



# AFRICAN WILDLIFE News

FALL 2021

## UNDERSTANDING APES

How your support is helping great apes thrive

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Live a Little Differently*

YOUR SUPPORT AT WORK ACROSS AFRICA'S LANDSCAPES



Our mission is to ensure wildlife and wild lands thrive in modern Africa.

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# CELEBRATING AFRICAN LEADERSHIP AND 60 YEARS OF AWF



Dear AWF Friends,

To a unique degree among conservation NGOs, AWF recognizes the role of Africa's people in realizing the vision of a modern, thriving Africa with wildlife and wild lands at its core.

The voices we uplift, especially on the global stage, must be those of Africans — the people who bear the real costs and benefits of conservation decisions and the only ones who collectively can drive lasting, large-scale change.

And during this year, AWF's 60th, we will be celebrating the leaders who tirelessly champion conservation on their continent. That is why I am so happy to welcome former Niger president Mahamadou Issoufou, who has just joined AWF's Board of Trustees, to the AWF community. He is exercising the kind of visionary leadership that will help ensure Africa does not rashly sacrifice its natural resources in the name of progress.

President Issoufou has mobilized and supported his home village in conservation work that's yielding real results. In recent years, the village has reforested degraded habitat and helped fight desertification through the planting of tree seedlings over thousands of hectares.

The former president is not stopping at the borders of his village. The Foundation Issoufou Mahamadou, formally launched in June, has committed to the restoration of ecosystems and protection of biodiversity. President Issoufou's vision is a carbon sink created through 10 million new trees.

60 years of experience and the lessons we have learned have informed our bold and imperative vision of conservation in Africa. We know African leadership must be at the core of these critical decisions being made, they are the only ones who fully understand what is at stake.

Which is why we are so excited to commence AWF's 60th anniversary – celebrating visionary conservation leadership – with the launch of the Benjamin Mkapa African Wildlife Photography Awards. This competition honors the life and legacy of His Excellency Benjamin Mkapa, former president of Tanzania who served as a leader on AWF's board from 2011 until his passing in 2020. It is our hope that these awards not only highlight African conservation perspectives through the arts, but inspire engagement and discussion of conservation throughout the African continent. The awards ceremony on October 28, will mark the beginning of a year where we will not just celebrate past success, but demonstrate how those successes inform our future.

I hope you will feel as inspired as I do about AWF's innovative, tireless work and the critical importance of supporting dedicated and far-thinking conservation leaders.

Sincerely,

Kaddu Sebunya  
Chief Executive Officer

# Uplisting Elephants

For 20 years now, Africa's elephants have been regarded as two subspecies, the forest elephant and the savanna elephant. It was only in March of this year that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) categorized them separately and in doing so, uplisted the status of each. The African forest elephant is now listed as critically endangered and the African savanna elephant as endangered. Previously they had been listed as vulnerable.

The African forest elephant is found in lowland tropical forests of Central Africa and West Africa, while the savanna

elephant favors various habitats including grasslands and deserts.

According to the IUCN assessment, the savanna elephant population declined by at least 60 percent over the last 50 years while the number of forest elephants fell by more than 86 percent within recent decades. Poaching for ivory and loss of habitat are two of the leading contributors to the species' decline.

**AWF elephant protection:** Not all the news is terrible; some elephant subpopulations have grown in the past decade thanks to conservation work, including our own efforts.

AWF partners with governments and communities to protect or even expand critical corridors, so wildlife has room to roam. We also support elephant conservation through a suite of projects designed to counter wildlife trafficking at all stages, from poaching to illegal sales in the underground marketplace.

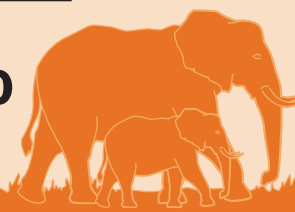
"AWF is fighting to conserve elephants *in situ* (in their natural habitats) and reducing trafficking and the demand for ivory in Asia and across the world — educating consumers about the real cost of ivory products," said AWF Vice President of Species Conservation and Science, Philip Muruthi.

## AFRICAN SAVANNA ELEPHANT

Status:  
**ENDANGERED**

Various habitats including  
grasslands and deserts

DECLINE  
↓ 60%

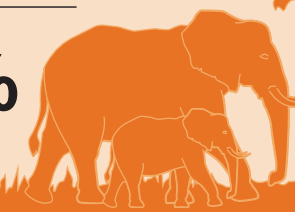


## AFRICAN FOREST ELEPHANT

Status:  
**CRITICALLY-ENDANGERED**

Lowland tropical forests of Central  
Africa and West Africa

DECLINE  
↓ 86%



# COLLARING LIONS

AWF and the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) recently joined forces to collar lions at the LUMO Community Wildlife Conservancy.

The operation was a pilot project addressing human-wildlife conflict within the conservancy — a vital wildlife migration corridor in the Tsavo ecosystem and host to approximately 650 large mammals. The radio collars will deliver data KWS can use to manage the conservancy and support rapid-response teams that mobilize whenever big cats roam close to nearby settlements. (The teams usually respond by alerting villagers and humanely directing the lions away.)

The satellite-linked collars, which do not affect the lions' behavior, transmit signals that allow rangers to track the cats up to 5 kilometers away. Because lions are active at night, making it difficult to follow their movement, the devices will provide an unprecedented picture of the cats' real-time positions.

In the last two decades, lions saw a 43 percent population decline in Africa. AWF has been working tirelessly to protect this species through a comprehensive counter wildlife trafficking program that includes ranger and prosecutor capacity building, contraband detection at hotspots, and cybercrime-investigation support for wildlife authorities.



Alison Langevad

# COUNTING KENYA'S WILDLIFE

*In May of 2021 the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) set out on an ambitious goal — to complete a census of all Kenya's wildlife. It's a continuation of large-mammal surveys conducted every three years, but more comprehensive in the range covered and species counted.*

AWF, a key partner of KWS, provided financial and technical support for the survey. Kenneth Kimitei, senior ecologist, coordinated AWF's participation in the census in the Tsavo Conservation Area in the Tsavo-Mkomazi landscape. During the survey he was a Front Seat Observer (FSO), flying in the cockpit of the Cessna four-seater plane with the pilot. "The role of the FSO is to assist the pilot in flying on the proposed flight lines (usually north-south transects) and to maintain speed (at most 180 km/h) and altitude (300-350 feet above ground). In addition, the FSO coordinates with the rear-seat observers in conducting the counts, providing GPS locations for the sightings and alerting them of wildlife underneath the aircraft," he said.

Once collected, the data is downloaded, transcribed, and embedded in a larger database. In the Tsavo landscape, the data is used to establish trends and distribution of key wildlife species and to catalog threats and pressures to the ecosystem, said Amos Muthiuru, AWF species conservation assistant. With this data, landscape managers can make informed decisions about the distribution of resources (patrols, cameras, etc).

AWF isn't stopping at the Kenya border. The Tsavo-Mkomazi landscape falls in both Kenya and Tanzania, so AWF is helping the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute to cover the Tanzania side. Kimitei highlighted the importance of surveying both sides of the border to ensure an accurate landscape count: "The current population of elephants in Tsavo may be less compared to those counted



“...it's important to know how many elephants are on the Tanzanian side to determine if the total number of elephants has declined or if they have simply moved further south.”



in 2017, and thus knowing the population in Mkomazi is key." Because habitats don't stop at country borders, it's important to know how many elephants are on the Tanzanian side to determine if the total number of elephants has declined or if they have simply moved further south. Only with this information can landscape managers properly analyze the impact of past conservation measures and plan the best path ahead.

Even as the 2021 survey concludes and the data is examined, our team is readying for the next census. The future of wildlife surveys is up in the air, literally. According to Muthiuru, drones may be introduced

sometime soon: "It is a promising technology that might be cost-effective and consume less time compared to the current methods of survey." Whatever the future holds, AWF will continue to support wildlife however we can, believing every animal counts.

## LEGACY PROFILE



### VALERIE WATT *Live a little differently*

*"After 25 years as a park ranger, I hoped to volunteer in Kenya and perhaps become a biologist, honoring my childhood dream of being another Jane Goodall. Then, I looked at what my heroes are doing today and realized that African conservation organizations don't need another first-world retiree stepping in; they need support for their programs. The best thing I can give is my resources.*

*As a ranger, I taught visitors that 20 percent of the population uses 80 percent of the world's resources. Our lifestyles have consequences. In order to live with myself, I do things a little*

*differently. I live in a mobile-home community to limit my expenses and my environmental footprint. I avoid air travel — in fact, I haven't visited Africa yet because I'm trying to find a greener way to get there than flying. And while I will pass on to my sister and her children my inheritance from selling the family home, all the money I earn will go to conservation. The more modestly I live, the more I can put in my trust.*

*I have faith in how AWF's model — focusing on every part of the picture — will survive. I am proud that that will be my legacy."*

## Wildlife Watch: AFRICAN BLACK-FOOTED CAT

It's the smallest wild cat in Africa and the second-smallest wild cat in the world, weighing in at 2-6 pounds. And though it may look like the common house cat, the African black-footed cat is far fiercer. It kills more prey in one night than a leopard does in six months, and it has a hunting success rate three times higher than that of a lion.

African black-footed cats are found in the savannas, dry grasslands, and deserts of southern Africa. But you're unlikely to observe one in the wild; their nocturnal habits, skittish nature, small size, and spotted camouflage allow them to keep the low profile they rely on as hunters.

As a small predator it has an accelerated metabolism that keeps it hungry and hunting all night long. Its strategies are varied, but each is effective. For example, it may stealthily stalk or bound through a field of tall grass to flush out rodents. Or, if in a retired mood, it may sit quietly at a rodent burrow's edge for up to 2 hours, waiting for prey to emerge.



They're solitary animals. Kittens stay with their mothers for the first few months after birth; in that time, the mothers will bring back live prey for the kittens to learn how to hunt. Then, once they're independent, the kittens will set out on their own, finding abandoned termite mounds and burrows to make their dens.

But this elusive cat is under threat, vulnerable to extinction from habitat loss and destruction. To help keep African black-footed cats stealthily sneaking, AWF works with communities to establish sustainable land-management plans and community conservancies — making conservation work for both wildlife and the people who share the land.



# UNDERSTANDING APES

*How your support is helping great apes thrive*

Martin Harvey

## *What is it about great apes that so captivates us?*

There are many possible answers: their playfulness and sense of mischief, the care and compassion with which they look after their young, or just the familiar gaze of one great ape staring into the eyes of another.

Four primates qualify for the title of non-human great ape: orangutans, gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos. But just what makes these apes so great? Larger brain-to-body ratio, higher intelligence, and longer lifespans, to start. The lack of tails separate apes from monkeys while size separates them from the remaining apes such as gibbons. Great apes are more than just large primates with long lives and bigger brains though; they each share more than 98 percent of their DNA with humans. They use tools. They have complex interpersonal relationships. Evidence suggests communities of each species are even able to develop cultures. They are exceptional creatures.

Three of these apes, gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos, live exclusively in Africa. They are indispensable to the African landscape, but their presence is not guaranteed. All species of great apes are either endangered or critically endangered, threatened by the illegal wildlife trade, zoonotic diseases, and conflict with humans. Habitats are disappearing due to climate change and expanding human populations.

**Great apes are predicted to lose 85 to 94 percent of their range in Africa within the next 30 years.**

The situation is dire, but there is reason for hope. We are working hard each day to ensure Africa's great apes remain a fixture of Africa's wild lands.

### **GORILLAS**

They seem intimidating: 300 to 485 pounds, 4-6 feet tall, an arm-span 8 feet wide, and a bite force twice that of a lion. But gorillas are actually gentle and peaceful animals. They're primarily herbivores and spend the day eating plants and resting. They move less than a mile a day and each night make a new nest of leaves and branches to sleep in. Other than occasional interactive group face-offs, gorillas are serene and shy.

Gorillas exist in Africa as two species (eastern and western) and, unfortunately, both species are critically endangered. So AWF works with communities surrounding gorilla habitats to ensure



the apes' continuous protection. In 2018, we helped protect mountain gorillas (a subspecies of eastern gorilla) in Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park by donating 27 hectares of land adjacent to the protected area, expanding the park for the first time in 40 years. AWF's Senior Vice President Craig Sholley said the plan will "expand the park's boundaries for gorillas while simultaneously devising a green growth plan around the park to improve community livelihoods."

While gorillas are far from out of the woods, there is good news for these great apes. Subspecies surveys have shown substantial population gains. The latest mountain gorilla census put their numbers over 1,000 — an inspiring rebound from their low point in the early 1980s, when less than 250 remained. And a study published this June updated the global population estimate of eastern lowland gorillas (a subspecies of eastern gorillas) to 6,800 individuals — almost twice the previous estimate.

### **CHIMPANZEES**

Probably the most well-known of the great apes is the charismatic chimpanzee. Smaller in size than the gorilla, they measure in around 4 feet tall and weigh between 60 and 150 pounds. Though chimpanzees can be prone to aggression, they are also intelligent, playful, and social creatures. They're so playful that they've even been observed performing a rhythmic "dancing" in the rain.

In Cameroon's Campo Ma'an, AWF's Technical Advisor Lesly Akenji works to

protect the resident chimpanzees. "Here we are doing great ape monitoring and habitat protection," Akenji said. But it's not just that. AWF also works with the local communities, helping them to develop sustainable alternative livelihoods that put less stress on chimpanzee habitat. For example, we work with local organization Tropical Forest and Rural Development, training women from neighboring communities in developing sustainable incomes by selling non-timber forest products.

And, in positive news for the local chimpanzee populations, AWF's work seems to be helping. Camera traps in Campo Ma'an have captured images of mother chimpanzees carrying infants — a positive sign that the chimpanzees feel comfortable and secure in their surroundings.

### **BONOBOS**

It was only in 1929 that bonobos were identified as a separate species from chimpanzees. Though they may look similar, bonobos differ significantly in their social structure and behavior. Bonobos are more peaceful and have never been known to kill one of their own. They favor sex both as a means to resolve conflict or to socially engage one another.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the only country where bonobos live in the wild, AWF supports bonobo populations in the Lomako-Yokokala Faunal Reserve. We've been active here for over a decade, protecting critical populations of bonobos and preserving their dense forest habitat.



Billy Dodson



Billy Dodson

With the technical support of Village Enterprise and the financial support of Arcus Foundation, AWF works with the riparian communities of the Lomako-Yokokala Faunal Reserve to create microenterprises, empowering the communities and reducing pressure on bonobos and their habitats. And we've seen results, recording increased bonobo-nest sightings.

Nowhere outside of Africa can these great apes be found in the wild. It's a big responsibility to be trusted with the care of so many great apes, but it is also an extraordinary opportunity — and we couldn't do it without your support.

*Thank you.*

- CELEBRATE -  
**60 YEARS OF AWF**

by visiting Africa with us in 2022!

With the new year arriving before you know it, it's time to start planning your adventures. For 2022, we have six exciting safaris planned to Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Tanzania. With 20 years of experience crafting stellar safari experiences, AWF is uniquely positioned to offer exceptional itineraries that blend unforgettable wildlife viewing with chances to see AWF's projects and learn about critical conservation issues.

To learn more about our safaris, please reach out to our safari program manager

**CARTER SMITH**  
csmith@awf.org

or Twitter  
@CarterSafari



## Searching for the *heart* of conservation

A new short film, *The Heart of Conservation*, celebrates the opening of AWF's two new Classroom Africa schools in a remote region of Uganda, near Kidepo Valley National Park. In this poignant documentary — produced by the AWF Council member who supported the schools' construction — rangers, teachers, and students share the impact these schools have already made, reflecting especially on the significance of conservation education and the students' future as stewards of nature.

Watch now: [AWF.ORG/HEART](http://AWF.ORG/HEART)



**It's not too late to thank a ranger.**

Visit [awf.org/thank-rangers](http://awf.org/thank-rangers) to send a note of gratitude to a ranger for their hard work protecting wildlife!

Say thanks: [AWF.ORG/THANK-RANGERS](http://AWF.ORG/THANK-RANGERS)

## ON OCTOBER 28, 2021 AWF IS TURNING 60!

Stay tuned for events and announcements. Thank you for all your support over the years, we couldn't have made it to 60 without you.

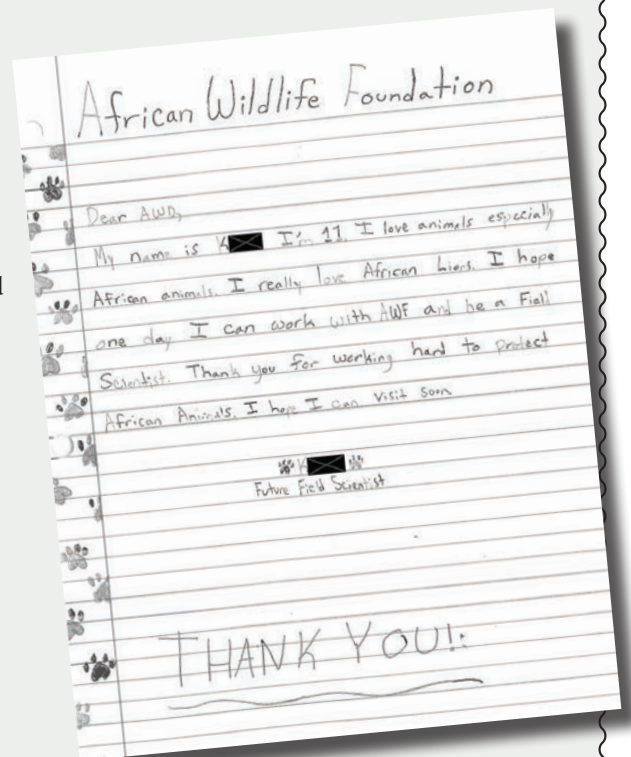
Visit our website for the latest updates and content:

[AWF.ORG/60YEARS](http://AWF.ORG/60YEARS)

## Community Connection

We were delighted to receive a letter from K in the mail! K loves all African animals, especially lions. "I hope one day I can work with AWF and be a Field Scientist," K wrote.

We think you'll be an excellent field scientist, K! Thanks for the letter, and keep up your enthusiasm!



### CONNECT WITH US



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