

# RESILIENT AFRICA

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2026: Volume I

THE FUTURE  
OF WILDLIFE:  
NEGOTIATING  
SPACE



BUILDING A FUTURE WHERE  
PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE THRIVE



KENYA: WHITE RHINOS IN NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK.

## How People and Wildlife Can Thrive Together

Today, Africa's rapid development is reshaping wildlife habitat and changing the ways people and wildlife coexist.

Our conservation science team uses a multi-pronged approach to conserve key species in their natural habitats, including elephants, large carnivores, great apes, giraffes, and rhinos. We apply cutting-edge science to understand wildlife movement, monitor threats, and map strategies for how people and wildlife can share space. We work to deter wildlife and habitat crime by strengthening law enforcement capacity to detect, deter, investigate, and prosecute. And we support good wildlife management through national policy engagement and providing on-the-ground training and resources for wildlife authorities and community scouts. This work helps to secure habitat, prevent crime, reduce human-wildlife conflict, and promote coexistence.

As Vice President for Species Conservation and Science, Dr. Philip Muruthi leads AWF's strategies to protect and manage priority species and ensures our conservation efforts are firmly grounded in science. We recently spoke with him to get his insights on how wildlife and people can successfully coexist.



**Dr. Philip Muruthi holds an M.S. and Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology from Princeton University. Over more than 25 years at AWF, he has played a central role in shaping our conservation approach and brings deep insight into the future of wildlife on a rapidly changing continent. Based at AWF's headquarters in Nairobi, he has served on numerous national committees and task forces, including Kenya's Task Force on Migratory Corridors and Dispersal Areas, as well as species recovery planning and conservation policy initiatives.**

### What is the biggest challenge facing wildlife in Africa today?

**Dr. Muruthi:** Hands down, the greatest threats to wildlife are habitat loss and fragmentation. Wildlife and people both depend on healthy ecosystems for their needs like shelter, food, and fresh water. Traditionally, Africans have shared space with wildlife and understood these patterns, but the expanding human footprint is overwhelming these biodiversity-rich areas.

As cities grow, settlements increase, and roads, farms, and railways fragment the landscape. Migration routes are blocked and dispersal areas converted, isolating wildlife populations and degrading habitat. Wildlife can no longer access food and water without conflict with people.

When wildlife can no longer move and interact freely and lose their food and water sources, they come into increased contact with communities—putting both wildlife and people at risk. Elephants raid crops, predators attack livestock, and communities retaliate. Wildlife poaching may occur.

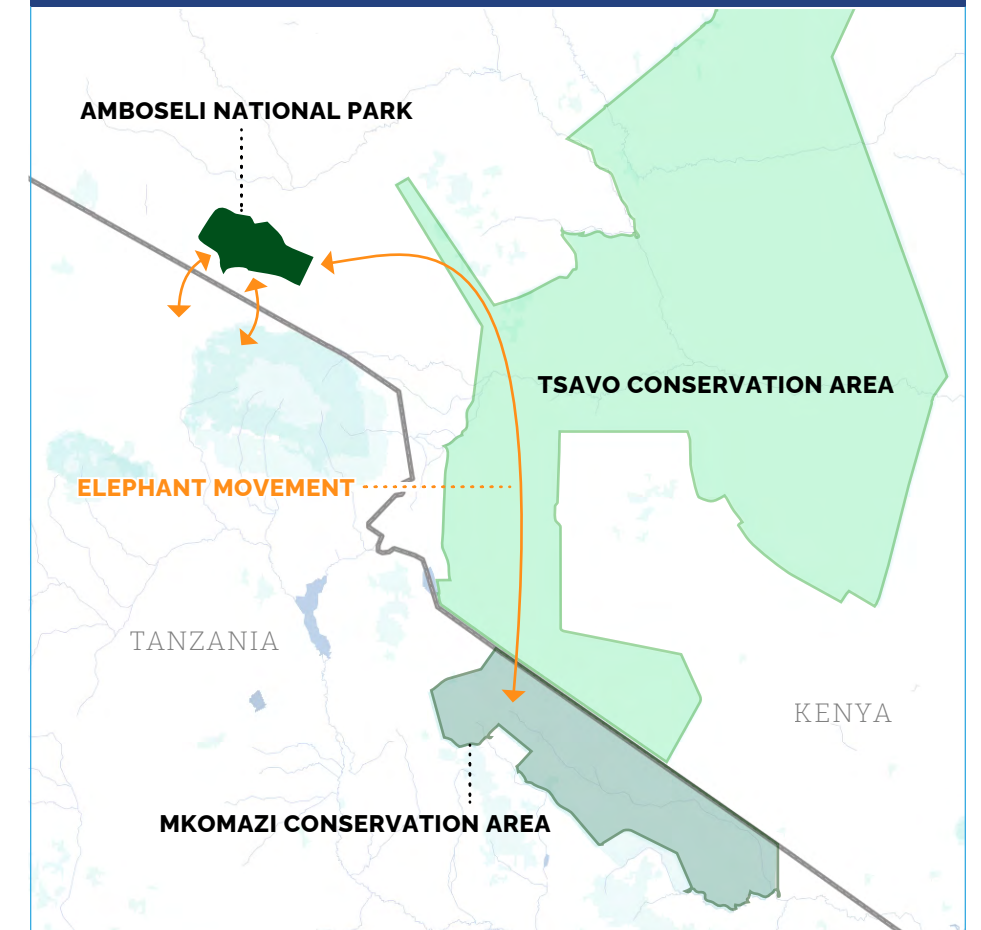
### How do conservationists tackle habitat loss and fragmentation?

**Dr. Muruthi:** If you want to conserve healthy ecosystems, maintain connectivity, and integrate conservation and development, you have to work beyond the boundaries of individual parks and other conserved areas—and often across the boundaries of countries.

Our approach to conservation starts with an integrated landscape-level program that looks at wildlife movement outside and between protected areas and where those movements intersect with local people.

For example, an elephant may spend part of the year inside Kenya's Amboseli National Park, then move across natural wildlife corridors through community lands and private ranches toward the Tsavo Conservation Area and eventually

## Elephant Corridors Inside Amboseli Ecosystem



into Mkomazi in Tanzania in search of water, seasonal grazing, and even mates. When fences, farms, or roads block a corridor, the elephant loses access to those resources or runs into conflict with people who have settled there—trampling crops, for example, or damaging wells or other water sources. Sometimes conflicts can turn deadly, with people fatally injured.

Landscape-level planning helps us negotiate how people and wildlife share space.

That negotiation requires strategies to reduce human-wildlife conflict and encourage peaceful coexistence. We have to be focused on solutions that meet the needs of both people and wildlife, recognizing that development and conservation happens in tandem.

### How does AWF make coexistence real on the ground?

**Dr. Muruthi:** We use science to help inform us on what's at stake in a place—where is the most important biodiversity, what are the key threats, and what are the pressure points for local communities. Then we partner with relevant stakeholders, including wildlife authorities, communities, government, and businesses, to build shared consensus around a common conservation vision, conservation targets, and key strategies.

From there, we prioritize, because you can't do everything. This stage helps us define how AWF may engage in the landscape. It also identifies which species, habitats, and livelihoods we may want to monitor to understand and maintain ecosystem health while addressing human wellbeing.

Resilient Africa is a newsletter from the African Wildlife Foundation exploring how Africa is defining and meeting conservation challenges on the continent.

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RWANDA: MOUNTAIN GORILLAS IN VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK. © LARRY TRAXLER



KENYA: DOUGLAS NJERI KAMARU (CENTER), AN AWF CHARLOTTE FELLOW, COLLARS A LION IN TSAVO NATIONAL PARK AS PART OF A STUDY ON THE IMPACTS OF PREY LOSS, HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND LAND DEGRADATION ON PREDATORS.

It is very important that what we do is coordinated with other stakeholders. Our on-the-ground strategies use protected areas as anchors embedded in the larger landscape. They also include species protection and partnerships with wildlife authorities to strengthen infrastructure and management. Further, they promote habitat restoration, support for livelihoods, and local economies. These strategies strengthen governance that respects the rights of Indigenous and local communities. Finally, we ensure protection of species through combating poaching and trafficking. I would say AWF's holistic approach—working with others to address not only ecological, but also human wellbeing—encourages co-existence between people and wildlife.

**What is the future of wildlife in Africa?**

**Dr. Muruthi:** The big question is: Can wildlife and people coexist in Africa today? I think one of our greatest challenges is to show that yes, conservation works. Species cannot exist without people.

People live with wildlife every day. We do conservation not only for the benefit of the species, but also for the benefit of the people who share the landscape.

Conservation of Africa's wildlife, wild lands, and natural resources is part of economic development. We believe that conservation and development must happen in tandem.

Tanzania's Kilombero Valley is a good example of where land use planning with stakeholders across the landscape has been successful. It has allowed the development of an important agricultural sector while protecting elephant corridors and vital wetlands. Farmers are improving yields on existing land, wildlife still live and move across the landscape, and communities benefit from both conservation and economic opportunity.

I believe this type of coexistence is the future of wildlife in modern Africa. But conservation must be at the table with development and other sectors to ensure sustainable integration.

**What makes you hopeful?**

**Dr. Muruthi:** When I joined AWF in 1997, I was uncertain of the continued survival of the mountain gorilla. But now, their recovery gives me hope. Despite insecurity and civil conflict in Rwanda, DRC, and Uganda at various times, the mountain gorilla is the only African great ape species whose population is growing.

AWF played an early role in developing a transboundary gorilla conservation strategy and helped to establish the first community-owned ecotourism lodge in Rwanda. Today, Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park is a strong example of how a national park can be woven into a local and even national economy, and AWF is helping to move that vision forward. That is exciting.

But there are many other conservation successes in Africa. The eastern black rhino population in Kenya has more than doubled since the 1980s, due to multiple strategies led by the Kenyan Wildlife Service, including strong anti-poaching

measures and the establishment of rhino sanctuaries. AWF has contributed in multiple ways, including support for the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary in Tsavo.

For me, this rhino recovery story shows how powerful it is when the government, private sector, and communities pull in the same direction, and I am proud AWF has been a part of that. It is a story about species sustainability, their contribution to healthy, resilient ecosystems, and how wildlife conservation can contribute to economic opportunity.

**What more needs to be done?**

**Dr. Muruthi:** Along with positive conservation action, we need to continue countering wildlife trafficking by investing in strong legislation and building capacity of legal professionals and law enforcement as well as sensitizing the general public on the negative impacts of these crimes. The Kenyan rhino recovery story show us that if we can keep wildlife safe from poachers, make wildlife products

difficult to move around, actively involve local players, and improve conviction rates for wildlife crime, Africa's wildlife have a fighting chance.

It's important that we continue to innovate and adapt in ways that contribute to positive change. That is why we are building the next generation of scientific leaders. More than 90 people have gone through AWF's Charlotte Fellowship which supports post-graduate research and training. Many more conservation leaders are supported through other AWF capacity-building programs programs and fellowships.

Ultimately, everything we do is geared for AWF to be a catalyst to sustainable, African-led conservation. That investment in leadership—along with the inspiring work of the many individuals and institutions AWF supports in advancing conservation and compatible development—keeps me optimistic.

**6,633**  
law enforcers, community scouts, wildlife authorities and others trained to support counter wildlife trafficking efforts across Africa

**90+**  
graduates from AWF's Charlotte Fellowship program supporting scientific research and training

**108**  
early to mid-career managers and policy professionals in AWF-Wall Youth Leadership fellowship community

## “EARPRINTING” RHINOS TO SAVE THE SPECIES



Kenya has launched its largest-ever black rhino ear-notching and tagging operation in Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary in Tsavo West National Park—a critical step in safeguarding one of Africa’s most iconic species. Rhinos have roamed Africa for millions of years. Today, they are one of the continent’s most threatened species, particularly the critically endangered black rhino, widely poached for their horns. Kenya’s population fell from tens of thousands in the 1970s to fewer than 400 at the height of the poaching crisis. Its recovery to more than 1,000 eastern black rhinos is a hard-won national success that still requires vigilant protection.

Ear-notching gives each rhino a unique identity, like a fingerprint, allowing authorities to manage sanctuaries as one national population. Knowing each animal’s origin, age, sex, and breeding history enables teams to move rhinos

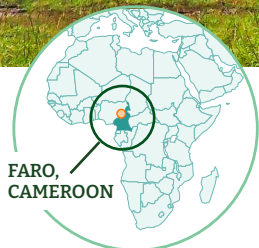
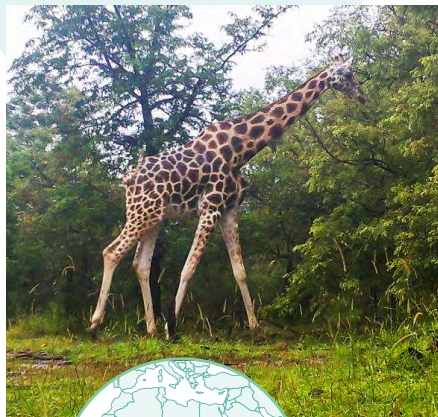
before sanctuaries reach capacity, prevent inbreeding, and target patrols where they are most needed.

Wildlife veterinarians dart rhinos from a helicopter, vehicle, or on foot. Teams record data, cut a coded ear pattern, and fit a transmitter if needed—turning a “rhino somewhere in the sanctuary” into a known individual tracked and protected daily.

AWF scientists helped national authorities develop Kenya’s Black Rhino Action Plan, the official government strategy guiding conservation of the species. It aims for a national population of 2,000 by 2037. With growth exceeding five percent annually, the population is on track to reach that goal. Kenya is home to the largest population of the eastern black rhino.

PHOTO: BLACK RHINOS © BILLY DODSON

## RARE GIRAFFE SPECIES HEADLINES ENCOURAGING WILDLIFE COMEBACK IN CAMEROON



A mosaic of open savannas, dry woodlands, and winding rivers makes Faro National Park ideal habitat for the graceful Kordofan giraffe. This critically endangered subspecies, found only in parts of Central Africa, is Cameroon’s only giraffe and among the most threatened on the continent. Its population has declined by more than 40 percent in recent decades due to poaching and habitat loss.

Recent wildlife surveys in northern Cameroon’s remote Faro National Park, however, reveal encouraging signs for Kordofan giraffes and other species. In 2021, giraffes were seen only in isolated pockets, but thanks to more frequent patrols and monitoring tools such as camera traps, giraffe sightings have expanded across a broader area of the park. In 2023 alone, 21 individual giraffes were identified by camera traps in the central zone—a tangible sign of recovery.

Also encouraging is the rise in hippopotamus numbers, with 508 individuals counted along key river sections of the Faro and Déo Mayo Lifé system, showing a clear rebound from a population impacted by poaching and human activity.

AWF has played a central role in technical coordination, field support, and community engagement for Faro’s wildlife surveys, which are led by the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife with European Union support through the CaSeVe project.

PHOTO: CAMERA TRAP PHOTO FROM THE FARO LANDSCAPE, CAMEROON.

## ACTION PLAN BRINGS RENEWED HOPE FOR ETHIOPIA’S WALIA IBEX



The Walia ibex is a proud symbol of Ethiopia’s national identity. Found only in the remote Simien Mountains, this mountain goat—with massive, curved horns reaching up to a meter in length—is under serious threat. Its numbers have dropped from about 800 individuals to roughly 300 in less than a decade due to habitat loss, human activity, livestock grazing, regional instability, and climate change.

As part of AWF’s national-level work on species conservation and recovery, AWF provided funds and advised Ethiopia’s Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) on a new action plan to guide the country in conserving this iconic species.

Last year AWF joined community members, religious leaders, leading Ethiopian academics, and senior

representatives from regional and federal agencies to shape the plan. Participants explored issues around habitat conservation, restoration strategies, and population recovery, recognizing the urgency of safeguarding the species.

AWF’s contributions drew on more than two decades of experience in the country. Recommendations included tourism development, stronger wildlife law enforcement, and the encouragement of alternative livelihoods for local communities to reduce pressure on Walia ibex habitat. In addition, AWF developed a community-level wildlife ambassador program in the Simien Mountains, where local voices lead the way in strengthening support for conservation of the species.

PHOTO: WALIA IBEX, ETHIOPIA

## AWF HELPS KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE DETECT ILLEGAL ACTIVITY AT KENYA’S BUSIEST AIRPORT



Airports are major conduits for smuggled wildlife products, moving ivory, rhino horn, pangolin scales, and live species through global transport networks. Last year, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) teams at Nairobi’s Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) screened more than 34,000 flights, 71,000 cargo shipments, 140,000 pieces of luggage, and 36 shipping containers—contributing to seizures of antelope horns, kudu horns, assorted wildlife skulls, and other products destined for markets in the USA, Europe, and Asia.

Recently, British Airways (BA) and AWF partnered to strengthen KWS’s capacity to detect and deter wildlife trafficking at JKIA—one of Africa’s busiest transit hubs and a critical front line in the fight against illicit wildlife trade.

As part of its commitment to the United for Wildlife Transport Taskforce and the Buckingham Palace Declaration, BA supported AWF in training two wildlife contraband detection dogs and 21 KWS dog handlers. The Belgian Malinois duo join a team of four other dogs trained to detect wildlife products transported through airports.

This is one example from AWF’s robust counter wildlife trafficking program, which includes multiple strategies to detect, deter, investigate, and prosecute wildlife crime. Our emphasis on developing capacity within wildlife authorities and other law enforcement entities helps ensure the longevity and growth of these conservation efforts.

PHOTO: BRITISH AIRWAYS KWS TRAINING, KENYA

## TUI Care Foundation and AWF Join Forces in Rwanda’s Innovative eDNA Biodiversity Monitoring Project

In February 2026, a new era in biodiversity monitoring was launched in Rwanda’s Volcanoes National Park. From gorillas and golden monkeys to the smallest organisms sustaining life in the park, environmental DNA (eDNA) monitoring is expanding what conservation can measure across the park’s 160 km<sup>2</sup> landscape.

Environmental DNA is a scientific approach that detects genetic traces organisms leave behind in the environment. Those traces—shed through skin cells, saliva, waste, or decaying matter—can reveal which species are present, even when they are rarely seen or easily missed by traditional surveys. By collecting genetic material from soil and water, eDNA enables scientists to monitor species and ecosystem health more accurately and build a stronger foundation for data-driven conservation decisions.

The eDNA monitoring initiative is supported by the TUI Care Foundation and implemented by the African Wildlife Foundation in collaboration with the Rwanda Development Board and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. Through the partnership, the TUI Care Foundation is helping equip Rwanda with cutting-edge tools while strengthening local scientific capacity and community stewardship. Through training and outreach, community members living near the park are being equipped to support wildlife and habitat monitoring, while students are introduced to conservation through education and park engagement activities.

“This project reflects TUI Care Foundation’s ambition to protect endangered species and their habitats while empowering communities to benefit from conservation,” said Alexander Panczuk, Managing Director at the TUI Care Foundation. “By supporting innovative biodiversity monitoring in Volcanoes National Park, we are investing in data-driven conservation, local scientific capacity, and the next generation of conservation leaders. These efforts help ensure that tourism continues to contribute positively to conservation outcomes and resilient livelihoods in Rwanda.”



At TUI Care Foundation, our mission is to use the positive impact of tourism to create lasting benefits for people and nature. We build on strong partnerships with local and international organizations to maximize impact, working with partners that have a long-standing presence on the ground, trusted relationships with local communities, and a professional, science-based approach to conservation. We value our partnership with the African Wildlife Foundation for these reasons. From our collaboration in Kenya to this innovative wildlife project in Rwanda, working with AWF enables us to protect endangered species, strengthen community resilience, and support sustainable tourism destinations that depend on healthy ecosystems.



**ALEXANDER PANCZUK**  
*Managing Director, TUI Care Foundation*

By integrating eDNA with established field, satellite, and sensor-based techniques, conservation partners aim to build a fuller biodiversity baseline that strengthens adaptive management across the Virungas landscape. Importantly, local sequencing and training partnerships are building Rwanda’s next generation of conservation scientists and ensuring data can be processed in-country.

## 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Read our 2025 Annual Report to learn how the African Wildlife Foundation is building a future where people and wildlife thrive:

[ANNUALREPORT.AWF.ORG](https://annualreport.awf.org)



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We believe in a vision of Africa where sustainable development includes thriving wildlife and wild lands as a cultural and economic asset for Africa’s future generations. **Your generous gift today can help us build a resilient future for Africa where people and wildlife both thrive.**

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