

# African Wildlife News



1961–2011



Home to elephants, rhinos, and more, African Heartlands are conservation landscapes large enough to sustain a diversity of species for centuries to come. In these landscapes—places like Kilimanjaro and Samburu—AWF and its partners are pioneering lasting conservation strategies that benefit wildlife and people alike.

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YOUR SUPPORT AT WORK IN THE AFRICAN HEARTLANDS



Elephants crossing the Zambezi River, in the Sekute Conservation Area. AWF helped establish the area with the Sekute Chiefdom.

## Back to School With AWF Support, New School Opens

In the Kazungula Heartland, one of Africa's largest elephant populations roams a vast landscape comprising more than 18,000 square miles of viable wildlife habitat. African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) is committed to securing habitat here for the elephant population and mitigating human-elephant conflict in a manner that improves people's livelihoods.

Just west of Victoria Falls, AWF established the Sekute Conservation Area in partnership with the Sekute Chiefdom. The organization helped the people of Sekute form the Sekute Community Development Trust, in which they now hold their land.

Identifying two critical elephant corridors, AWF has worked with the local community to designate a 50,000-acre section of the Chiefdom as the Sekute Conservancy. The conservancy gives the world's largest pachyderm population much-needed space and resources to thrive. Furthermore, the Sekute Wildlife Conservancy, if properly managed, has both tourism potential and a chance to sustainably contribute to carbon sequestration, thus mitigating the impacts of climate change.

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# Machache

**A**s AWF's CEO, I enjoy sharing highlights of our successes and new initiatives. But as you are well aware, within these success stories, there are recurring challenges that remind us why we must be ever vigilant in our mission to save Africa's most threatened species.

I am deeply saddened to tell you that a young adult male mountain gorilla—blackback Mizano of the Habinyanja group—was recently killed in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park. The gorilla was reportedly found dead with evidence of spear wounds about the shoulders and neck. An official release by the Ugandan Wildlife Authority suggests poachers had killed a duiker, a small antelope, and then stabbed the gorilla when they unexpectedly came upon him in the forest. (See awf.org for more details.)

While this is by no means a cold case (wildlife authorities have already made several arrests), it is surely one that has left us all shaken and grieving. Bwindi has a small population of just over 300 gorillas. At 12 years old, Mizano was the only blackback of the Habinyanja group. Time will tell how Mizano's death will affect the group's future, but of one thing we can be certain: It leaves a huge hole and is a big loss to this small population.

The attack on Mizano is by no means an isolated case of human–mountain gorilla conflict. Recently I received an update on the status of a baby gorilla I had named at Rwanda's annual Kwita Izina ceremony three years ago. I was thrilled to learn Sacola, named after the community trust

that runs Sabyinyo Silverback Lodge and which AWF helped establish, was happily living among the 17 mountain gorillas of the Sabyinyo family group. Only a few months before the report, however, Sacola had gotten caught in an antelope snare left by poachers. I do not wish to think of the report I would have received if area experts had not been able to free her.

In the wake of Mizano's death, I want to thank you for all you do to help mountain gorillas and Africa's other majestic species. Besides funding our anti-poaching work, your support contributes to many important successes, including the recent birth of another set of twins in the Susa group in the nearby Virunga Volcanoes.

Because I had a lot I wanted to say about the Virunga Heartland's special mountain gorillas, there's no space to point out all the other important developments unfolding in the Heartlands (so, please, read on!). I do want to again thank you for remaining a committed AWF member. Like you, I believe saving Africa's wildlife is a critically important thing to do.

Thank you for being part of AWF.

Patrick Bergin  
Chief Executive Officer

Thanks to the following special contributors to this issue of *African Wildlife News*: Jake Abell, Kathleen Garrigan, Madeline Johnson, and Sheryl Silverstein.



Thadeus Mutesiuki Bhamungu



## AWF Plants over 25,000 New Trees

**T**he Mau Forest complex in Kenya's Rift Valley region is suffering from an ecological disaster created by extensive encroachment and deforestation. To combat this threat, AWF teamed up with the Interim Coordinating Secretariat (ICS), Kenya Wildlife Service, and Kenya Forest Service to revitalize this once pristine forest.

Home to breathtaking flora and fauna, the Mau is East Africa's largest closed-canopy forest ecosystem and Kenya's largest natural "water tower," storing rainwater during wet months and releasing it during dry periods. The 400,000-hectare forest forms the upper catchment of over a dozen rivers. These rivers are the lifelines of the region, feeding lakes and wildlife reserves, including Lake Victoria and the famed Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Years of indiscriminate forest clearing and settlement have destroyed the Mau's ecosystem, drying up the rivers and setting off frequent droughts. Over 25 percent of the Mau forest cover was lost to logging, burning, and farming. Fewer trees mean less rain, which means less water drains into the rivers and lakes. Already some of Mau's rivers have shifted from a perennial status to seasonal.

The dwindling rivers are crippling Kenya's water supply; agricultural sector, including tea; hydroelectricity projects; and its spectacular wildlife populations. Since Lake Nakuru National Park is the most visited park in Kenya, any damage to the lake's ecological health is a threat to the tourism industry and could also result in serious damage to the nation's economic health.

In May, AWF launched a restoration project around the Enderit River, the eastern side of the Mau forest, by planting more than 25,000 trees. AWF plans to adopt and rehabilitate the entire Enderit block in a public-private partnership initiated by the ICS.

"AWF will mobilize resources to restore the degraded parts of the forest, develop a participatory management plan, assist local community forest associations to implement annual work plans, and initiate forest-based carbon trading through Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation mechanisms," says AWF President Helen Gichohi. ■

# Gorilla Twins Born in Rwanda, While Poaching Kills Gorilla in Uganda

**T**win gorillas were born in May in Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, just the seventh pair to be born in the park in the last 40 years. Populations of the world's remaining mountain gorillas exist in protected areas in AWF's Virunga Heartland, which spans the borders of Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda.



Abel Musana/Rwanda Development Board

News of the births prompted a spontaneous collective singing of "Happy Birthday" by a contingency of conservation workers from the three countries.

However, the news isn't all good. Poachers killed a blackback gorilla in June in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Reportedly, park staff found the gorilla dead with signs of spear wounds. Suspected poachers have been arrested, and the Ugandan Wildlife Authority is working with local community leaders to investigate the killing and discuss possible preventive measures. Given that a recent census counted just over 780 mountain gorillas left in central Africa, one death has a significant impact on this fragile species.

AWF and its International Gorilla Conservation Programme partners, Flora and Fauna International and World Wide Fund for Nature, have worked for years to ensure the health of mountain gorilla populations and will continue to do so in the face of this sobering loss. Mixed news like this reminds us that while we have much to celebrate, there is hard work ahead of us in ensuring the continued viability of mountain gorillas in central Africa. ■

# Weaving a Brighter Future for Women



With access to basic technologies in sustainable agriculture, the Djolu women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (above) are transforming their lives and taking ownership of their future.

**N**ear Tarangire National Park in Northern Tanzania sits a *banda*, or business stall, where women in multihued frocks spread out on a cool floor and deftly weave strips of palm fronds into baskets, floor mats, purses, and other colorful products.

They are members of the Mshikamano Mwada Women's Group, composed of 30 women, all from Mwada village, one of 10 villages now part of the Burunge Wildlife Management Area.

AWF, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), constructed the *banda* for the Mwada women to be used as a business office, as a store, and as a meeting place where they can receive training in business skills, marketing, and product development and design.

At the *banda*, the hands of the Mwada women weave not only baskets and mats but also a future in which they and their daughters will play a greater and more meaningful role within their homes, their communities, and their country. They are learning that conservation can open doors to opportunities previously closed to them.

According to Josephine Simon, community conservation and gender officer in AWF's Maasai Steppe Heartland, the enterprise has been a lifeline for many women. "The women feel very lucky," Simon says. "If you talk to individual women, they are going through a lot of challenges. Some of them, their husbands have died. Some of them, they have kids who are disabled. So the money they get from selling their products is a lot of money for them."

**Read about other women's groups AWF is supporting, and learn how, from chickens to pottery, mothers and daughters are weaving, molding, and threading their way to a better future.**



**"Women play a big role in the management of natural resources in Africa. I do not see conservation succeeding without women."**

— Josephine Simon

to take her disabled daughter for medical check-ups in Arusha and nearby towns, something she could not afford before the enterprise.

"Women are the backbone of most families. In addition, they play a big role in the management of natural resources and the production of food in Africa and in most parts of the world," says Simon. "I do not see conservation succeeding without women."



## Sangaiwe Women's Group, Pottery Enterprise, Maasai Steppe Heartland, Tanzania

In the Burunge Wildlife Management Area, the Sangaiwe Women's Group, with help from AWF and USAID, established a pottery enterprise, providing decorative garden and house pottery for the local market. AWF constructed a *banda* and kiln and hired trainers to enhance the women's business, marketing, and pottery skills. In addition to their pottery enterprise, the Sangaiwe women have also started raising chickens for sale in local markets.



Clay pots waiting to be fired.

## The Kuku Project, Samburu Heartland, Kenya

In 2008, AWF approached the women of Nkiloriti Group Ranch in the Samburu Heartland and, at their request, helped them jumpstart a chicken enterprise, referred to now as The Kuku Project. AWF built a chicken coop, complete with a heater and water tank, and purchased 80 fledgling chicks for the women, who are now selling special kuku eggs to local lodges. The income generated from The Kuku Project has allowed the women to purchase everything from clothes for their children to medicine for their livestock.



Samburu ladies and girls, part of the Kuku Project at Nkiloriti Group Ranch.



Baskets woven by members of the Women's Handicraft Association in Kinigi.

## Esilalei Women's Cultural Boma, Naisho Women's Group, Maasai Steppe Heartland, Tanzania

On the road from Arusha to Tarangire National Park lies the Esilalei Women's Cultural Boma, operated by the Naisho Women's Group from nearby Esilalei village. USAID and AWF began working with the Naisho Women's Group in 2001 to help enhance the quality of their handicrafts, as well as provide business and marketing training. In 2003, a permanent *banda* was built for the Naisho women where they could better display their wares and attract passing tourists. More recently, the Naisho Women's Group has started a new enterprise—buying cattle to fatten and sell at local markets at a higher value. ■



Esilalei Women's Cultural Boma.



# Wildlife Watch

AWF/Amy Cobden



In a country with a tumultuous past, Amy Cobden, a Ph.D. student from Emory University, has dedicated the last two years to the future of the bonobo species. Cobden has worked tirelessly out of the Lomako Conservation Science Center, an AWF-funded facility in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC.) Due to the country's history, there is a considerable gap in research on bonobos, which are found only in the DRC. Bonobos share as much DNA with humans as chimpanzees, and as close relatives to humans, they have a significant evolutionary importance.

The first goal of Cobden's project was to habituate the bonobos in the Iyema region. Habituation is the process of acclimating bonobos to the presence of humans. It is a tedious necessary first step, according to Cobden. "You can't do research unless the bonobos are comfortable in your presence," Cobden says. The process of habituation requires tracking and an immense amount of patience. Amy can tell by the great apes' behavior whether they are uneasy or not. Cobden asserts that if the bonobos are not habituated, "The results are going to be biased toward whatever reaction they have to humans." Due to hunting pressures in the past, bonobos are very wary of humans.

Cobden mapped the different vegetation in the area to determine the abundance or scarcity of food sources available to the bonobos. With the help of local guides called *pisteurs*, she was able to identify much of the plant life in the region. She also collected samples of bonobo feces and urine to identify what the bonobos are ingesting. She will analyze the samples for levels of stress hormones and link the bonobo behaviors she observed with stress levels and food availability.

Cobden believes that this interest and curiosity in our distant cousin can promote a much broader interest in DRC. She hopes the outcome will generate the possibility for an increase in infrastructure, in jobs, and in an economy that is based on DRC's unique natural resources.

A project like this can have an impact on a community on many different levels. On the local level, the project employs someone from every village and ethnic

group represented in the surrounding area. On a broader level, a project like this helps transform the opinions of the local population and demonstrates the importance of supporting the conservation of these animals and their habitat for years to come. ■



Amy Cobden photographing her subjects as part of her research on bonobos for AWF.



The bonobo research provides employment to area villages and helps transform locals' opinions on conservation.

## Thank You!

Thanks to all the dedicated supporters who voted for AWF's bonobo conservation work in the Congo Heartland, which was selected as a finalist by The Walt Disney Company to receive funding through its Friends for Change: Project Green. This program encourages people from all over the world to choose between five different conservation projects, and AWF is happy to report that your efforts helped AWF receive the most votes. This secured the 1st place award of \$100,000. Thanks again to both The Walt Disney Company and our Friends for Change! ■



John Butler

AWF/Amy Cobden