

African Wildlife NEWS

Your support at work in Africa's landscapes



LEFT: Both black (pictured) and white rhinos are threatened by the illicit wildlife trade, but your support is enabling success in protecting priority populations on the ground.

Seeing Success in Africa

AWF's Urgent Response Fund has already had positive impact on the fight against illegal wildlife trafficking

In the world of conservation, results take time. Certainly with a large-scale, global issue such as illegal wildlife trafficking, achieving the ultimate result—shutting down the trade—will require multiple years of coordinated effort by numerous parties, from governments to conservation NGOs to the general populace.

Yet in the scant year since AWF's launch of the Urgent Response Fund, we are already seeing evidence that this US\$10 million fight against illegal wildlife trafficking is making an impact—even as we continue to scale up our efforts.

Enhanced patrols

The past few years have been brutal for South Africa's rhinos, with 1,004 of the pachyderms lost to poaching during 2013 and 1,215 during 2014. As of December 2014, however, not a single loss had occurred in a reserve in the Eastern Cape, thanks in part to enhanced security measures supported by AWF. AWF's support allowed the purchase of motorcycles—

and, soon, a vehicle—to better patrol the reserve's rugged terrain. "Already with the motorcycles, we have provided an additional 150 percent net patrol coverage," explains the reserve's manager.

More than 1,000 km away, another private reserve, Sabi Sand Wildtuin—which together with Kruger National Park and other area reserves have become ground zero in Africa's rhino poaching crisis—has responded to the global increase in rhino poaching with aerial power. In late 2014, AWF helped underwrite the purchase of a helicopter for Sabi Sand to conduct aerial patrols.

The day after the helicopter was delivered, an aerial patrol team spotted a number of poisoned cabbages laid out by poachers to lure rhinos. The team was able to quickly sweep the reserve and remove all of the cabbages. "It is thanks to the helicopter that we were able to intervene and prevent losses," explains Warden David Powrie. The chopper will be further outfitted with night-vision equipment to enable regular nighttime patrolling.

Continued on page 4

INSIDE:
Winning
Nature's Best
Photos



PLUS:

Ivory progress in Asia

Chinese citizens are supportive of ivory bans, and governments and the private sector are starting to listen.

Page 3

Does your dog have what it takes?

Not every pup can cut it as a sniffer dog.

Page 5



Poulantze Bézu

The African Wildlife Foundation, together with the people of Africa, works to ensure the wildlife and wild lands of Africa will endure forever.

AWF Senior Staff

Patrick Bergin
CEO

Jeff Chrisfield
COO

Charly Facheux
Vice president for
conservation projects

Kathleen Fitzgerald
Vice president for
conservation strategy

Tyrene Haralson
Vice president for
finance & administration

Craig Sholley
Vice president for
philanthropy & marketing

Daudi Sumba
Vice president for program
design & government relations

Editorial Staff

John Butler
Director of marketing and membership

Mayu Mishina
Senior communications and marketing manager

Kathleen Garrigan
Senior communications and media relations officer

Grant Wheeler
Graphic designer

Amy Barriale
Membership and production manager

Contributors:
Billy Dodson, Gayane Margaryan

African Wildlife News is published four times a year.
© 2015 African Wildlife Foundation

African Wildlife Foundation

Washington, DC

1400 16th Street, NW
Suite 120
Washington, DC 20036
Toll Free +1 888 494 5354
Phone +1 202 939 3333
Fax +1 202 939 3332

AWF Conservation Centre

Ngong Road, Karen
P.O. Box 310, 00502
Nairobi, Kenya
Phone +254 20 2765000
Fax +254 20 2765030

email: africanwildlife@awf.org



It Can Start With a Photo



Every year African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) partners with Nature's Best Photography to sponsor the "African Wildlife" category of the Windland Smith Rice International Awards competition. It's not much of a stretch to say that the sponsorship is, in its own way, another conservation investment we're making in Africa's future.

As photographer Billy Dodson—who donates much of his stunning wildlife photography to AWF for use in our publications—writes in our four-page supplement, the camera has been an effective tool for telling compelling, and often poignant, stories about the world around us. When the camera is pointed at African wildlife, those who otherwise would not have the opportunity to see firsthand the intensity with which a lion can yawn or the love a rhino mother has for her calf are still able to experience it, feel the same awe and wonder as if they were there and, most importantly, be moved to stand up for African wildlife. Check out our supplement for the article and winning Nature's Best photos.

As you know, we do need to stand up for African wildlife more than ever because of the continuing illegal wildlife trafficking crisis. We ran a supplement with our Fall 2014 issue that talked about AWF's Urgent Response Fund, the US\$10 million emergency initiative to combat this nefarious global trade. I'm happy to report that we're already seeing the positive impact of the fund.

One of our tactics is to establish a best-in-class sniffer dog program, whereby AWF will provide canine detection teams to authorities throughout the continent needing additional assistance in "sniffing out" illicit wildlife products at their ports. We've already partnered with a dog training company in Arusha, Tanzania, and the first dogs under this program are currently in training. You can read about this and some of our other efforts in our cover story. And, for the dog owners among you, take our sniffer dog quiz to see whether your pup has a nose for the job!

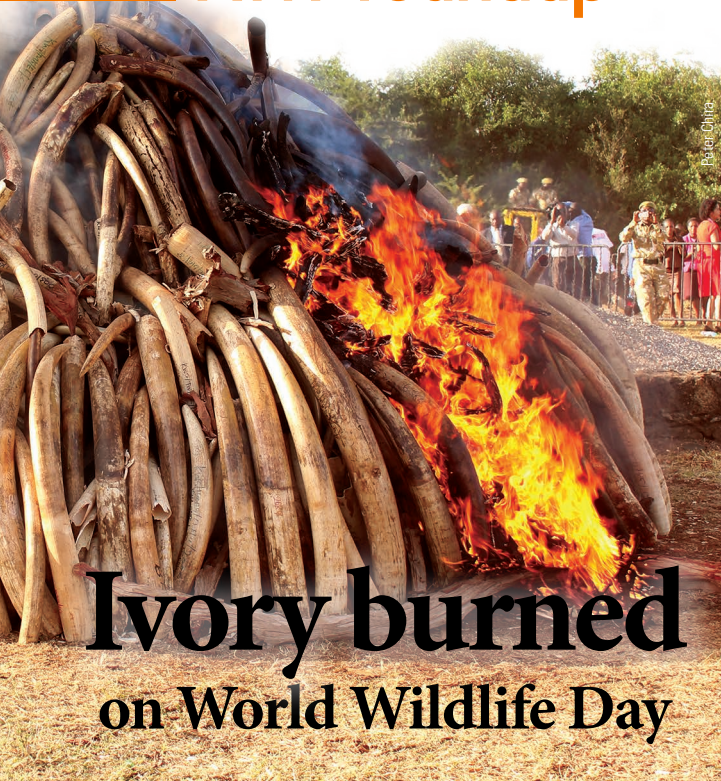
Thanks to your generosity, we are able to implement other conservation efforts as well, in South Sudan (page 4), Cameroon (page 8) and elsewhere on the continent. Together, we will ensure that photographers will have amazing African wildlife to capture on camera for decades to come.

Patrick J. Bergin, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer



RIGHT: "African Lion," taken by Tom Schandy, is one of the highly honored images from the latest Nature's Best Windland Awards. Check out more Nature's Best photos in the supplement, after page 4.

AWF roundup



On March 3, the world stood together against wildlife crime, the theme of this year's World Wildlife Day. AWF did its share to raise awareness: We helped organize and participated in rallies in Kampala, Uganda, as part of a World Wildlife Day steering committee working with the Ugandan Ministry of Wildlife; spoke about wildlife crime during a panel discussion with the Congolese scientific press association in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo; and hosted a booth during celebrations at Kenya Wildlife Service headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

AWF's vice president for program design and government relations, Daudi Sumba, also represented AWF at an ivory burning during which Kenyan

President Uhuru Kenyatta burned 15 tonnes of confiscated ivory. President Kenyatta further pledged to destroy his country's entire stockpile of confiscated ivory by the end of the year. The event was attended by representatives from the African Union, the United Nations and various conservation organizations. Said Sumba, "The entire continent of Africa held the match to Kenya's ivory stockpile today. This move signals an absolute commitment and political will by Africa's leaders to adopt a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to wildlife crime."

March 3 is also known in Africa as Africa Environment Day and Wangari Maathai Day, after the former Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Ivory burned on World Wildlife Day

Progress in Asia on ivory trade

The Chinese Goods Centre became the fourth major retailer in Hong Kong to suspend its ivory sales, following in the footsteps of Wing On, Yue Hwa and Chinese Arts & Crafts, which all decided last year to drop ivory from their store shelves. Most of the city's major retailers are now said to be ivory-free.

Meanwhile, China's State Forestry Administration in February announced a one-year suspension of import permits for African ivory carvings. It's a move most likely

supported by the majority of Chinese nationals: In a recent survey conducted by WildAid, AWF and other partners, 95 percent of respondents agreed that the Chinese government should impose a ban on ivory to help stop the poaching of elephants in Africa. International trade of ivory is illegal under a 1989 ban by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (or CITES), but domestic trade is still legal in China.

Download the survey at awf.org/2014-ivorysurvey

19.7

MILLION

Acres of land under improved conservation management in 2014, thanks to your support. Learn more in our new 2014 annual report, at awf.org/annualreport

Make Africa your HEIR!

Secure the future for Africa's wildlife: Consider a legacy gift. Legacy gifts are deferred gifts of cash, equity or property, often made through a person's estate. Examples include making a specific or residual bequest in a will or trust, or designating AWF a beneficiary of your life insurance policy or retirement plan. Legacy gifts are easy to set up and almost anyone can make them!

To make a legacy gift, visit awf.org/legacy or call +1 202 939 3333.

Old friend helps launch new programs for apes

For the past several years, Endangered Species Chocolate has generously supported AWF's priority species efforts, which include projects to protect Africa's great apes as well as its imperiled elephant, rhino and carnivore populations. The Indianapolis-based chocolate company's support was key in the launch of AWF's African Apes Initiative two years ago, enabling AWF to expand its great ape work beyond bonobo and mountain gorilla to include other great ape species such as the chimpanzee and lowland gorilla. AWF has since implemented great ape protection and ecological monitoring projects in Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroon and is launching additional work in the Central African Republic and northern Democratic Republic of Congo.

To learn more, visit chocolatebar.com



Seeing Success, continued from page 1

Elephant protection

On the elephant front, through a new partnership with Game Rangers International (GRI), AWF is supporting anti-poaching patrols and protection around Zambia's Kafue National Park, Africa's second-largest park. AWF's support of GRI is also helping to strengthen the capacity of Zambia Wildlife Authority's (ZAWA's) Intelligence and Investigations Unit, which, in December, captured Interpol environmental fugitive and alleged ivory trafficker, Ben Simasiku.

Simasiku is awaiting trial, and GRI and ZAWA have arrested 10 other trafficking suspects between November 2014 and January 2015.

Thanks to your support, AWF is adding to this and other elephant protection projects with funding to new locations: Dzanga Sangha Special Reserve in the Central African Republic, Dja Faunal Reserve in Cameroon and Bili-Uele Protected Area Complex in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), all of which have forest elephant populations;

and the Ruaha–Rungwa ecosystem in southern Tanzania, home to one of the largest populations of elephants in East Africa.

Law enforcement

Supplementing these on-the-ground actions are AWF efforts to stop the trafficking of wildlife products out of the continent. Through an exclusive contract with Tanzania-based Canine Specialist Services International (CSSI), AWF is establishing a continent-wide sniffer dog program, which will provide canine detection teams to authorities requiring extra assistance at ports.

In January, CSSI on behalf of AWF purchased a number of dogs from quality breeders in the Netherlands and began working with those canines and African handlers to prepare them for wildlife detection work. Once fully trained, the detection teams will be deployed to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, as well as other critical trafficking ports. These may include Kinshasa, DRC; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; and Mombasa, Kenya. Magistrate and law enforcement training in those same areas will ensure that once wildlife contraband has been detected by the sniffer dogs, those complicit in the crime are tracked down, arrested, prosecuted and ultimately receive punitive sentences.

According to Philip Muruthi, AWF senior director of conservation science, "The wildlife trafficking situation is still desperate—but it is not hopeless. We are seeing successes, and there are more resources, manpower and awareness, as well as national and international muscle, being leveraged against this insidious industry. There is every reason to believe that we will be successful in shutting down this trade." ■

LEFT: Forest elephants, whose populations have been decimated in Central Africa, are receiving greater protections through AWF's Urgent Response Fund, specifically in the Central African Republic, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo.



SPECIAL SUPPORT FOR THE URGENT RESPONSE FUND

AWF would not have been able to implement the Urgent Response Fund without the generosity of certain AWF supporters—particularly Janet Carrus. A longtime AWF donor, Carrus not only gave a substantial donation to the emergency fund but also challenged others to act through a matching-gift campaign in December, when The Gerald and Janet Carrus Foundation matched every dollar that people contributed to the fund.

"Because of the extremes of what is needed on this planet nowadays, people think, 'What is my \$100 going to do, or my \$50 or my \$25,' and they get deflated," observes Carrus. "It's important for people to

understand that whatever they do makes a difference, because it does impact on some level the future of Africa's wildlife."

Carrus adds, "I know I can't change the world singlehandedly. I know, though, that in my own way, I can do something right now that will have a ripple effect. Because it's an emergency situation right now. Time is of the essence."

If you would like to support the Urgent Response Fund, please visit awf.org/donate or call +1 202 939 3333.

Richard Peters / NBP Awards 2014

More Than a Pretty Picture

**“When my eye is to the viewfinder,
I am privileged to observe a moment
in their world”** —Richard Peters

A photographer shares how the art of photography can be effective in the fight for wildlife

“Can he who slays the elephant for his ivory be said to have ‘seen the elephant’? Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine-trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.”

—Henry David Thoreau, “The Maine Woods”

Thoreau occupies a well-deserved seat of honor in the world’s pantheon of great conservationists. Decades after his death, his words continue to move and inspire us. How much more powerful, though, would Thoreau’s words have been if also accompanied by pictures of that wilderness he so often visited?

Six years after “The Maine Woods” was published and five years after the end of the American Civil War—when gruesome images from the battlefield forever changed the perception of the war on the home front—Union Army veteran William Henry Jackson accepted an assignment with a U.S. Government Survey team to document the American west in photographs. One of the first photographers ever employed on a conservation mission, Jackson lugged an array of outsized cameras across difficult terrain in hazardous conditions. The fruit of his exhaustive efforts was both substantive and long lasting, however. Not only did he capture the first images of a number of iconic natural landmarks, but his photos were also ultimately decisive in the creation of Yellowstone National Park.

Ansel Adams further elevated photography of the natural world to an art form in the early and mid-20th century and, in so doing, delivered compelling images of nature to those who

continued on page S2



African Lioness

Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya
By Richard Peters

Richard Peters’s interest in natural history was sparked while watching BBC’s pioneering wildlife documentaries as a child. Later, he took an interest in photography when he was given an old film camera, and he has since pursued nature photography in the United Kingdom and abroad.

“The afternoon rain was relentless, although it cooled us down from the morning’s heat. Many of the inhabitants of the Mara appeared to be sheltered away, until we came across this beautiful lioness. I kept the lens pointed down until she yawned. I caught her with her tongue fully extended, almost as if she was catching the raindrops.”

continued from page S1

might otherwise have never developed an interest in the outdoors. The advent of color photography; publications such as *National Geographic* magazine; and photographers such as Frans Lanting, Art Wolfe, Galen Rowell and many others have enabled generations of armchair adventurers to enjoy wildlife and wild landscapes from every corner of every continent.

Agent of change

Whether of the ruins of battlefields or the majesty of mountain ranges, images have the ability to both shock and awe, and over time photography's utility as an agent for change has grown progressively more apparent. Photography has been instrumental in defining social mores and in powerfully documenting the madness of human conflict. In particular for conservation, it has become an effective tool.

Much of Africa's wildlife is in a state of crisis, with several species critically endangered and many more threatened. The encroachment of expanding human populations on traditional wildlife habitat and the deplorable scourge of

poaching require a global effort to resolve and combat. Photography is one of the most valuable weapons available in this difficult fight, as images of African wildlife inspire us to appreciate their majesty while photos of their destruction rally us to their defense.

Not all clichés are valid but there is abiding truth in the phrase, "A picture is worth a thousand words." An image of a brutally slaughtered rhino mother with bewildered orphaned offspring close by will, for example, touch our souls in a way that words never will. Now, with the proliferation of the Internet and the near-universal use of digital cameras, the opportunity to see both the beauty and destruction of nature are rarely more than a keystroke away. And, as Thoreau wrote, truly seeing and understanding nature will lead to its preservation rather than destruction.

Photography as an art unto itself is exhilarating and rewarding. But photography for conservation, dedicated to the continued existence of the natural world, expresses the noblest possible use of the medium. They enable us to see the world "aright," as Thoreau so eloquently remarked. —*Billy Dodson*



Bohns/NBP Awards 2014



Dee Ann Pedersen/NBP Awards 2014

Elephants

Kruger National Park, S
By Blaine Harrington III

"To me this photo is about fa
I like the way the baby eleph
by the adults, and I wanted
between the baby and its m
wrapped her trunk around t
its head on a friend."

Mountai

Volcanoes
By Dee Ann

"I sat on the
watching a
He kept son
father's bac
Of all the lar
these gentle
most connec

Meerkats

Kalahari, Botswana
By Johan J. Botha

"Meerkats spend a lot of time looking out for predators on the ground and up above them. At dawn, they bask in the first rays of sunlight to warm themselves, and then they quickly disperse to look for food. I was privileged to photograph this group as they were soaking up the sun, preparing for the day ahead."

Cheetah and Cub

Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya
By Marco Urso

"I had been following these cheetahs for a while when they stopped in an open field late in the afternoon. The cub stayed very close to its mother as I waited in my vehicle to capture the right moment."



Marco Urso / ANP Awards 2014

South Africa

family and connection. The hunters were surrounded to capture the affection of the mother. The mother had the baby as it leaned

Mountain Gorilla and Baby

National Park, Rwanda
By Philine Harrington

ground in Rwanda's dense forest, a juvenile mountain gorilla at play. The cub was leaping over his way across his path, and his father never flinched. Among the large mammals I have photographed, the gorillas are the animals I felt most connected with."



Philine Harrington / ANP Awards 2014



Larry C. Reese / NBP Awards 2014

White Rhinoceros and Calf

Klerksdorp, South Africa
By Larry C. Reese

"While walking in the bush, we came across this mother and her young calf in a watering hole. As they came up from the water onto the berm, I captured this moment of motherly love."

Lion Silhouette

Kafue National Park, Zambia
By Will Burrard-Lucas

"The entire plain was blanketed in mist, and the rising sun illuminated the landscape with an intense orange glow. It was a breathtaking and surreal scene unlike anything I've ever seen before."



Will Burrard-Lucas / NBP Awards 2014



David Lloyd / NBP Awards 2014

Hippopotamus

Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya
By David Lloyd

"I spotted two hippos fighting for territory in a pool one morning. They separated from the rest of the pod, still battling. I was able to take this picture of them in a symmetrical pose with the early morning light and the rising mist."

About the photos



The photos used in this feature include the winning entry, as well as highly honored submissions, from the "African Wildlife" category of the 2014 Nature's Best Photography Windland Smith Rice International Awards. Every year, AWF sponsors the "African Wildlife" category to help promote the compelling natural world that AWF—and supporters like you—work so hard to protect.

Some of these photos, as well as other winning images from the competition, will be featured in an exhibition opening October 24 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC.

And, for the photographers among you, mark your calendars for Jan. 1, 2016. That's when the Nature's Best Photography Windland Smith Rice International Awards will begin taking entries for its 2016 competition!

For more information, visit naturesbestphotography.com

Quiz:

Does Your Dog Have What It Takes?

It takes a special pup to be a detection canine that can find ivory and rhino horn at busy airports and seaports. Does your dog have what it takes? Take our quiz and find out!

ABOVE and RIGHT: To qualify as a sniffer dog, Fido not only needs to be social and have a high play drive—but also have great agility and concentration.

1. My pup's age is...

- A. Younger than 18 months.
- B. Between 18 and 36 months.
- C. Between 3 and 6 years.
- D. Just a number. She's young at heart, and that's what's most important.

2. My dog weighs...

- A. Less than 20 lbs.—he's small but acts big!
- B. Between 20 and 55 lbs.
- C. Over 55 lbs. but under 80 lbs.
- D. More than I do.

3. If I were to describe my dog's personality, I'd say s/he...

- A. Qualifies as an Alpha—she's the boss and don't you tell her otherwise.
- B. Is a cautious sort, but once she gets to know you, she's friendly.
- C. Is a bit of an introvert—he prefers his own company to others'.
- D. Loves a party—he's a happy, social guy.

4. When it comes to playing fetch, my dog...

- A. Will drop his toy when I tell him to, but not until then.
- B. Will fetch once—and then will refuse to let go of her toy.
- C. Is great! He retrieves the ball, then drops it at my feet and eagerly awaits the next throw.
- D. Cannot care less. Whenever we play fetch, it feels like she's doing me a favor.

5. My dog's concentration is...

- A. Scary. When he's focused, nothing can distract him.
- B. Pretty good. She'll notice when things happen around her but will then go back to whatever she was focused on.
- C. Dependent on his mood and the object.
- D. Who am I kidding? He pretty much has doggie ADD.

Did you answer the following?

- 1. B & 2. C** Age, weight and breed are particularly important for sniffer dogs: They need to be able to focus but have a lot of energy and drive, and be able to get into and out of certain spaces.
- 3. D** Detection dogs need to be confident but must also have happy, open personalities and get along with different people and other dogs.
- 4. A** Sniffer dogs must have a high drive for finding and playing with toys—and only release a toy on command.
- 5. A or B** It's OK for dogs to react to people or noise, but an easily distracted dog will not make the cut. German Shepherds, Belgian Malinois and Dutch Shepherds tend to have the drive and concentration to keep working under a variety of conditions and distractions, and those are the breeds that CSSI typically chooses.

If your dog fits this profile, congratulations! S/he may have what it takes to be a wildlife crime-fighting sniffer dog!



From Conflict to Conservation

At the government's request, AWF is helping South Sudan build its conservation framework

The Great Barrier Reef. Yellowstone. The Serengeti. World Heritage Sites are often household names, symbolic of the greatest wonders on Earth. For host countries, designation of a World Heritage Site within its borders brings with it not only caché, but also a number of more practical benefits, such as financial assistance, technical support and training from the World Heritage Committee. It raises awareness about the importance of heritage preservation, and, by drawing the world's attention, strengthens a country's tourism potential.

So it's perhaps not surprising that the government of South Sudan is currently working on ratifying the 1972 World Heritage Convention, after which it can begin proposing a number of its own areas for future World Heritage designation. In 2014, at the behest of the World Heritage Committee, AWF identified and drew up a tentative list of sites for such a proposal.

"There's a strong desire on the part of the Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism to conserve South Sudan's natural resources. As Africa's youngest country and one challenged by conflict, South Sudan needs support to develop in a way that benefits its people while maintaining its natural heritage," explains Kathleen Fitzgerald, vice president for conservation strategy at AWF.

1st management plan

At a workshop in November, AWF presented a tentative list of sites with World Heritage potential to the ministry and other key stakeholders. Believed to meet the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (or UNESCO's) natural selection criteria, the suggested sites include Nimule National Park, the only park in South Sudan where elephants can easily be seen; the Imatong Mountains, the country's only Afromontane habitat; Boma and Badingilo National Parks, which see the annual migration of the white-eared kob, the second-largest land migration in Africa; and others.

LEFT: South Sudan has been challenged by conflict but it boasts tremendous natural beauty and biodiversity. AWF is now assisting the government in building up a culture of conservation.

AWF is already providing conservation assistance to the South Sudanese government in two of these sites. One of the biggest accomplishments to date is the development of a general management plan for Nimule—the first-ever general management plan signed in South Sudan.

Without such a plan in place, Nimule National Park could well succumb to poaching and other looming threats

Though many would greet that news with a yawn, a general management plan provides tremendous value, as it guides zoning for natural resource use and revenue generation opportunities for the protected area. It also establishes a decision-making framework and ensures the area is responsibly managed in a way that meets conservation and other objectives.

Without such a plan in place, picturesque Nimule could well succumb to poaching, human encroachment and other looming threats, and endanger its chances of becoming a future World Heritage Site before it can be considered.

Instilling knowledge

For a culture of conservation to fully develop, however, the knowledge must also be there. According to Fitzgerald, many of the senior staff at the Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism have biology and ecology degrees and practical field backgrounds. At the ranger level, however, conservation experience is virtually nonexistent—most rangers are ex-soldiers.

To that end, AWF is providing ranger training and implementing other conservation activities in the Imatong Mountains, which are a significant watershed for the southern part of the country. They are also part of the Kidepo Valley ecosystem, which includes Uganda's Kidepo Valley National Park, where AWF has been working for the past few years.

"The Imatongs are representative of many of South Sudan's natural sites: They are both beautiful and ecologically significant. If these ecosystems are properly managed, they will provide tremendous ecological and economic value to the country," says Fitzgerald. ■



LEFT and BELOW: Though mountain gorillas are a significant tourism draw for Rwanda, Emery Rubagenga (pictured below with his wife, Natacha Kabandana) initially had no interest in seeing them himself. His attitude changed after a mountain gorilla trek, however.



An *electrifying* experience

A Rwandan businessman talks about his first encounter with mountain gorillas, and how he went from ambivalence to admiration

Rwandan Emery Rubagenga did not live in his home country until after the 1994 genocide, when he was already a young adult. Previously his parents had fled Rwanda in the wake of the 1959 revolution, settling first in Belgium and then later in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Rubagenga grew up.

After returning to Rwanda, Rubagenga studied at university and went on to establish a busy life in the capital city of Kigali: He married, had a child and eventually became head of ROKA Rwanda Co., a mining company. Never in that busy time did he consider going to see the country's famed mountain gorillas... until he met AWF trustee Larry Green.

Low expectations, high praise

A couple of years ago, as Green was planning a mountain gorilla trek in Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park with AWF, he sent an invitation to Rubagenga and his wife to join the trip. Out of politeness to Green, Rubagenga and his wife reluctantly accepted.

"We were not particularly excited," admits Rubagenga. "Our attitude about mountain gorillas had always been, 'This is for tourists.'"

Even *Kwita Izina*, the Rwandan government's annual mountain gorilla naming ceremony,

was not an event to which they, or others in their social circle, paid much attention.

Initially, the trek met the Rubagengas' low expectations. The uphill hike to get to the gorillas was long and strenuous. Rubagenga was also worried about his wife, who had fallen twice during the trek.

Then they came upon a mountain gorilla group.

"We had not been expecting much out of this experience," Rubagenga recalls. "We had simply gone on the trek to please Larry! But when we came upon the gorillas, my eyes connected with the eyes of a male mountain gorilla. It was this electric thing. I felt as if in that moment, I was in conversation with him. I was overwhelmed by the beauty of this animal."

Rubagenga adds, "I'm so ashamed to say it, but I have traveled all over the world: China, the United States, Europe... but my home country was not on the list. This beauty is in my country, and until the trek, I had not been aware of it. The experience gave me another perspective on wildlife."

Self-appointed ambassador

Rubagenga and his wife are now self-appointed ambassadors for the mountain

gorilla. "We have promised ourselves that whenever we have friends visiting, we will take them on a mountain gorilla trek," he says. "It was such a touching, humbling

"This beauty is in my country, and until the trek, I had not been aware of it" —Emery Rubagenga

About Kwita Izina

Rwanda's *Kwita Izina* mountain gorilla naming ceremony is an annual event put on by the government to celebrate its mountain gorillas and promote wildlife conservation. A little more than half of the world's 900 or so mountain gorillas live in Rwanda, in Volcanoes National Park.

The event, at which names are given to every gorilla infant born in Volcanoes National Park in the previous 12 months, is a nod to the Rwandan baby-naming tradition. Last year the event celebrated its 10th anniversary. The 2015 *Kwita Izina* is scheduled to take place in June.

Wildlife Watch *Western Lowland Gorilla*

Much like its mountain gorilla cousin, the western lowland gorilla is good at playing “follow the leader.” All activities engaged in by the gorilla troop—eating, nesting or moving within the home range—is decided upon by the leader, a dominant older male called the silverback. The remaining members of the troop typically include three adult females and their offspring.

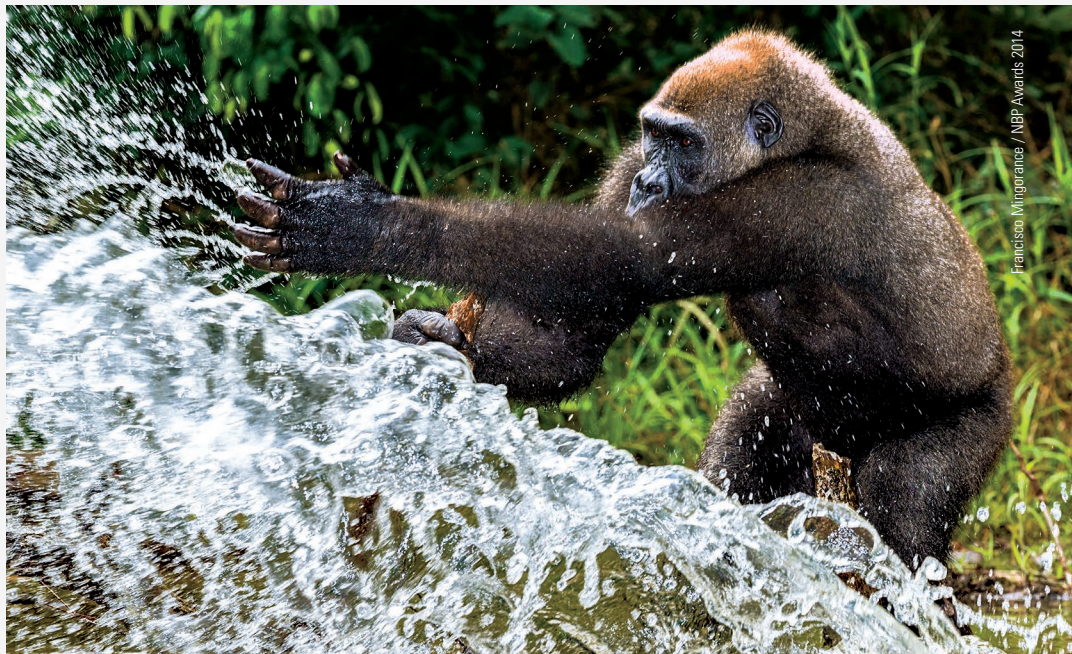
Though AWF supporters may be more familiar with the mountain gorilla due to our long-running work in the Virunga landscape, most people tend to picture the western lowland gorilla when you talk about gorillas. That’s because this is the subspecies of gorilla most commonly found in zoos. Western lowland gorillas are smaller, and have longer arms and shorter hair, than their mountain gorilla cousins.

The western lowland gorilla is found in the rain forests of Cameroon, Central African Republic and other Central African countries. Where once it existed in healthy numbers, the past few decades have seen drastic declines in this subspecies’ population. For one, new roads created for commercial logging operations have opened up the western lowland gorilla’s once-impenetrable habitat to commercial hunters. Combined

with Ebola—which has wiped out significant numbers of the western lowland gorilla since the early 1990s—and the subspecies’ naturally low reproductive rates, bushmeat hunting has cut the population down to below 100,000.

AWF is helping wildlife authorities to protect some of Central Africa’s remaining western lowland gorilla populations. Since 2013, for example, AWF has been supporting anti-

poaching and ecological monitoring in Dja Faunal Reserve in Cameroon, a World Heritage Site which is said to host some 4,000 western lowland gorillas but is under threat of being moved to the list of Sites in Danger. In April, AWF, together with Dja’s wildlife authority, led a weeklong expedition into the interior of this 5,260-sq.-km reserve to ascertain the type and scale of threat the western lowland gorilla and other species face in the reserve.



Francisco Mingorance / NBP Awards 2014

what's new ONLINE

CONNECT WITH US



awf.org/facebook



awf.org/twitter



awf.org/pinterest



awf.org/youtube



awf.org/googleplus

awf.org

YOUTUBE



Frances Van Pletzen / Kariega Game Reserve

Thandi, a white rhino that survived a horrific poaching attack in 2012, is now in the headlines with great news: She is a new mother! Despite the vicious attack that left Thandi fighting for her life and missing a horn, she delivered a healthy calf in mid-January. Thandi’s story is the basis for one of AWF’s public awareness ads starring NBA legend and wildlife advocate Yao Ming. He introduces viewers to Thandi as a cautionary tale of the horrors of the rhino horn trade, imploring viewers to stop buying illegal wildlife products because “when the buying stops, the killing can too.”

Watch Thandi’s miraculous story: awf.org/thandis-story

VIDEO

Clean stoves for Kenya

In Kenya’s Imbirikani Group Ranch, habitat loss is a major issue affecting wildlife, while efficient, clean energy is difficult to come by for the community’s more than 4,500 residents. To protect area natural resources and to alleviate health concerns (from people cooking with stoves that produce a substantial amount of smoke), AWF implemented a clean stove project. These new *jikos* are eco-friendly cooking stoves that save trees by using charcoal made from just the branches and trimmings of trees and by burning that charcoal more efficiently than traditional stoves. They also last longer and expel smoke outside of the home instead of inside—a feature of the old cook stoves that was causing respiratory problems and affecting people’s vision.

Imbirikani Group Ranch is reaping additional benefits from the stoves: They are making and selling them to neighboring communities, thus receiving economic returns from the stoves, as well as protecting forests.

Watch a video about these stoves: awf.org/clean-stove