigating conflicts and construction of mobile bomas.

2. Improved park management and enhanced patrols

The project strengthened the management of the national park through provision of essential materials and rations for 33 ecoguards. The constant presence of ecoguards saw a reduction of human disturbances and potential lion-pastoralist conflicts. The park also saw a significant boost in patrols by 45%, attributed to improved training and equipment for ecoguards, enhancing their ability to monitor wildlife and combat poaching. As a result, the patrols became more efficient in protecting the park's biodiversity.

CASE STUDY

Combatting the impacts of COVID-19 on bushmeat, ivory poaching, and human–wildlife conflict

Partner	Zambian Carnivore Program
Target species	▪ Africa Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*) EN ▪ African Lion (*Panthera leo*) VU ▪ Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) VU ▪ Spotted Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*) LC ▪ African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) EN
Country	Zambia

INTRODUCTION

The project was initiated in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Luangwa Valley, Zambia. The Luangwa Valley is home to the largest populations of large carnivores and elephants in Zambia and is a crucial site for safari tourism, which is one of the continent's most lucrative sectors. The abrupt termination of tourism due to the pandemic led to several cascading negative impacts on both conservation efforts and local communities. This situation likely caused sharp increases in bushmeat and ivory poaching, as well as retaliatory human–wildlife conflict, particularly as food security became a growing concern.

Photo: © Zambian Carnivore Programme

APPROACH

Key strategies under the project included anti-poaching patrols by community scouts and park authority officials who were equipped with advanced tools like GPS and cybertrackers, to combat bushmeat and ivory poaching. Large carnivore monitoring was conducted by researchers using radio collars to track and collect data on lions and wild dogs, helping to identify high-risk areas for poaching.

Human–wildlife conflict mitigation involved both education and practical measures: communities were sensitised about living safely alongside lions, and innovative methods like cell phone-based early warning systems and aversive conditioning were used to manage lion and elephant conflicts.

RESULTS

1. Non-lethal deterrents to protect livelihoods

To mitigate human-wildlife conflict, the project distributed over 600 solar string lights and 400 noise makers to communities. These non-lethal deterrents effectively reduced incidents of predation and crop damage by deterring nocturnal predators and crop raiders. Additionally, approximately 50 people were trained to use chilli fences and chilli bombs made from locally sourced chillies. This natural barrier capitalised on elephants' aversion to chilli, proving both effective and empowering for local farmers, fostering a sense of security and participation in conservation efforts.

2. Educating for coexistence

Community sensitisation efforts reached over 9,500 people, building communities' understanding of the importance of wildlife conservation and practical ways to reduce conflict. Additionally, 24 radio shows broadcast across the valley reached an estimated 15,000 listeners, spreading further awareness and fostering a deeper understanding of how to live harmoniously with wildlife.

3. Early warning systems: bridging the communication gap

To proactively manage potential conflict situations, the project introduced early warning systems. Approximately 100 phones were distributed among community leaders and wildlife scouts, enabling timely alerts about wildlife movements near human settlements. This helped in averting potential conflicts and also strengthened the trust and collaboration between the communities and conservation teams.

5.5 Engaging communities in conservation for sustainable livelihoods

Wildlife conservation does not only involve the protection of species and habitats but also engaging communities in these efforts. Communities relying on natural surroundings for their livelihoods often act as custodians of these environments. Adopting sustainable livelihood practices is crucial as it ensures that economic activities align with the overarching goal of wildlife conservation.

Integrating sustainable livelihoods brings direct economic benefits to communities. Practices like eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture, and community-based natural resource management not only support conservation but also offer livelihood opportunities, further aligning community interests with conservation goals. Overall, 20 projects under the rapid action grant engaged local communities through leveraging on local knowledge, providing economic incentives, addressing human-wildlife conflicts, empowering stakeholders, and enhancing community resilience.

CASE STUDY

Scaling up sea turtle conservation through the establishment of a Local Marine Managed Area in Marereni

Partner	Community-Based Conservation Group
Target species	Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) EN
Country	Kenya

INTRODUCTION

The growing dependence on marine resources has resulted in the widespread use of unsustainable fishing methods, such as mosquito nets and poison, by both fishermen and non-fishermen. This poses a significant threat to sea turtles and their habitats, endangering the marine ecosystem and its ecological balance. To address this issue, the project prioritises active engagement and collaboration with local communities, particularly fishermen. This approach aims to transform local practices and promote the sustainable use of marine resources.

APPROACH

Community-Based Conservation Group worked towards safeguarding threatened sea turtles and their habitats through a range of interventions including conducting regular patrols, surveillance, and monitoring at nesting beaches to protect the turtles and their nests. A significant proportion of the project was focused on organising educational and awareness meetings for fishermen and marine resource users. This was critical for fostering community involvement in conservation and establishing a Local Marine Managed Area (LLMA), to ensure a community-led protected environment for the sea turtles.

RESULTS

1. Community engagement in conservation efforts

A key outcome of the project was the conservation and protection of a 25km^2 coastline and the establishment of an LMMA and the Marereni Area Beach Management Unit Conservation Organization (MABICO). MABICO was formed as a community-based organisation covering 4km^2 to help sustain the momentum of the conservation efforts initiated by the project. The organisation empowered residents to take an active role in managing and protecting their natural resources and increased interest in establishing more LMMAs among other surrounding communities and local government.

2. Enhanced awareness and education

Through targeted education programs, approximately 300 fishermen and other resource users were educated about sustainable resource use and conservation practices, therefore enhancing local community capacity in natural resource management.

3. Enhanced protection for sea turtles

Another key impact from the project was improvement in the conservation of sea turtles and their habitats. The commitment was evident through extensive operational patrols and surveillance, accumulating around 5,760 hours in total. This rigorous effort led to a 62.5% reduction in turtle deaths by the project's conclusion.

CASE STUDY

Protecting mountain gorillas and building socio-economic resilience after the pandemic in communities surrounding Volcanoes National Park

Partner	Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund
Target species	Mountain Gorilla (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) EN
Country	Rwanda

INTRODUCTION

The decline in ecotourism, a vital funding source for the Volcanoes National Park (VNP) and nearby communities, has severely affected local livelihoods and heightened risks to gorillas and their habitat. This downturn has led to increased food insecurity due to reduced incomes and rising food costs, contributing to a spike in poaching incidents.

To combat these challenges, Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGFI) worked towards reinforcing gorilla protection efforts by continuing the daily safeguarding of gorilla families and increasing anti-poaching patrols to dismantle snares. In addition, the organisation conducted food security initiatives and alternative livelihood programs, targeting the subsistence needs of the most economically vulnerable community members.

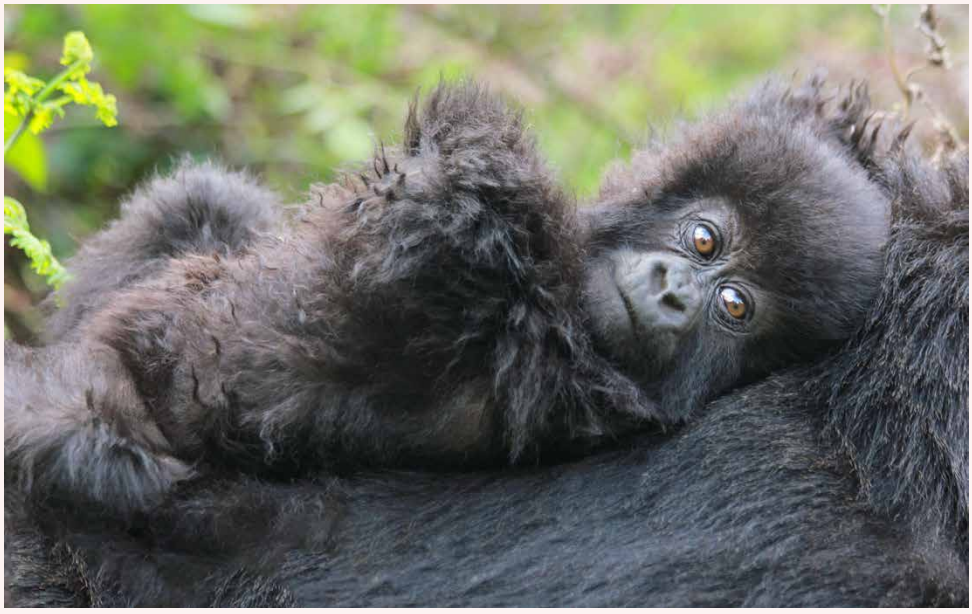


Photo: © Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund

APPROACH

In the areas around VNP, DFGFI implemented an innovative approach to protect mountain gorillas by integrating conservation with sustainable community development. The project focuses on cultivating mushrooms, not only as a food source but also as an economic transformation tool. By offering alternative income sources like mushroom farming, the project aims to simultaneously protect threatened species and enhance the livelihoods of local communities.

RESULTS

1. Economic empowerment through mushroom cultivation

The impact of mushroom cultivation has been profound. The farmers around VNP sold nearly 1,000 kg of mushrooms, generating approximately USD 2,000. This income has been a game-changer for many households, offering financial independence and reducing poverty. Moreover, the initiative encouraged participants to reinvest a portion of their income to sustain and expand their mushroom farms.

2. Financial management and independence

Aiming to enhance household income management skills, the project trained 40 heads of households involved in mushroom growing, building community capacity to manage village savings and establish a loan group. The savings scheme enabled mushroom growers to open bank accounts at a savings and credit cooperative, and a microfinance institution, providing rural communities with access to financial services. Through group savings, beneficiaries generated significant income, with the cooperative generating USD 2,000 in four months, demonstrating the financial success and sustainability of the initiative.

3. Conservation impact

By providing alternative livelihoods, the project reduced the local communities' reliance on the national park's resources. This was critical in minimising illegal activities such as poaching and habitat destruction, which directly threaten gorilla populations.

The doubling of anti-poaching patrols also played a crucial role in protecting mountain gorillas. No gorillas were caught in snares throughout the grant cycle.

5.6 Habitat protection and management

40 grants supported through the initiative undertook effective ecosystem management which is crucial for maintaining balance, preventing overpopulation or extinction of species. Strategies like habitat restoration, re-wilding, and creating wildlife corridors aid in mitigating human-wildlife conflict, particularly as human populations expand. Coexistence promotion and public education on harmonious living with wildlife are key conflict management approaches.

Habitat management, encompassing modification and species translocation, helps species adapt to changing conditions. Protecting genetic diversity is vital for wildlife health and resilience.

CASE STUDY

Sustaining conservation efforts at the recently established Onepone Endangered Species Refuge, Ghana during the pandemic

Partner	Herp Conservation Ghana
Target species	▪ Togo Slippery Frog (*Conraua derooi*) CR ▪ Ukami Reed Frog (*Hyperolius torrentis*) EN ▪ Hooded Vulture (*Necrosyrtes monachus*) CR ▪ White-bellied Pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*) VU
Country	Ghana

INTRODUCTION

The Onepone Endangered Species Refuge (OESR), home to 11 threatened species, faced heightened challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The conservation site in which the Togo slippery frog and various pangolin species reside, saw an increased risk of extinction for these threatened species due in part to impacts of the pandemic. Funding shortfalls led to the suspension of regular activities and patrols, resulting in heightened poaching, illegal logging, and wildlife trafficking. The refuge is also prone to seasonal wildfires, especially from October to January. Prior to the grant, financial challenges impeded effective patrols and firefighting efforts, elevating the risk of potentially devastating wildfires.

APPROACH

The project's aim was to mitigate the risk of wildfires, ensure species survival and maintain the overall health and integrity of the refuge's ecosystem. Herp Ghana implemented measures such as creating and maintaining firebreaks, controlled burns to reduce fuel loads, and active fire suppression during high-risk periods to ensure survival of the threatened species in the OESR, including the Togo Slippery Frog.

RESULTS

1. Protection against bushfires

The project effectively shielded the core zone of the OESR from potentially devastating bushfires, averting extensive damage to habitats and preserving flora and fauna. Establishing a 10.85 km fire belt along the refuge's most fire-prone boundaries played a crucial role in preventing fire spread, safeguarding both the refuge's habitat and neighbouring areas. Additionally, the project trained 15 community members in fire prevention, suppression, and control, addressing bushfire concerns and enhancing monitoring and reporting capabilities for other illegal activities.

2. Reduction in illegal activities

Illegal logging was reduced by 60% (from ten to four incidents) and poaching by 52% (from 25 to 12 incidents), helping to preserve the natural resources and ecological balance within the OESR. There was increased surveillance and patrolling within the OESR, with 24 trained rangers and patrol staff deployed to monitor the area more effectively, therefore deterring illegal activities such as logging and poaching.

3. Capacity building for habitat management

Rangers and community volunteers were trained in field navigation, data collection, wildlife sign identification, and fire control. These skills were important for the ongoing monitoring and management of OESR.

Photo: © HERP - Ghana

5.7 Use of technology

Technology enhances the ability to monitor and track wildlife populations effectively. Advanced tools such as GPS tracking, drones, and satellite imagery provide real-time data about animal movements, behaviour, and population dynamics. This information is critical in understanding the needs of various species, identifying patterns such as migration routes, and detecting changes in population sizes. Moreover, technology has allowed for the monitoring of vast and remote areas that are otherwise difficult to access.

Poaching remains one of the biggest threats to wildlife, and technological innovations have been instrumental in combating it. Tools like thermal imaging cameras, automated sensors, and acoustic traps can detect illegal activities in real-time, allowing for rapid response. 8 projects employed technology to monitor wildlife and combat poaching. By equipping rangers with advanced technology, it becomes possible to stay one step ahead of poachers, thereby providing better protection for threatened species.

CASE STUDY

Community species protection initiative

Partner	Northern Rangeland Trust
Target species	▪ Hirola (*Beatragus hunteri*) **CR** ▪ Reticulated Giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis reticulata*) **EN** ▪ African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*) **EN** ▪ Tana Mangabey (*Cercocebus galeritus*) **EN** ▪ Tana Red Colobus (*Piliocolubus rufomitratus*) **CR**
Country	Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Wildlife in northern and coastal Kenya, notably a dwindling elephant population, face severe threats from increased poaching driven by human settlements and commercialised hunting. The situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic due to resource redirection and economic impacts, leading to a surge in poaching activities. Community conservancy rangers, crucial for anti-poaching efforts in this remote region, were at risk due to funding challenges. Dependent on grants, donations, and limited tourism revenue, their operations faced significant setbacks during the pandemic. Urgent financial support was needed to sustain ranger operations and prevent further wildlife poaching.

APPROACH

The Northern Rangeland Trust utilised technology to effectively monitor and safeguard threatened species. The Wildlife Conservancy Management Monitoring System (WCoMMS) enabled conservancies to gather data and observe patterns in wildlife behaviour, illegal activities, wildlife mortality, and human-wildlife conflict.

Key applications of the WCoMMS tool in the project included:

- Tracking the scope and intensity of ranger patrols, ensuring comprehensive coverage of critical areas by monitoring patrol locations and frequency;
- Observing and recording wildlife sightings and their behavioural trends, essential for assessing the health and status of various species;
- Monitoring changes in vegetation cover across the landscape;
- Overseeing and strategising anti-poaching efforts.

Photo: © Denis Lemaiyan

RESULTS

Illegal logging incidents decreased to just one case by the project's end, down from eight initially. Targeted species populations were maintained within a 7% natural fluctuation range, with only one poaching-induced fatality reported (a Reticulated Giraffe) during the project. The project provided crucial financial support, covering 14 months of salaries and rations for 105 conservancy rangers across seven conservancies. This funding was essential for sustaining ongoing operations, preventing potential halts due to financial constraints. These rangers played a vital role in managing poaching hotspots and contributed significantly to achieving the project's goals, including executing 36 arrests throughout the project duration.

CASE STUDY

Permanence of bonobo guards and ranger patrols at and around the expedition camp in the Lomako Yokokala Faunal Reserve, DRC

Partner	Koninklijke Maatschappij voor Dierkunde Antwerpen (Royal Zoological Society Antwerp)
Target species	Bonobo (*Pan paniscus*) EN
Country	Democratic Republic of the Congo

INTRODUCTION

The Lomako Yokokala Faunal Reserve faced a significant threat primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The cancellation of planned eco-tourism visits in 2020, a crucial source of revenue and global awareness for bonobo conservation, resulted in decreased funding. This impacted the capacity to maintain a consistent presence of Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) rangers and bonobo guards, raising the risk of increased poaching and illegal activities. Grant funding from IUCN was essential to sustain ranger patrols and support bonobo guards, preserving conservation gains.

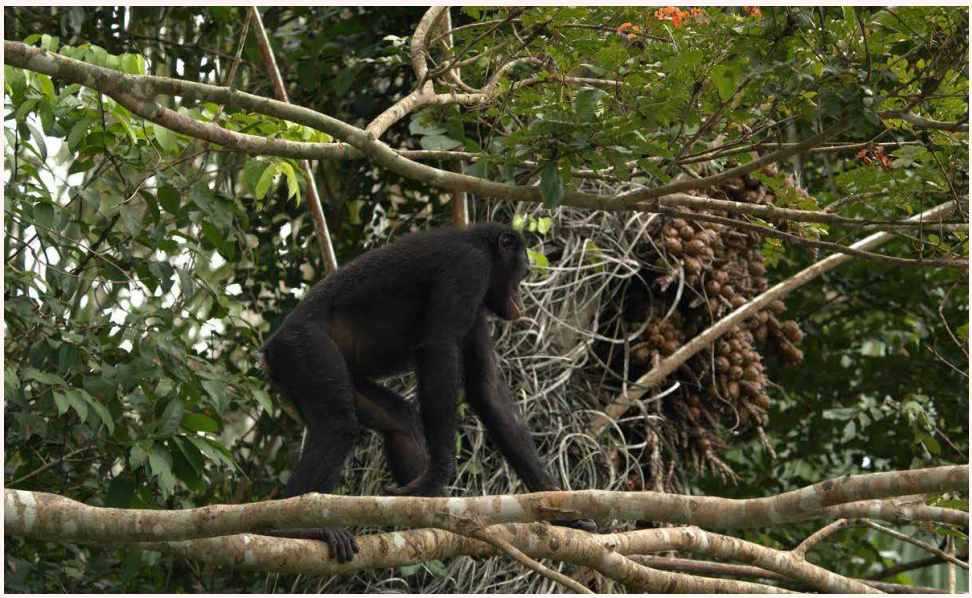


Photo: © Royal Zoological Society Antwerp

APPROACH

SMART is a vital conservation tool, providing valuable data for informed decisions, improving patrol effectiveness, and addressing threats like poaching. It also plays a key role in wildlife tracking, contributing to a better understanding of ecosystem health and shaping conservation tactics.

Employing SMART for wildlife monitoring and threat detection at the Lomako Yokokala Faunal Reserve, the Royal Zoological Society Antwerp aimed to ensure emergency aid for ranger patrols, maintain support for bonobo guards, and implement strategies to prevent disease transmission between humans and bonobos.

RESULTS

1. Ranger patrol

The project successfully achieved monthly SMART-generated ranger patrol reports. These reports indicated threats, such as signs of intrusion, and identified biodiversity hotspots which evidenced existence of large mammals such as bonobos and elephants. Throughout the project period, anti-poaching ranger patrols were conducted for varying durations each month, covering significant distances. The total kilometres covered by patrols during the project was 1,860.

2. Wildlife monitoring

The SMART system helped in counting the bonobo and elephant sightings during patrols. The count varied each month, with instances of 19 bonobo and 11 elephant sightings in one month, and five bonobo and three elephant sightings in another. This data was critical for assessing the presence and movement of key species within the reserve.

5.8 Tackling barriers to conservation action in South Africa

South Africa's rich biodiversity, including unique species like the Rough Moss Frog, faces severe threats due to the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. The budget crisis of the government risked causing cuts to already insufficient funding for wildlife authorities, endangering wildlife and habitats. Travel restrictions caused a significant decline in tourism, affecting state wildlife authorities, private concessionaires, and community conservation programs.

The pandemic heightened threats such as poaching, habitat encroachment, and resource depletion. Financial hardships in communities near protected areas increased reliance on these resources, leading to activities like poaching and deforestation. The loss of tourism and trophy hunting revenue raised the risk of land conversion, eroding confidence in wildlife conservation.

In response to the income loss, IUCN Save Our Species supported 15 projects through rapid action grants to address COVID-19 impacts on the conservation of terrestrial or freshwater species in South Africa.

CASE STUDY

Active restoration of the fragmented habitat of the Endangered Western Leopard Toad in Tokai Park, Cape Town

Partner	Friends of Tokai Park
Target species	Western Leopard Toad (*Sclerophrys pantherina*) EN
Country	South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Habitat fragmentation and degradation negatively affects Endangered Western Leopard Toads (*Sclerophrys pantherina*) in Tokai Park, Cape Town. This species, emblematic of urban conservation, has been significantly impacted by the extensive urbanisation of the region. The development and expansion of urban areas have led to the loss and fragmentation of the toad's natural habitat, leaving it with diminished and isolated patches of suitable living space. Additionally, the invasion of alien plant species in Tokai Park pose a severe threat, as these invasive species compete with and often dominate the native Fynbos vegetation, integral to the toad's ecosystem.

APPROACH

The project aimed to restore the fragmented habitat of the Western Leopard Toad in Tokai Park, which has been largely urbanised, affecting its feeding and breeding areas. Friends of Tokai Park focused on rehabilitating the toad's environment by removing invasive alien plants and reintroducing native species. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted planned activities, leading to the uncontrolled spread of invasive flora and a decrease in conservation funding.

RESULTS

A total of 6.3 hectares of Peninsula Granite Fynbos and Cape Flats Sand Fynbos were cleared of invasive alien vegetation, resulting in a significant 22-26% reduction in alien tree cover. The project successfully planted 4,900 seedlings of locally indigenous species across 29.9 hectares, focusing on restoring crucial Fynbos vegetation for the toad's habitat, including threatened and ecologically important species.

The project also provided training for 12 individuals in alien vegetation management, contributing to both project objectives and offering valuable work experience and skills development for young graduates. Additionally, the project led to the discovery of a previously unknown population of the Endangered Largestipuled Fountainbush *(Psoralea fascicularis)* during the planting phase, emphasising the area's importance for biodiversity conservation.

CASE STUDY

Enabling ongoing and informed metapopulation management of the South-western Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*) population in South African National Parks

Partner	South African National Parks
Target species	South-western Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*) CR
Country	South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The Critically Endangered South-western Black Rhino population is managed as a metapopulation across Addo Elephant, Karoo, and Mountain Zebra National Parks. South African National Parks (SANParks), crucial for this conservation effort, faced financial constraints during the COVID-19 pandemic due to reduced tourism revenue. This strain impacted the operating budget for essential conservation and anti-poaching programs, putting existing monitoring and management programs for the black rhino populations at risk.

Photo: © Charlene Bissett

APPROACH

One primary strategy of the project was intensive monitoring of the black rhino population in Addo Elephant, Karoo, and Mountain Zebra National Parks through the establishment of a monitoring team and the involvement of field rangers. This monitoring was essential for maintaining a detailed understanding of the population dynamics, including tracking individual rhinos, recording births and deaths, and ensuring regular sightings of the animals.

RESULTS

The project strengthened SANParks' capacity to conserve and protect the South-western Black Rhino populations across three parks, crucial amidst reduced budget cuts from the COVID-19 pandemic. The project grant enabled continuous monitoring, with over 95% of the population individually identifiable through ear notching. Conservation staff were trained in rhino identification techniques. The project resulted in a steady increase in black rhino populations, recording 19 births and surpassing the national growth target. Additionally, it successfully mitigated poaching threats with a monitoring team and field rangers.

CASE STUDY

Blue Swallow habitat conservation management and monitoring

Partner	BirdLife South Africa
Target species	Blue Swallow (*Hirundo atrocaerulea*) EN
Country	South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The Blue Swallow has been facing significant conservation challenges, primarily due to its Critically Endangered status in South Africa and vulnerability at the global level. This small, insectivorous bird, known for its striking iridescent blue plumage and distinctive flying patterns, is native to the mistbelt grasslands in parts of South Africa and Tanzania.

In the last 20 years, grasslands have been rapidly diminishing and fragmenting due to human activities. The primary threat to the Blue Swallow's habitat has been the conversion of grasslands into agricultural lands, forestry plantations, and urban development.

Photo: © Steve McKean

APPROACH

The Blue Swallow is restricted to isolated patches of Mistbelt grassland in South Africa, with less than 2% of this grassland type formally conserved. The project helped to address the risks posed by habitat loss and degradation due to development and agricultural expansion.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a cessation of funding and increased pressure on landowners to convert the remaining grassland into agricultural land due to economic difficulties. This project helped to fill the gap in conservation funding caused by the pandemic.

RESULTS

The project expanded Blue Swallow habitat by 340 hectares and enhanced management for over 3,800 hectares, implementing annual plans for improved habitat management. Approximately 790 hectares were treated for invasive alien plants, enhancing the quality of the Blue Swallow habitat. To bolster monitoring, three additional Blue Swallow monitors were recruited, resulting in increased breeding success. The number of fledged chicks rose from 34 to 47 in the 2020-2021 breeding season, marking a roughly 38% increase.

CASE STUDY

Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park threatened species and community conservation project

Partner	Wildlife ACT Trust Fund
Target species	▪ African Wild Dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) EN ▪ Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) VU ▪ Lion (*Panthera leo*) VU ▪ African White-backed Vulture (*Gyps africanus*) CR ▪ White-headed Vulture (*Trigonoceps occipitalis*) CR ▪ Lappet-faced Vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*) EN
Country	South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Wildlife ACT's protected area monitoring, which relies heavily on funding through a tourism participation model, was significantly impacted due to the COVID-19 lockdown. This resulted in a loss of funding from both tourism and long-term funders, reducing their capacity to support conservation activities in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park.

The COVID-19 pandemic also led to a major economic downturn, significantly affecting the livelihoods and incomes of communities around the park, many of whom depend on tourism. This escalated issues of inequality, poverty, and vulnerability, which in turn threaten biodiversity.

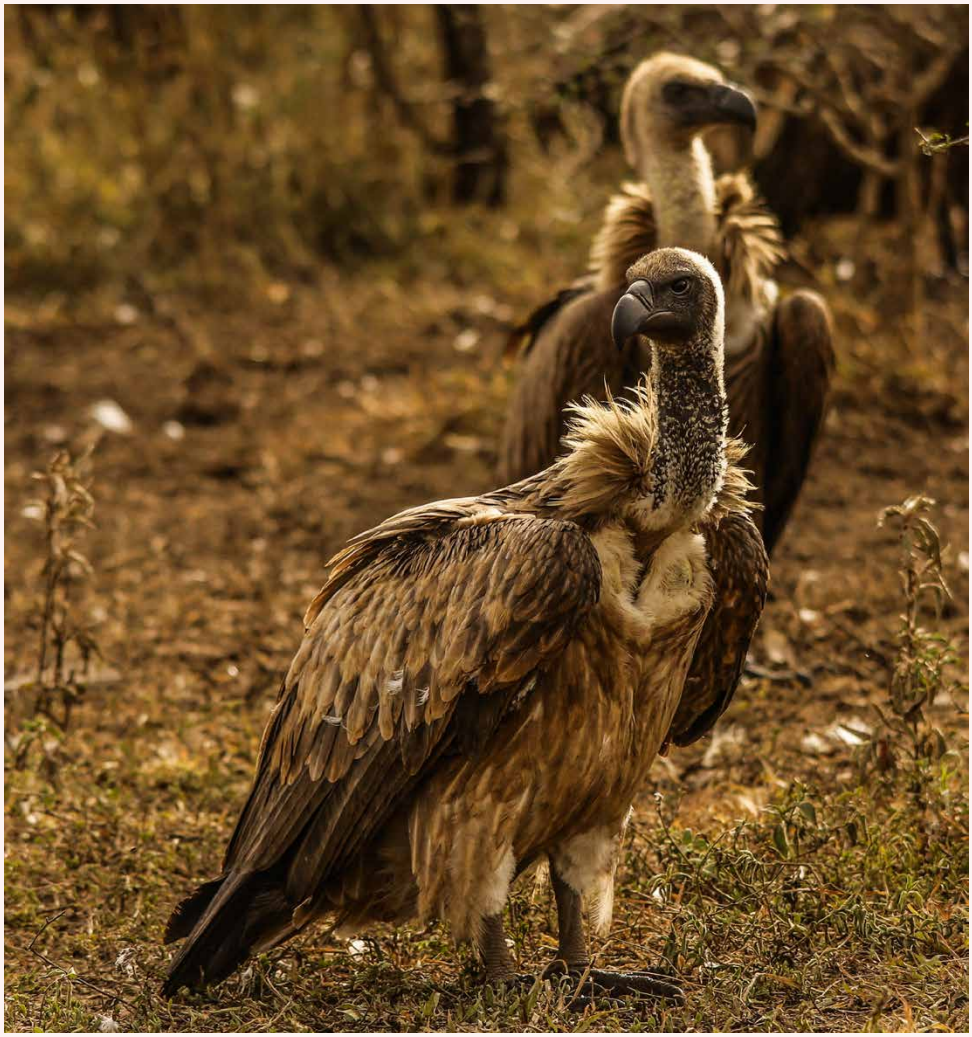


Photo: © Ryan Mitchell

APPROACH

Wildlife ACT concentrated on wildlife protection and community engagement. Their conservation efforts involved advanced technology like satellite tracking and camera traps to monitor threatened species such as cheetahs, African wild dogs, and vultures. Simultaneously, the organisation conducted extensive community outreach, education, and development programmes to raise awareness about conservation, promote human-wildlife coexistence, and align conservation goals with the interests and well-being of local populations.

RESULTS

The project effectively monitored key threatened species, utilising tracking and satellite units to enhance their movements and health observation. The project activities successfully contributed to an increase in wildlife populations: African Wild Dogs (from 16 to 29), cheetahs (from 12 to 21), and lions (from 61 to 72).

Additionally, 30 businesses received basic business training for economic resilience, and 12 workshops promoted understanding between the park and local communities. The rapid emergency response team successfully resolved 100% of reported human-wildlife conflict incidents, preventing potential harm to wildlife and reducing damage to local livelihoods.

6

INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

Photo: © Omaha Zoological Society

This report summarises the breadth of conservation action we have taken since 2019 under the rapid action grants of the SOS African Wildlife initiative. Almost 54 project partners (see Annex 2 for a full list of projects) reported their assessments on whether their projects had been successful or not, often citing multiple reasons. Common factors underpinning success from across our portfolio include:

6.1 Importance of building partnerships with local communities

The conservation of species can succeed in most places only in cooperation with the people who inhabit areas of high diversity and earn a living from these resources. Therefore, the effectiveness and sustainability of such projects will depend on their ability to understand and form productive partnerships with these communities. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the long-term integration of the Virunga Foundation with the communities around the Virunga National Park was a key factor explaining the success of their activities. Over 99% of the staff working for Virunga Foundation come from Eastern Congo, including from the surrounding communities. This has facilitated the building of partnerships with the communities and strong engagement of community members in the conservation of mountain gorillas in the park.

“The effectiveness and sustainability of projects will depend on their ability to understand and form productive partnerships with these communities.”

6.2 Understanding communities' needs, challenges and realities is essential

A key lesson documented by most IUCN Save Our Species-funded projects is that project staff must understand the communities with which they work. The process of learning is at least as important for project staff as it is for communities. A conclusion reached by most IUCN Save Our Species-funded projects is that the overall success of a conservation project is likely to be determined by the quality of social relations developed between project workers and local stakeholders, especially the traditional authorities and community groups. In Malawi for example, the implication of traditional authorities and community groups in the conception of the Wildlife Action Group project around the Thuma and Dedza Salima Escarpment Forest Reserve helped develop strong ties between project staff and the communities. Together they were able to establish new income-generating activities such as poultry clubs, irrigation gardens, and beekeeping which the community members themselves wanted to pursue. This led to an increased involvement by the communities and a reduction in pressure on wildlife in biodiversity hotspots where poaching incidents were rising.

6.3 Address community needs

Community-based conservation projects must address community priorities and provide benefits to community members. Community priorities usually include earning a living. Therefore, identifying alternative sources of income that conserve or sustainably use biological resources is very important. Several rapid action grant projects have successfully addressed this need. For example, in the protection of Panda Masuie Forest Reserve in Zimbabwe, and the protection of Mountain Gorillas in the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, a variety of income-generating activities that provided alternatives to hunting, and natural resource exploitation were designed and carried out jointly by the project staff, reserve managers and the community. They include jobs as fence attendants, growing and preserving fruit trees and mushrooms as well as setting up irrigation gardens, beekeeping, and poultry farms in Malawi.

"Identifying alternative sources of income that conserve or sustainably use biological resources is very important."

6.4 Conservation through adaptive management

Flexibility and adaptability are essential for addressing unforeseen challenges and changes in project scope. Unforeseen factors, such as pandemics, conflicts, and habitat degradation due to climatic changes like poor rainy seasons, necessitated adaptive management strategies. Regular monitoring and a flexible project plan allowed for adjustments in real-time, increasing the project's resilience and effectiveness. This was the case in Ethiopia where despite being faced with the COVID-19 pandemic and insecurities that affected field activities, emergency measures including advocacy, and stakeholder involvement were taken

to protect the habitat of the Critically Endangered Liben Lark from land-grabbing and overgrazing. Future projects for implementing conservation actions must consider the possibilities of disruption due to conflicts, economic crises, outbreaks of zoonotic episodes, and climatic changes and plan to adjust accordingly.

6.5 Collaborate with all relevant stakeholders

Building strong partnerships with governmental agencies, experts, and other stakeholders is fundamental for project sustainability and success. Collaboration with governmental bodies and experts from project design and implementation provided access to additional resources, expertise, and support. Leveraging these partnerships enhanced project outcomes and contributed to the development of a broader conservation network. For example, the control of the population of an invasive aquatic fern species in Cameroon and the restoration of the fragmented habitat of the Western Leopard Toad in South Africa achieved success as a result of consultations with experts. These experts advised project leads on appropriate methodologies to eradicate invasive alien species, while the projects' strong engagement with government agencies facilitated various levels of authorisation needed.

6.6 Importance of law enforcement and ranger patrols

Law enforcement and ranger patrolling is a core pillar of species conservation and is most effective when fully integrated into the broader protected area program. For example, in the Akagera National Park in Rwanda, the K9 unit and law enforcement team have maintained a zero-poaching record in the park thanks to well-planned patrols and a continual assessment and analysis system that helps identify areas requiring improvement in all law enforcement activities. After any activity or engagement, debriefs are conducted with the K9 and law enforcement teams to identify strengths and weaknesses of responses, and devise means of improvement. For instance, after each deployment, a team debrief helps identify areas of improvement, such as communication chains or equipment storage. This system of assessment has helped reduce deployment times, which is critical to law enforcement success where response time can make the difference between an apprehension or an escaped poacher. Law enforcement without effective community engagement and outreach will have limited effectiveness and conversely, engagement and outreach in these villages without any ranger patrolling is similarly likely to be limited in effectiveness. In addition, different activities and strategies in a law enforcement and ranger patrolling program will be appropriate under different circumstances. A strategic approach to addressing the key threats specific to each protected area is critical.

Photo: © Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust

6.7 Investing deeply in community capacity building and training

Investing in training and capacity building among project staff and local stakeholders has resulted in enhanced skills, increased awareness, and a more empowered local workforce. This has led to improved conservation practices, better community engagement, and sustainability of conservation efforts. This was the case at the Tswapong Hills in Eastern Botswana, where building the capacity of the local communities to enact the actions needed to help the Cape Vultures has led to sustainable vulture bone provision, and the community having ownership, training, resources, and skills to sustain the project. Also, in Chad, African Parks has invested in long-term environmental education in primary schools around the Greater Zakouma Ecosystem by incorporating environmental education into the school curriculum with teachers better demonstrating the importance of conserving the Zakouma ecosystem. They have equally implemented a long-term training program for women on ecologically friendly income-generating activities such as gardening and compost production, which has helped to increase awareness and reduce pressure on the ecosystem resources.

Photo: © Freshwater Research Centre

ANNEX 1

List of species protected under rapid action grants

Common Name	Scientific Name	IUCN Red List Status
Amphibians		
Rough moss frog	*Arthroleptella rugosa*	CR
Togo slippery frog	*Conraua derooi*	CR
Ukami reed frog	*Hyperolius torrentis*	EN
Western leopard toad	*Sclerophrys pantherine*	EN
Birds		
African white-backed vulture	*Gyps africanus*	CR
Blue swallow	*Hirundo atrocaerulea*	EN
Cape vulture	*Gyps coprotheres*	EN
Gola malimbe	*Malimbus ballmanni*	EN
Hooded vulture	*Necrosyrtes monachus*	CR
Lappet-faced vulture	*Torgos tracheliotos*	EN
Liben lark	*Heteromirafra archeri*	CR
Timneh parrot	*Psittacus timneh*	EN
White-headed vulture	*Trigonoceps occipitalis*	CR
Fish		
Clanwilliam sandfish	*Labeo seeberi*	EN
Mammals		
Addax	*Addax nasomaculatus*	CR
African forest elephant	*Loxodonta cyclotis*	EN
African savannah elephant	*Loxodonta africana*	EN
African lion	*Panthera leo*	VU
African manatee	*Trichechus senegalensis*	VU
African wild dog	*Lycaon pictus*	EN
Aye-aye	*Daubentonia madagascariensis*	EN
Black-and-white ruffed lemur	*Varecia variegata*	CR
Black-bellied pangolin	*Phataginus tetradactyla*	CR
Bonobo	*Pan paniscus*	EN

Cheetah	*Acinonyx jubatus*	VU
Crowned lemur	*Eulemur coronatus*	EN
Eastern black rhino	*Diceros bicornis michaeli*	CR
Eastern chimpanzee	*Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*	CR
Giant ground pangolin	*Smutsia gigantea*	CR
Grauer's gorilla	*Gorilla beringei graueri*	CR
Greater bamboo lemur	*Prolemur simus*	CR
Hirola	*Beatragus hunteri*	CR
Jentink's duiker	*Cephalopus jentinki*	EN
Kordofan giraffe	*Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum*	CR
Leopard	*Panthera pardus*	VU
Maasai giraffe	*Giraffa camelopardalis*	VU
Mountain gorilla	*Gorilla beringei beringei*	EN
Northern sportive lemur	*Lepilemur septentrionalis*	CR
Okapi	*Okapia johnstonii*	EN
Pygmy hippopotamus	*Choeropsis liberiensis*	EN
Reticulated giraffe	*Giraffa camelopardalis reticulata*	EN
Ring-tailed lemur	*Lemur catta*	EN
Saiga antelope	*Saiga tatarica*	CR
Sanford's brown lemur	*Eulemur sanfordi*	EN
South-western black rhino	*Diceros bicornis bicornis*	CR
Spotted hyena	*Crocuta crocuta*	LC
Tana mangabey	*Cercocebus galeritus*	CR
Tana red colobus	*Piliocolubus rufomitratus*	CR
Temminck's ground pangolin	*Smutsia temminckii*	CR
Tonkin snub-nosed monkey	*Rhinopithecus avunculus*	CR
Western chimpanzee	*Pan troglodytes verus*	CR
White-collared lemur	*Eulemur cinereiceps*	CR
White-bellied pangolin	*Phataginus tricuspis*	CR
White rhinoceros	*Ceratotherium simum*	NT
Reptiles		
Green sea turtle	*Chelonia mydas*	EN
Pancake tortoise	*Malacochersus tornieri*	CR
Radiated tortoise	*Astrochelys radiata*	CR
Slender-snouted crocodile	*Mecistops cataphractus*	CR

ANNEX 2

List of projects funded by rapid action grants

	Grantee	Project title	Project dates	SOS Grant Amount (in Euro)
1	**Kalahari Research and Conservation** Botswana	Helping Endangered Cape vultures at Tswapong Hills, Eastern Botswana	07 June 2019 – 6 June 2020	18,298
2	**Biodiversité-Environnement et Développement Durable** Cameroon	Saving the lions of Mpem-Djim National Park in Cameroon	12 July 2019 – 11 July 2020	24,386
3	**Community-Based Environmental Conservation** Kenya	Scaling up sea turtle conservation through the establishment of a local marine managed area in Marereni	13 September 2019 – 12 September 2020	25,000
4	**African Marine Mammal Conservation Organization** Cameroon	Emergency control of salvinia molesta aquatic fern to save the African Manatee's habitat and lake Ossa's biodiversity	19 November 2019 – 18 November 2020	25,000
5	**Conservation Lower Zambezi** Zambia	Support replenish and expand the lower Zambezi detection and tracking dog unit	11 December 2019 – 10 December 2020	25,000
6	**Marwell Wildlife** Niger	Planning to save the last wild addax	19 December 2019 – 18 June 2020	8,518
7	**Environmental Foundation for Africa** Sierra Leone	Strengthening communities' capacities for forest protection, species conservation, and habitat restoration in the western area peninsular forest landscape of Sierra Leone	16 April 2020 – 15 April 2021	25,000
8	**The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** Ethiopia	Emergency measures to protect the habitat of the critically Endangered liben lark	01 June 2020 – 30 May 2021	24,392
9	**Virunga Foundation** Democratic Republic of Congo	Appui au maintien des capacités locales de suivi et de protection des populations de gorilles de montagne du Parc National des Virunga pendant la suspension des activités touristiques dues aux mesures globales de confinement liées à la pandémie de COVID-19	01 June 2020 – 30 November 2020	100,000
10	**Wildlife Conservation Society** Democratic Republic of Congo	Rehabilitating and reinforcing strategic patrol posts in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve in the Democratic Republic of Congo	24 July 2020 – 23 July 2021	100,000

11	**Bill Woodley Mount Kenya Company Limited** Kenya	Support for the Joint Wildlife Protection Team of the Mount Kenya National Park and reserve rangers	21 July 2020 – 20 February 2021	54,550
12	**Northern Rangelands Trust** Kenya	Community species protection initiative	11 August 2020 – 10 February 2021	99,852
13	**Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia** Namibia	Securing wildlife rangers and livelihoods for Indigenous San Conservancies in Namibia	12 August 2020 – 11 August 2021	90,860
14	**Wildlife Action Group** Malawi	Intensifying and scaling up law enforcement patrols and community resilience in response to COVID-19 threat	19 August 2020 – 18 August 2021	49,631
15	**Missouri Botanical Garden** Madagascar	Using community patrols to control extra pressures on timber resources at two new Malagasy protected areas	13 August 2020 – 12 August 2021	83,345
16	**Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques en Côte d'Ivoire** Ivory Coast	Reversing the COVID-19 induced trend of weakening community conservation of the Tanoé-Ehy Forest, south-eastern Côte d'Ivoire, and its threatened monkeys	20 August 2020 – 19 August 2021	98,042
17	**Omaha Zoological Society** Madagascar	Sustainability during COVID-19: Protecting biodiversity through reforestation, livelihood development, and education in Kianjavato, Torotorofotsy, Mahafaly-Lavavolo and Montagne des Français, Madagascar	25 August 2020 – 24 August 2021	81,605
18	**Environment Governance Institute Uganda** Uganda	Empowering communities for sustainable alternative livelihoods and ecosystem conservation in the Murchison belt during and post-COVID-19	14 August 2020 – 13 August 2021	58,807
19	**Elephant Connection** Zambia	Addressing multiple threats to elephants and people by reinstating the boundary fence of Zambia's Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park	17 August 2020 – 16 August 2021	10,507
20	**Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust** Zimbabwe	Conservation of elephants and the biodiversity around Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 crisis	18 August 2020 – 17 February 2021	56,485
21	**Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund** Rwanda	Protecting mountain gorillas and building socio-economic resilience after pandemic in communities surrounding Volcanoes National Park	18 August 2020 – 17 August 2021	100,000

22	**Zambian Carnivore Programme** Zambia	Pandemic Conservation: Combatting the impacts of COVID-19 on bushmeat, ivory poaching, and human-wildlife conflict	27 August 2020 – 26 August 2021	100,000
23	**African Parks** Rwanda	Supporting Akagera National Park's K9 unit to maintain the zero-poaching record of high-value species	28 August 2020 – 27 August 2021	95,410
24	**African Parks** Chad	Mitigating COVID-19 impacts on conservation and communities in the Greater Zakouma Ecosystem	28 August 2020 – 27 August 2021	99,993
25	**Conservation Through Public Health** Uganda	Emergency action to address COVID-19-related threats to the survival of mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park	04 September 2020 – 3 September 2021	100,000
26	**International Fund for Animal Welfare Inc.** Zimbabwe	Protecting Panda Masuie Forest Reserve's wildlife through sustained enforcement capacity and community support	18 September 2020 – 17 September 2021	93,881
27	**Wildlands Conservation Trust** South Africa	Rapid relief for Somkhanda Black Rhino Reserve	17 November 2020 – 16 November 2021	98,452
28	**Wildlife ACT Fund Trust** South Africa	Hluhluwe-imfolozi Park threatened species and community conservation project	01 December 2020 – 30 November 2021	99,992
29	**Birdlife South Africa** South Africa	Blue swallow habitat conservation, management, and monitoring	01 January 2021 – 31 December 2021	69,829
30	**Itombwe Génération pour l'Humanité** Democratic Republic of Congo	Conservation des gorilles et des chimpanzés dans la Reserve Naturelle d'Itombwe en République démocratique du Congo	8 February 2021 – 7 February 2022	82,604
31	**Association Projet Conservation des Grands Singes** Uganda	Protéger les chimpanzés sauvages leur habitat et les humains riverains des menaces directes et indirectes générées par le SARS-COV2	29 January 2021 – 28 January 2022	82,497
32	**Conservation Lower Zambezi** Zambia	Support to Conservation Personnel and Wildlife Protection in the Lower Zambezi during COVID-19	01 February 2021 – 31 January 2022	90,000
33	**Herp-Ghana** Ghana	Sustaining conservation efforts at the recently established Onepone Endangered Species Refuge, Ghana in the midst of a global pandemic	19 March 2021 – 18 March 2022	47,080
34	**Honeyguide Foundation** Tanzania	Wildlife and ecosystems of Northern Tanzania's biologically important Randilen Wildlife Management Area remain protected during the COVID-19 pandemic	20 April 2021 – 19 April 2022	92,003

35	**BirdLife International** Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau	Emergency conservation actions to prevent further killings of Critically Endangered vultures for belief-based use-related trade in West African countries	21 April 2021 – 20 April 2022	74,570
36	**Conservation des Espèces Marines** Ivory Coast	Continuer à sauvegarder les espèces en danger d'extinction en Côte d'Ivoire en s'adaptant aux changements imposés par la COVID	04 May 2021 – 03 May 2022	23,173
37	**Uganda Conservation Foundation** Uganda	Emergency response to an upsurge in lion poaching due to COVID-19 in two critical hotspots in Uganda	06 May 2021 – 05 May 2022	92,993
38	**Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia** Liberia	Protecting threatened species in the Gola Forest Landscape from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic	11 May 2021 – 10 May 2022	99,500
39	**Endangered Wildlife Trust** South Africa	Fire for frogs: Urgent controlled fire management to improve habitat for the Critically Endangered rough moss frog	14 May 2021 – 13 May 2022	36,380
40	**Endangered Wildlife Trust** South Africa	Supporting conservation canine units to detect and interdict illegal wildlife products and firearms on nature reserves to prevent wildlife trafficking	02 June 2021 – 01 June 2022	85,723
41	**IMPACT Madagascar** Madagascar	Increasing environmental surveillance to prevent overexploitation, and supporting communities suffering economic loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Madagascar	29 June 2021 – 28 June 2022	58,820
42	**South African National Parks** South Africa	Enabling ongoing and informed metapopulation management of the South-western black rhino (Diceros bicornis bicornis) population in South African National Parks (SanParks)	12 July 2021 – 11 July 2022	72,554
43	**Forêt pour le Développement Intégral** Democratic Republic of Congo	Résilience socio-économique et protection des gorilles de Grauer dans les forêts communautaires situées aux limites nord du parc de Kahuzi-Biega	22 July 2021 – 21 Jul 2022	74,997
44	**Koninklijke Maatschappij voor Dierkunde Antwerpen (Royal Zoological Society Antwerp)** Democratic Republic of Congo	Permanence of bonobo guards and ranger patrols at and around the expedition camp in the Lomako Yokokala Faunal Reserve, DRC	01 September 2021 – 30 August 2022	75,315
45	**Freshwater Research Centre** South Africa	Saving South Africa's most threatened migratory freshwater fish, the Clanwilliam sandfish	10 September 2021 – 09 March 2023	80,250

46	**Mabula Ground Hornbill Project** South Africa	Saving our thunderbirds: Implementation of ongoing conservation actions and urgent conservation priorities as defined by the National Biodiversity Management Plan for the species beyond the borders of protected areas	22 September 2021 – 21 January 2023	100,000
47	**Endangered Wildlife Trust** South Africa	Improving the conservation of highly threatened and endemic South African wildlife through habitat protection, improved knowledge, and stakeholder participation	05 October 2021 – 04 October 2022	96,526
48	**Tsavo Trust Ltd** Kenya	Maintaining anti-poaching field operations in the Tsavo Conservation Area, Kenya. Elephant security inside and outside the Tsavo National Parks	13 December 2021 – 12 December 2022	99,943
49	**Selati Wilderness Foundation** South Africa	Monitoring and protection of biodiversity on Selati Game Reserve	20 December 2021 – 19 December 2022	99,908
50	**Wildlife ACT Fund Trust** South Africa	Tembe Elephant Park threatened species and community conservation project	29 January 2022 – 28 November 2023	92,928
51	**Friends of Tokai Park** South Africa	Active restoration of the fragmented habitat of the Endangered western leopard toad in Tokai Park, Cape Town	01 February 2022 – 31 July 2022	96,652
52	**Wildnerness Foundation Africa** South Africa	Buffering South Africa's unique succulent species from the impacts of the illegal wildlife trade	13 July 2022 – 12 December 2023	92,389
53	**Wildnerness Foundation Africa** South Africa	Enabling continuation of monitoring and appropriate management of threatened seabirds in the Addo Elephant National Park MPA	13 July 22 – 31 December 2023	99,703
54	**Selati Wilderness Foundation NPC** South Africa	Protection of the Critically Endangered Lillie Cycad Encephalartos dyerianus	10 August 2022 – 31 May 2024	99,546

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