

The continent of Africa is host to the most diverse and extensive wildlife resources on Earth. From mountain gorillas living in misty mountain forests, to great populations of elephants in the savanna, to the chase of predators and prey in the grasslands, Africa is rich in wildlife and wild lands. These resources are at once an invaluable part of the natural heritage of the entire planet, and a rich asset for many separate nations struggling to find resources to help develop themselves and improve the lives of their people.



PHOTO BY CRAIG SHOLLEY

As populations, cities, agriculture and development grow and spread throughout Africa, these natural ecosystems are being encroached upon and fragmented into ever smaller spaces. Wetlands and swamps are drained. Forest are cut down and converted to lumber or charcoal. Grasslands are tilled under to make way for fields or new homesteads. Loss of habitat is now the single biggest threat facing Africa's wild species of plants and animals.

Forced into unnatural boundaries, wild animals lose the ability to behave naturally. Migration routes are disrupted and wildlife are unable to change their feeding grounds with the seasons or to exchange bloodlines with others of their species. Small, isolated populations living in small parks or on game ranches lose their health and vitality and ultimately

die out. As wild species disappear, the country is poorer both biologically and economically.

## Creation of African Heartlands

The essential need to conserve Africa's remaining vital ecosystems inspired AWF to mark a new era in African conservation by establishing the African Heartlands Program. Heartlands are large, cohesive conservation landscapes which are biologically important and have the scope to maintain healthy populations of wild species and natural processes well into the future. They also form a sizeable economic unit in which tourism or other natural resource-based activities can contribute significantly to the livelihoods of people living in the area. Most of the African Heartlands include a combination of government lands (like national parks) community-owned lands, and lands owned by individuals or the private sector.

AWF has performed extensive scientific research and feasibility studies to select and prioritize Africa's most viable conservation landscapes. In these vast conservation landscapes, which frequently cross national boundaries, AWF works with local partners to undertake concrete activities that protect more land for conservation while mitigating threats to these valuable resources.

Specific Heartland activities include:

- Teaming with local governments and partners on the ground to develop detailed plans for the conservation of these areas;
- Strengthening the infrastructure and management of national parks and game reserves that frequently constitute the core of these landscapes;
- Identifying and securing wildlife migration corridors, water sources and other critical sites which must be protected for the long term health of the landscape;
- Working with rural communities to develop plans to ways to manage their land and wildlife resources as part of the Heartland;
- Assisting these same communities with technical assistance and capital to engage in wildlife related enterprises, such as ecotourism, to improve their livelihoods from conservation;
- Working with the private sector to harness the ideas, energy and resources which they can bring to conservation in the area;
- Conducting on-going research and monitoring across the Heartland to ensure the health and viability of priority conservation targets.



## The Heartlands

### Four Corners

Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia are represented in the aptly named Four Corners Heartland. The mighty Zambezi River cuts a watery path through the center of this rich African landscape, providing essential water to the spectacular ecosystems contained in this region. Four Corners is home to many great African species including the largest concentration of elephants in Africa, lions, cheetah, giraffe, hippopotamus, rhinoceros, wild dogs, leopard, kingfishers, great herons, bream and tiger fish as well as many medicinal and endemic species of plants. World-renowned Victoria Falls is found in this Heartland.

### Kilimanjaro

This Heartland draws its name from majestic Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak and contains a variety of ecosystems from semi-arid savanna to wetlands. Kenya's Amboseli National Park, six large Maasai group ranches, Lake Natron, the low-lying savannas of Longido and Tanzania's Kilimanjaro and Arusha National Parks encompass this Heartland. The world's best known and most studied population of African elephants live here in Amboseli and the greater Amboseli ecosystem, as well as endangered species of cheetah, wild dogs and declining tree species of juniper and ebony.

### Limpopo

The enormous Limpopo Heartland spans the three diverse countries of Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe and is larger than the entire country of Switzerland. Centered on the Limpopo River, this Heartland includes South Africa's popular Kruger National Park. Host to more than 1.5 million visitors a year, Kruger National Park has more wildlife species than any other game sanctuary in Africa, including 10,000 elephants. Savanna, dry woodland, rivers and floodplains support rare ungulates such as Lichenstein hartebeest, roan and sable antelope, predators, elephant, hippopotamus, a rich avifauna, insects and diverse aquatic life.

### Maasai Steppe

Stretching from the escarpment of the Great Rift through the baobabs of Tarangire to the Maasai Steppe, this Tanzanian Heartland is a rich and continuous mosaic of landscapes. Herds of elephants, large predators, many varieties of birds and locally endangered ungulates – fringe-eared oryx, lesser kudu and gerenuk inhabit the varied terrain. Lakes Manyara and Burungi, catchment forests, swamps, and baobab/acacia savanna form the core conservation areas of this breathtaking Heartland.

### Samburu

Located just north of the equator in the rain-shadow of Mt. Kenya, this Heartland includes parts of Mt. Kenya National Park and Samburu National Reserve, plus extensive ranch and communal lands. Important elephant migration corridors exist in this Heartland, as well as northern specialty species like reticulated giraffe, Somali ostrich, beisa oryx and gerenuk. Free-ranging lions, hyenas and leopards live along side avifauna, wild dogs, Grevy's zebra and black rhinoceros. Intact wet montane forests, dry cedar forests, Loroki plateau grassland, acacia-grassland and the Ewaso Nyiro River are part of the Samburu Heartland.

### Virunga

In the transboundary region of Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the volcanic highlands of the Virungas and Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park shelter the last 668 mountain gorillas in the world. Chimpanzees, golden monkeys, forest elephants, giant forest hogs, African buffaloes, and a rich variety of avifauna, reptiles and amphibians share this Heartland of incredible biodiversity.

### Zambezi

The three-country, transboundary region of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Mozambique includes a range of diverse lands along the middle stretch of the Zambezi River and incorporates some of the most outstanding terrestrial and riverine wildlife viewing and scenic landscapes in southern Africa. The Zambezi river, tributaries, acacia floodplain and interconnecting wetlands are home to many species of plant and animal life including hippo, elephant, buffalo, impala, sable and roan antelope, eland, nyala, crocodile, black rhinoceros, wild dogs, cheetah and lion.