

Sheldrick WILDLIFE TRUST

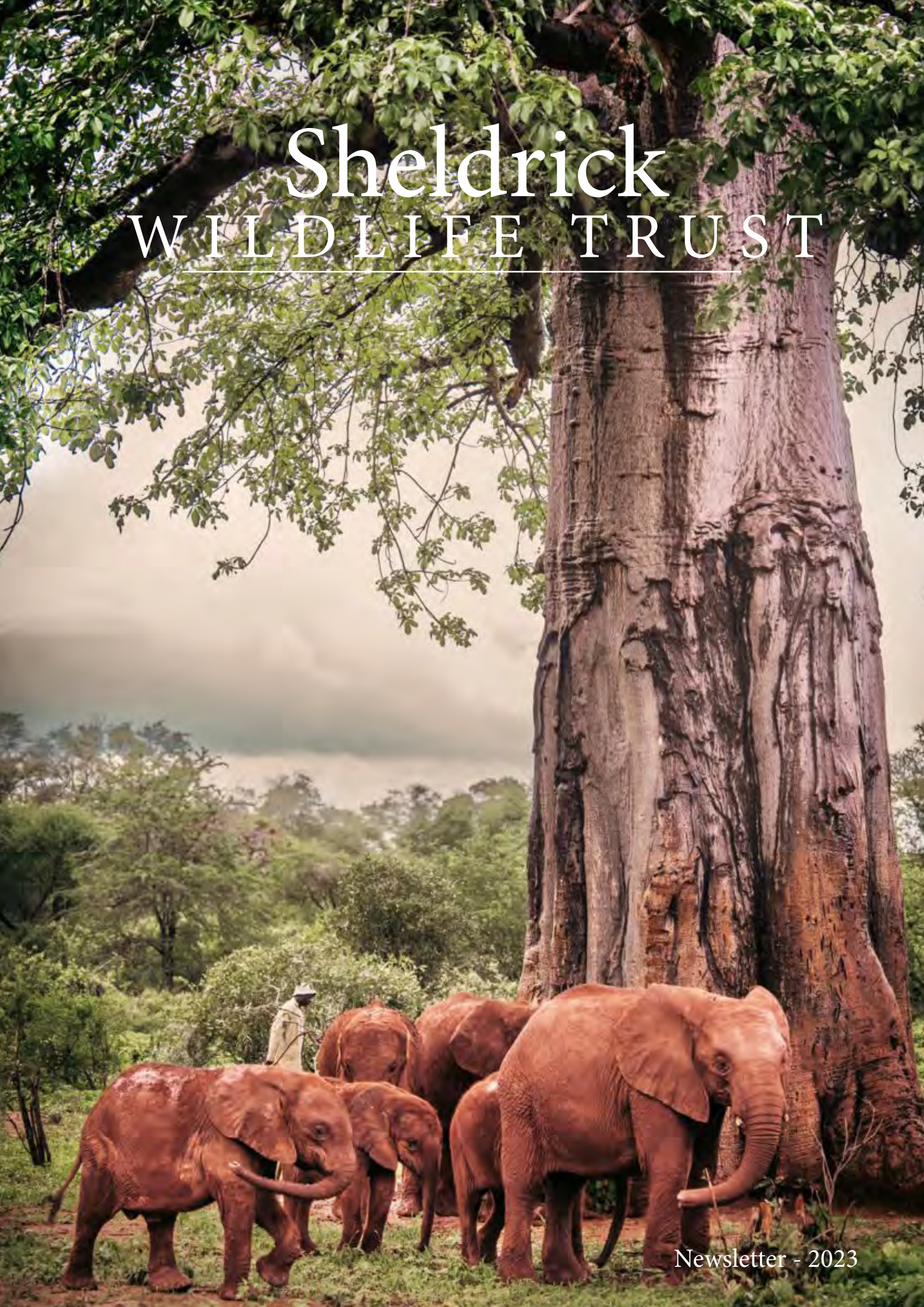


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Each orphan will remain in our care until they are ready to reclaim their place in the wild. For elephants, this process can take upwards of a decade.



Overview for 2023

2023 was a year of polarities. As the year began, we were still grappling with a devastating, country-wide drought. Everywhere, everything revolved around the parched earth and all its consequences. There were rumblings of El Niño bringing relief, but we hardly dared hope.

However, as we are reminded time and again, nature gives and nature takes. The October rains began modestly, but by the end of the year, we had been blessed with once-in-a-lifetime rains. I have spent most of my life in Tsavo, and I have never seen it like this. The vast landscape — which, for the better part of two years, was bone dry as far as the eye could see — has burst into a jungle of vegetation.

This was the ultimate balm for Kenya's beleaguered denizens. After years of struggle, elephants and other wildlife finally had a surplus of food. They took full advantage of the benevolent times: On patrols, our pilots sighted a record number of mating elephants below. In two years' time, we can expect another baby boom.

Similarly, hard-pressed communities celebrated the ample rainfall. Harvests were actualised, people's circumstances improved, and poaching and other illegal activities declined as a result. We were presented with the unfamiliar situation of being able to enjoy the transformation of the

landscapes around us, without the stresses and strains we had become accustomed to. Of course, we know that good times are fleeting: Every peak is followed by a trough. This is especially true now that human activities have disrupted the natural order. But after such a trying two and a half years, we welcomed the respite.

In good times and bad, our teams remain vigilant and hard at work. Their commitment, talent, resilience, and professionalism is second to none. Where many would wilt, they simply shine. Working in the blazing heat to resuscitate a drought-stricken bull, shepherding a herd of elephants back to safety, battling a bushfire before it wipes out an entire ecosystem, distributing school food donations to support our neighbours — whatever the task, no matter how big or how small, they tackle it with absolute dedication.

Such extraordinary dedication is needed now more than ever. Human activities present the single greatest adversary to our natural world. We were reminded of this

during the drought, amidst increasingly unpredictable weather patterns. Meanwhile, as habitats shrink and resources become scarce, human-wildlife conflict has emerged as one of the greatest threats to elephants and other creatures. Tackling this prodigious challenge has become one of our primary focus areas. We have developed productive relationships with local communities, rapidly coordinating an aerial and/or ground response to shepherd elephants back to safety. Crucially, we have also prioritised establishing soft transition boundaries at the edge of the park, creating 'buffer zones' for the benefit of communities and wildlife alike.

Habitats once lost are lost forever. That is why we have placed such emphasis on our Saving Habitats initiatives, securing vulnerable ecosystems before they disappear. Galana and Kulalu Ranches, Shimba Hills and Mwaluganje, Arabuko Sokoke Forest — these are more than just names on a map; they are an irreplaceable home for all manner of creatures.

Modelling the successful conservation management templates we rolled out in KARI Ranch and the Kibwezi Forest, we are focusing our efforts in these besieged landscapes in order to tackle illegal activities, foster a more viable ecosystem, and benefit the communities who live alongside them. These landscapes are particularly important habitats for elephants in the Greater Tsavo Conservation Area.

This year, we completed a milestone in our Saving Habitats work: fully securing the Shimba Hills and Mwaluganje with a new electric fenceline, spanning 117,037 kilometres — our largest fencing project to date! This was an enormous undertaking that took nearly two years to complete. Working around the perimeter of the ecosystem, we responsibly disposed of the derelict fence, replacing it with a state-of-the-art fenceline and 11 security bases that will effectively prevent illegal incursions and mitigate human-wildlife conflict.

Throughout the project, the team was met with positive feedback from the community along the new fenceline's perimeter, who were relieved to have greater protection for their homesteads. As we see time and again, successful conservation benefits both wildlife and the people who live alongside them.

Of course, as we forge a future for Kenya's wild elephants, we also have our orphan herd back home to look after. During the drought, we rescued the same number of orphaned elephants as the previous five years combined. We had to expand all five orphan units to contend with the influx of new arrivals. While this year offered a welcome reprieve thanks to the abatement of the drought,

our orphan herd continued to grow in 2023, with the addition of 11 orphaned elephants, one orphaned rhino, and a number of smaller species. Each orphan will remain in our care until they are ready to reclaim their place in the wild. For elephants, this process can take upwards of a decade. These orphans are symbols of survival, beacons of hope, and a reminder of why we must always look forward. After all, an elephant's life span mirrors our own. We owe it to these orphans to create a viable future, one in which they can live wild and raise their own families.

I end with a nod to one of our brightest beacons of hope: Baby Mwana, born March 2023, who is the very first wild offspring of our Umani Springs orphan herd. We rescued her mother, Murera, back in 2012. A poacher's trap had maimed her feet and rear leg to such a degree that vets advised that it would be kindest to end her suffering. But we saw another way. My mother, Daphne Sheldrick, recognised Murera's will to survive and rallied all of us to save her. As Murera reminds us, every sliver of hope is worth pursuing. She came to us a broken elephant, but now she is a matriarch and a mother. It is because of donors like you that we are able to bring these miracles to fruition.

The Sheldrick Wildlife Trust family continued to grow this year, but it was also marred by loss. The tragic death of Patrick Muiruri, a beloved elephant Keeper, father, husband, brother, friend, and colleague, left us reeling. As we always say, elephants are the greatest judge of human character, and Patrick was absolutely adored by his orphan charges. Like the rest of the SWT team, Patrick chose to follow a special calling — leading a purposeful life and leaving this world a better place than he found it.

As we move forward, Patrick leaves an irreplaceable hole in the patchwork of people that make up the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust. I am endlessly grateful for our extraordinary team. These quiet heroes are the reason we continue to make an impact in the field, every single day.

I would also like to thank you, the people who turn our mission into a reality. Every success outlined in these pages — every orphan rescued, every community supported, every habitat saved — is made possible through your committed support. As we enjoy this moment of bounty, we are also bracing ourselves for the inevitable challenges ahead. Your donations ensure we are up to the task, now and into the future.

With gratitude,

Angela Sheldrick





The Orphans' Project

320 orphaned elephants successfully raised
17 orphaned rhinos successfully raised
95 currently dependent orphaned elephants
60 babies born to wild-living orphaned elephants
12 orphaned elephants and rhinos rescued in 2023



Nairobi Nursery - Est. 1986

21 milk-dependent orphaned elephants
2 orphaned rhinos

If 2021 and 2022 were defined by an influx of orphan rescues, this was a year of beginnings. The Nursery is the pivotal first step in an orphaned elephant's journey — a journey that can span upwards of a decade from rescue to reintegration. Our new class of rescues settled in, regained their health, and embraced the new human-elephant family that will guide them through the next phase.

But 2023 still brought its fair share of rescues. Fresh into the new year, yet another drought victim entered our midst. On 15th January, we received a call about an orphaned elephant in the Lolldaiga Hills, north of Mount Kenya. He had been observed on his own for about a week and was clearly struggling. At two years old, he was on the larger side, but still deeply vulnerable. It is possible that he lost his mother, either to the drought or interlinked human-wildlife conflict, or he became too weak to keep up with his herd and was abandoned. In honour of his origins, we named him Loldaiga.

January also marked the beginning of a new chapter for three of our Nursery girls. On the 18th, mini matriarch Naleku, Suguroi, and Sagateisa left the Nursery to continue their reintegration journey in Ithumba. Plodding out of her stable after dawn, little Nyambeni began to look for her mini matriarch. She was starting to become frantic, until Olorien stepped in. The wise female laid her trunk along Nyambeni's back, reassuring her that everything was okay.

February was marred by tragedy, when our dear Ziwadi left us very suddenly. The 8th started like any other day, as the orphans congregated for their midday mud bath — an activity Ziwadi had only recently started to partake in, with great enthusiasm. Without warning, she started to have a seizure. The Keepers jumped in and tried to resuscitate her, but it was too late. While we wish her time on earth wasn't cut so cruelly short, we feel grateful for the four happy years we had with Ziwadi. Her Keepers

embraced her many quirks and never pressured her to conform. Even the other elephants seemed to recognise that Ziwadi was special and loved her all the more for it. It is also a small comfort that Ziwadi died while having fun. She was surrounded by friends, having a marvellous time. Her passing was very quick and we don't believe she suffered.

It wasn't long before our orphan herd grew yet again — this time, with our smallest Nursery rescue of the year. On 13th February, Samburu herdsman found a tiny elephant calf on the fringes of the Mukogodo Forest. There were no other elephants in the area, and based on her condition, she was obviously an orphan. Mokogodo, as we named her, was whisked to the Nursery, where she immediately captured the hearts of everyone in Nairobi, two-footed and four!

The next day, the SWT/KWS Amboseli Mobile Vet Unit was called to investigate a possible orphan. She was too young to be without her mother and, worryingly, she had a spear injury, which indicated that she had been embroiled in human-wildlife conflict. It was unclear whether this occurred after she was orphaned or was the cause of it. Once the team confirmed she was an orphan and Big Life rangers managed to track her down, a rescue was mounted. We named the calf Mushuru.

In March, we were treated to a wonderful visit from an old friend. Solio, an orphaned black rhino raised through our Orphans' Project, showed up at the Nursery with her

wild-born daughter, Savannah, in tow. It had been nearly five years since her last visit. Solio came into our care in 2010, after her mother was killed by poachers. She grew up at the Nursery and reclaimed her place among the wild rhinos of Nairobi National Park. Now, she is a mother of two and an incredible success story for the critically endangered black rhino species.

On 2nd March, KWS rangers spotted a lone elephant calf wandering near the shores of Lake Jipe in Tsavo West. After monitoring him for the afternoon, it was clear that he was an orphan. The only available vehicle in the area was the Trust's JCB backhoe, which was stationed at a nearby building site. The little calf was hoisted into the vehicle's big bucket and then driven to the KWS ranger base. From there, he made his way to the Nursery.

Taroha, as we named him, really struggled. Shortly after his arrival at the Nursery, his condition crashed and his ears curled in, which is always a telltale sign of poor health. Because of his fragile state, we partnered him up with tiny Mokogodo. Clad in their matching blue blankets, they became an unlikely couple and an inseparable pair. We have no doubt that this friendship helped pull Taroha through his most precarious times.

If we have learned one thing over the years, it is that even the smallest sliver of hope is worth pursuing. On 5th April, the SWT/KWS Mount Kenya Mobile Vet Unit received reports of a collapsed calf in Laikipia. For about five hours after her arrival at the Nursery, Sholumai remained completely comatose. Still, we plied her with drips, hoping for a miracle. In the dead of night, we saw a flicker of the eyelid, followed by a twitch of the trunk. Against all odds, she had returned to the land of the living. Despite being on the older side, Sholumai never threw her weight around. She seemed to recognise that we had saved her life. As is typical of older rescues, she remained shy, but she quietly accepted her Keepers from the very beginning.

26th April was a big day for three members of our Nursery herd. In the early dawn hours, Olorien, Esoit, and Lodo left Nairobi and graduated to our Ithumba Reintegration Unit, where they will continue their journey back to the wild. They were welcomed to Tsavo by friends old and new, including recent graduates Naleku, Suguroi, and Sagateisa. There is usually a day or so of adjustment after a graduation, as the orphans acclimate to the new herd dynamics. As is typical when a mini matriarch graduates, the youngsters felt Olorien's

absence keenly. But by month's end, the original 'blanket babies' (our nickname for the youngest orphans) were taking on new responsibilities. The Keepers were proud to observe Mzinga and Nyambeni babysitting Mokogodo, sandwiching the baby as they chaperoned her around the forest. It was a lovely sign that everyone is growing up.

The graduations continued in May. On 25th May, Bondeni, Kindani, and Kinyei moved to our Ithumba Reintegration Unit. Tempted by bottles of milk, Kindani and Kinyei walked into their compartments without any fuss. Predictably, it took lots of coaxing and a final shove to convince Bondeni onboard. This was a poignant moment for our 'Kaluku Trio,' who have been best friends since they were rescued as neonates. It was only fitting that they embarked on this next step together.

As the year progressed, the Keepers noticed a shift in sweet Latika. A dual snare-and-drought victim, she had a lot to overcome. As is typical of fragile orphans, she historically preferred to remain on the fringes of the herd. But as her strength increased, so did her confidence. She has even become a mini matriarch of note, diligently looking after Mokogodo and Taroha whenever she has the opportunity.

Sileita also transformed over the course of the year. When she first arrived at the Nursery, she was shy and reclusive — which is understandable, given the traumatic circumstances in which she was rescued. (Sileita was found guarding her mother's body, who had been killed by a bullet.) With time to heal, she opened her heart and emerged from her shell. Sileita has become an excellent mini matriarch who never plays favourites. Unlike the other girls, who can be quite selective in their affections, she loves everyone equally.

Kerrio is another excellent mini matriarch and a budding diplomat, with a talent for diffusing difficult situations. One afternoon Mzinga and Nyambeni were quarrelling over who got to lead the group down to the milk feed. A retaliatory headbutt devolved into a squabble, until Kerrio walked between the girls and laid a soothing trunk on their backs. Tension diffused and peace restored, the girls settled down to browse next to each other.

June marked Raha's grand debut at the mud bath — an activity she enjoyed enormously. The little black rhino was rescued in September 2022 as a one-week-old orphan. In the short time she had been on her own, jackals attacked her, causing extensive internal and external injuries to





*October heralded in a bounty of
rain that continued throughout the
remainder of the year.*





her rear end. Given her vulnerable condition, Raha kept a low profile as we focused on her healing journey. She had a real breakthrough when she finally started eating solids, which helped her put on weight and gain strength.

Mzinga has earned a reputation as the Nursery's rhino whisperer. Raha is leery of most elephants, charging and huffing at any who dare come too close. However, Mzinga is an exception to the rule. The friends-of-different-species often enjoy quiet moments in each other's company.

While Raha is quite selective about the company she keeps, Maxwell — our resident blind black rhino — is more accommodating. It has become a treasured tradition among our Nursery elephants to wait outside Max's gate en route to the forest, so they can exchange morning greetings with their big friend. The elephants rest their tiny trunks around his ears and horns, while the rhino gently huffs his approval.

Bull elephants have a reputation for being lone rangers, but countless stories prove otherwise. In late June, an infant orphan was reported in the Mara. She popped in and out of sight for the better part of a week, until 26th June, when she was found trailing an enormous friend. While her 'guardian bull' could provide her with companionship and protection, he could not provide her with milk, which a calf of her age requires. Talek, as we named her, was safely brought to the Nursery.

The following month, the Nursery herd's final addition of 2023 entered our midst. Little Pardamat spent three long, lonely weeks trying to survive on his own after his mother was fatally speared. Many new rescues arrive frightened and suspicious, particularly those who have witnessed the death of a parent. However, Pardamat never skipped a beat. He calmed down immediately, embraced his Keepers from the outset, and accepted his bottle with gratitude. Ahmed, who never showed much interest in nannying, took a special interest in Pardamat.

Muridjo and Shujaa have similar temperaments — they are naughty toddlers who do not always do as they are told. Predictably, this means they often clash heads. One day, the squabbling siblings began fighting over who would lead the herd to the mud bath, pushing each other out of the coveted first place. When Shujaa lost the contest and was forced to stand behind Muridjo, he craftily grabbed hold of her tail and bit it hard. Taken

off guard, she screamed and ran away, squeezing herself between the big bodies of Sileita, Muwingu, and Kerrio for safety.

As with any family, there are extroverts and introverts in our Nursery herd. Kitiak, Loldaiga, Sholumai, Mushuru, and Elerai fall firmly in the latter category. They prefer to browse quietly as a group, rather than getting involved in the others' rowdy antics. Taabu, who has a knack for helping shy elephants come out of their shells, acted as a helpful bridge in this department. As the Keepers remark, Taabu is a 'friend to everyone.' His best friend is Choka, who is an evenly matched sparring partner.

Kamili, who struggled with her health for so long, really blossomed over the course of the year. In fact, she has become a bit of a ringleader. One day, the independent girl led Choka, Mukutan, Kerrio, and Talek on a private adventure, so they arrived at the compound before the rest of the herd. They trotted in early and made the most of having the stockades to themselves by nipping into their friends' rooms to scoop up the pellets and lucerne that were waiting inside.

Finally, October heralded in a bounty of rain that continued throughout the remainder of the year. This elicited mixed emotions among our orphan herd: While they welcomed the results of the rain (a bounty of greens, sparkling puddles and mud baths around every corner), many protested heartily about the clatter of raindrops on the rooftops and were reluctant to leave their cosy bedrooms in the morning.

Best friends Taroha and Mokogodo weren't about to let a little damp delay their morning reunion. Rain or shine, the plucky pair dashed out of their stables at first light and made a beeline for each other. By contrast, Mukutan and Mageno stood stubbornly inside their stockades on raining mornings, their backs to the gate as they pretended to browse on leftover branches. But Shujaa took the cake when it came to rain evasion tactics. As the Keepers let the orphans out of their bedrooms, the crafty boy used his trunk to close the lower half of his stable door and then hid inside. It bought him some time, until he was discovered by the team on mucking duty. Shujaa and the other orphans must learn to accept inclement weather, as it is all part of life for wild elephants!

For Weka, 2023 was a year of transformation. She started meek and quiet, then became the Nursery's resident

rascal. By year-end, her priorities had shifted, and she was eager to establish herself as a nanny. Weka is still young herself, but through sheer persistence, she started to get more and more opportunities to look after the babies.

Every elephant is unique, as Weka and Muwingu remind us. These girls are mirrors of each other — they are about the same age and were rescued a day apart. Unlike Weka, however, Muwingu continues to show little interest in mothering the babies. Instead, she prefers to go on solo adventures or hang out with her best friends, Weka and Kitich.

On 1st November, we were honoured to welcome King Charles III and Queen Camilla to our Nairobi Nursery. President Ruto invited Their Majesties to Kenya as our nation prepared to celebrate 60 years of independence. Both the King and Queen are highly dedicated environmentalists, and during their visit, we were able to discuss issues that impact elephants and share more about our conservation work. Their Majesties also had the opportunity to meet the orphaned elephants and rhinos in our care. Mzinga made quite an impression, as did Raha!

The year ended with new beginnings for six members of our Nursery herd. On 6th December, Ahmed, Tingai, and Taabu graduated to our Ithumba Reintegration Unit. Two days later, Elerai, Kitiak, and Rafiki made the same journey. Graduations are always bittersweet, but the Keepers felt proud to help these orphans on the next step in their journey back to the wild.

At the Nursery, the year ended with a wonderful, joyful scene: During the midday mud bath, Muwingu and Choka were at their most mischievous. After a cooling wallow, they clambered out of the water in search of a game. The water buckets provided the perfect fodder. Using their heads, the two imps knocked over the buckets and then nudged them into the pool. When the Keepers pointed their fingers sternly, Choka checked himself for a second, but Muwingu was having too much fun to even consider stopping. A few minutes later, to the orphans' evident delight, the buckets were floating in the muddy water — mischief managed!





A photograph of an elephant in a savanna landscape. The elephant is in the foreground, facing right, with its trunk slightly raised. It has a reddish-brown hue, possibly from red soil. The background features a steep, rocky hill with sparse green vegetation and a few trees. The sky is blue with some white clouds.

Voi Reintegration Unit - Est. 1954

27 stockade-dependent orphaned elephants

81 ex-orphans living wild

At Voi, the beginning of a new year is typically accompanied by a shake-up in herd dynamics. This coincides with the appearance of Mweya and Edie's ex-orphan herd. It has become an annual tradition that they make a pilgrimage 'home' for the holidays, spending much of December, January, and beyond around Voi.

These extended visits are a time for Edie, Mweya, and co. to reconnect with their human-elephant family — and to recruit new members for their ex-orphan herd! In January, Suswa, Mudanda, and Arruba decided to leave the dependent orphans and join their friends in the wild. While an orphan's completed reintegration journey is always cause for celebration, we also needed strong leadership back at home. The Voi herd is bigger than ever before, thanks to all the orphans rescued during the 2021-22 drought — a cohort we call the 'Voi kids.'

Fortunately, we could rely on Mbegu. She was born a matriarch, and now that older females are reclaiming their place in the wild, she is finally maturing into the role that has always been her destiny. Everyone at Voi defers to Mbegu and respects her leadership. Of course, Mbegu doesn't bear this responsibility alone: She is surrounded by many capable deputies, including Sagala, Godoma, Tagwa, Tamiyoi, and Pika Pika.

February brought more familiar faces into the fold. On the afternoon of the 10th, ex-orphan Laikipia strolled into the stockade compound. Many of the Voi kids were awestruck by the older bull — at 24 years old, he cuts an impressive figure. Upon first taking in his formidable appearance, some of the babies bolted in the opposite direction. As Laikipia continued to visit, however, they began to hero-worship him. Some stood so close that they were leaning on him. It was sweet to see how Lemeki and Pika Pika intervened, protectively placing themselves between the youngsters and the big bull, although there was no need for concern.

23rd February was a very exciting day, for it was finally time for orphans Itinyi and Epiya to make their Voi debut. After a long time recuperating in the stockades reserved for newcomers, they were ready to join the rest of the orphan herd in the bush. Sensing their nervousness, Mbegu, Sagala, and Tamiyoi gently surrounded the newbies. To everyone's surprise, Itinyi felt so relaxed that he began to play-mount the other Voi kids. Epiya was a bit more reserved, but she quickly settled into the mix.

A few days later, we welcomed a wonderful surprise visitor. As the orphans made their way along the foot of Msinga Hill, an elephant cut away from a passing wild herd charged over to join them. We quickly realised that it was ex-orphan Rorogoi, who had gone wild a few months prior! Her return caused lots of excitement. Suswa trumpeted loudly as Godoma ran around in circles, waving her ears and trunk touching her friend. The Keepers joined the party, giving Rorogoi some lucerne as a treat to welcome her. It was wonderful to see her looking so happy and healthy.

March closed with a memorable afternoon. As the Voi herd converged upon the mud bath, they were greeted by about 40 wild visitors. A wonderful meeting of wild elephants and dependent orphans ensued. Little Seri even boldly tried to suckle one of the largest females, perhaps conjuring memories of her own mother. These wild interactions are so important for our orphans, laying the groundwork for their future lives as part of Tsavo's elephant population.

We have come to think of Pika Pika as the spoiled 'baby sister' of the Voi herd, but she seems to be growing up. She has taken on nannying duties with gusto, looking after the youngest Voi kids with diligence and dedication. Of course, all responsibilities melt away in the mud bath: She is still a water baby and insists upon remaining in the pool long after the rest of the herd has moved onto the next activity.

Arruba might have a new addition on the horizon: In April, the Keepers witnessed her mating with ex-orphan Laikipia! We will have to wait nearly two years to see what happens, but we may just have a full SWT grandchild on the way.

While Voi received nowhere near as much rain as Ithumba, we were treated to several showers throughout April. One day, the weather really worked in Lemeki's favour. Excited by the rain, mischievous Emoli tried to climb atop the younger girl's back. Much to her relief, however, he kept sliding off her wet back! She strolled away to join Thamana and Tamiyoi, feeling quite pleased with how the situation resolved itself.

On 16th April, a SWT pilot spotted a young female elephant trailing a big bull in the Losoito area of Tsavo West National Park. Given her poor condition, she was clearly an orphan and had cleverly sought refuge with the bull. Unfortunately, this refuge could only be temporary, as she was too young to survive without milk. Given the orphan's age and proximity to Voi, she was rescued and brought to the Voi stockades. As is common among drought victims who then experience the rains, she had consumed too much fresh grass after losing her mother, which gave her a severely bloated stomach. Fortunately, swift veterinary attention set her on the right course. We named her Losoito.

At the end of April, Lasayen strolled back to the stockades at dusk, with two visitors in tow. To the Keepers' surprise and joy, he was with Ndoria and Araba! The two ex-orphans had been living wild for well over a year, with nary a visit to their human-elephant family. While the Keepers set out a treat of range cubes and lucerne pellets, the orphans rumbled their welcomes, clustering around the pair to hear all their stories.

We will remember April as the month that Embu went wild. When Edie, Mweya, and co. departed after their multi-month residency around Voi, she decided to join them. At ten years old, Embu is ready to take this step — and she is in excellent hands, with experienced matriarchs like Edie and Mweya leading the way.

Mbegu is a matriarch to all, but a special big sister to two orphans. She is smitten with Busara and Baraka, who are among the youngest Voi kids. She often wedges herself between the two babies, ensuring that no one disturbs them or tries to lay claim to them.

By mid-May, it started to get very dry around Voi. The orphans had to become diligent about their browsing, wandering slowly as they searched for any remaining shoots of green. While our orphans will always be spared the worst effects of the dry season, we are also proud to be in a position to support Tsavo's wildlife through increasingly trying times.

We were poignantly reminded of this one afternoon, when a wild elephant and her tiny calf stood waiting outside the Voi water trough. Nursing mothers and their babies struggle the most during the dry season, and this savvy female clearly knew where to find help. As soon the Keepers filled up the trough, she and her baby drank deeply before moving off into the wilderness.

21st May marked a special reunion. As the dependent herd was enjoying breakfast, ex-orphans Suswa, Ndoria, Rorogoi, Kenia, Arruba, Araba, and Panda wandered into the compound. Former orphans mingled with current orphans, trunk touching each other frequently as they ate.

Once the baby boy of the Voi herd, Emoli has emerged as a 'big brother.' Thamana is his favourite mentee; the boys spend hours together, between browsing sessions and daily sparring lessons. While Emoli is always up for a game, Thamana can't match his inexhaustible energy levels. We often saw the older bull plod after Thamana wherever he went, hoping he would relent and play with him.

By contrast, Murit craves peace and quiet above boisterous games. One afternoon, he joined Itinyi and Lemeki for a cooling dip. When Ngilai plunged in after them, Murit decided that the event was becoming too hectic and made a hasty exit. Murit gets along with Ndotto and Ngilai, but he has always preferred gentle Lasayen's company best.

On 2nd July, we were treated to a visit from our old friend, Nguvu, who has been living wild for nearly a year. Kenia and her ex-orphan herd brought the nine-year-old back to the stockades. Nguvu, who is instantly recognisable with his long tusks, looked healthy and happy with his wild life.

8th July was Losoito's big day. After months of recuperating, she was ready to join the rest of the orphan herd. Large and small, the orphans clustered around the newbie — even big boys like Lasayen and Emoli were competing for her attention. She stood stolidly among the herd, keeping her cool. Lemeki lay outstretched on the pile of lucerne as she invited Losoito to play with her, while Emoli and Thamana spontaneously decided to show off their sparring skills.

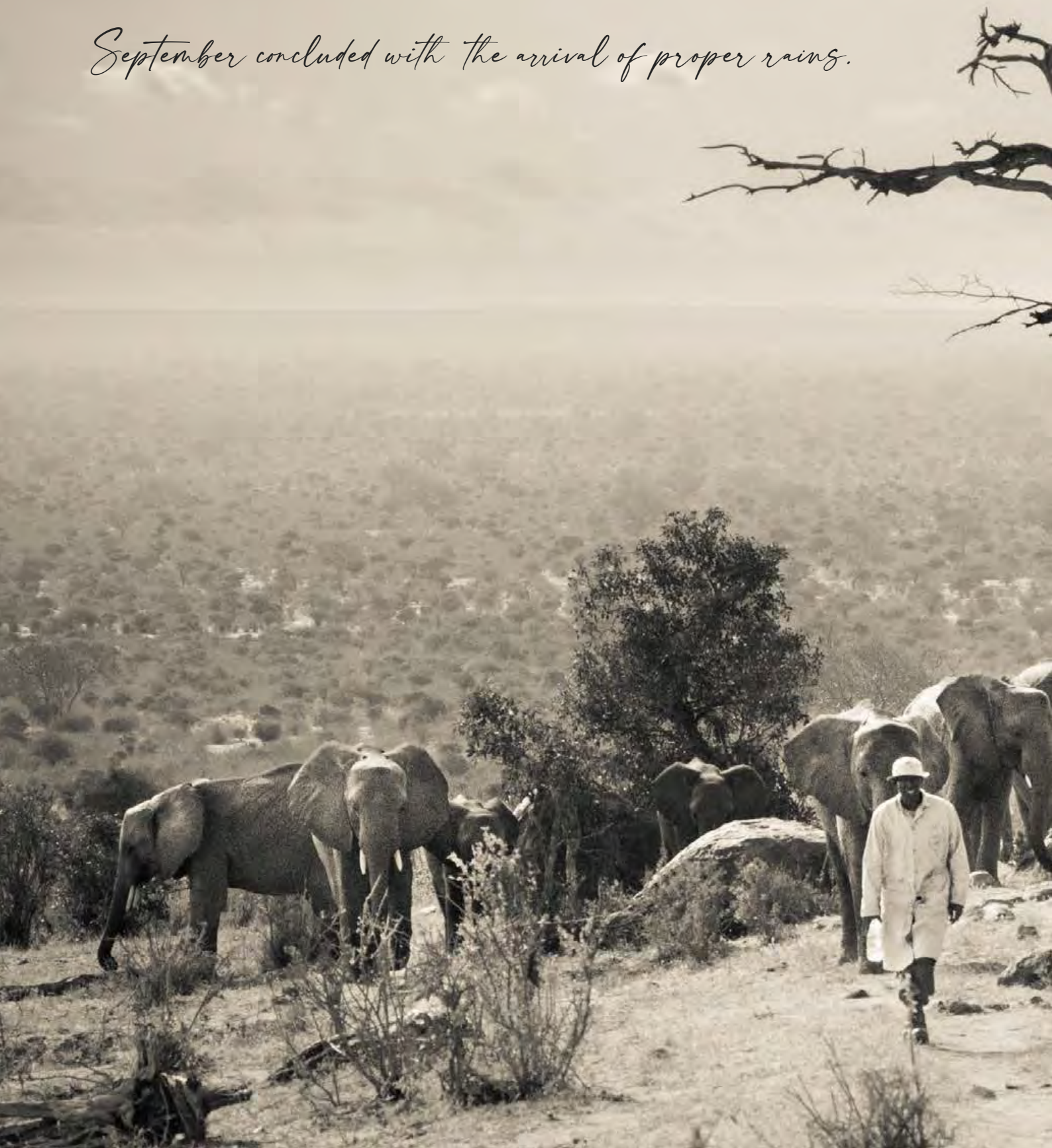
Although Mbegu is the main matriarch, she is ably assisted by Tagwa, Tamiyoi, Sagala, and Godoma. Tamiyoi has emerged as a particularly good mentor to little Losoito. She knows that the recent rescue is still shy and apprehensive in the face of more brazen orphans like Dabida and Seri. One day, the Keepers observed Losoito trying to lag behind the others, but Tamiyoi encouraged her to keep up, helping to build the new girl's confidence.

As the dry season began to bite, ex-orphans Kenia, Araba, Arruba, Panda, Kihari, Naipoki, Suswa, and Mudanda became familiar faces around Voi. We were glad that they chose to ride out this difficult time close to home; conditions are challenging in the southern sector of Tsavo,



*By mid-May, it started to get very dry around Voi.
The orphans had to become diligent about their browsing,
wandering slowly as they searched for any remaining
shoots of green.*

September concluded with the arrival of proper rains.







and these elephants only recently reclaimed their place in the wild. They showed excellent judgement by taking advantage of the support we can offer at Voi.

Ashanti, our little survivor, lost the bottom half of her trunk to a poacher's snare. Although it severed the 'fingers' at the end of the trunk that allow African elephants to dexterously pick up food and other objects, she has adapted marvellously. She eats slowly and with great concentration, either using her short trunk to scoop up loose pellets or simply dropping to her knees to eat directly with her mouth. The other Voi kids don't quite know what to make of these unusual techniques and watch her, wide-eyed with wonder.

September concluded with the arrival of proper rains. When the drizzle turned into a downpour, the orphans exploded into a frenzy of excitement. Some chased each other in joyous darts and dashes, while others rolled around in the wet earth. Little Kenderi marvelled at the rain as she entwined trunks with Ashanti and Dabida. As drought victims, rain must have special significance for the Voi kids.

Traditionally, Lemeki has preferred the company of her Keepers to fellow orphans, but that is changing. She has started to embrace her elephant side and is really becoming one of the gang. When Lemeki is not hanging out with her best friend, Thamana, she can be found with Tamiyoi, Tagwa, and Sagala, who spoil her as big sisters are wont to do. Ndotto remains her favourite 'big brother,' although Ngilai also dotes upon the younger girl.

We rescued Ndotto as a newborn back in 2014. Over the past nine years, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to watch him blossom. Beginning in November, our darling bull took a big step in his reintegration journey. He started to spend nights outside the stockades, joining with the ex-orphans as evening fell. For now, he continues to link up with the dependent herd each morning. As we are reminded time and again, rewilding is a personal process for every orphan.

In keeping with tradition, Edie and Mweya, along with their kids, Mwituu, Eden, Eco, and Enzo, made the annual pilgrimage home for the holidays. The Keepers were delighted to find Ndii in their midst — who they had not seen for over two years! However, we were deeply saddened to realise that the end of Ndii's trunk had been severed, likely by a poacher's snare. While the wound had long since healed, it was a sobering reminder of the impact poaching has on wildlife.

The year ended with the promise of new life. For several days, a wild bull pursued Panda, and on 8th December, the pair mated. Then, later in December, a different bull wooed Edie. Again, the Keepers witnessed their courtship unfold. We will have to wait 22 months to see if these unions result in new life! If they do, it would be Panda's first baby and Edie's fifth.

But our Voi family won't have to wait that long for its next addition: As the year progressed, it became increasingly clear that Mudanda is pregnant. We can't definitively say when she will give birth, but given the size of her belly, the happy event cannot be far off.



Ithumba Reintegration Unit - Est. 2004

31 stockade-dependent orphaned elephants

91 ex-orphans living wild

For our Ithumba herd, January was a time of transition. Karisa, Mundusi, Enkikwe, and Sapalan spent their first full month out in the wild, as part of Yatta and Wendi's ex-orphan herd. Mid-month, Esampu linked up with Wendi's ex-orphan herd. We felt this was a rather bold choice, given Wendi's unpredictability, but she was very hospitable and embraced the younger female.

18th January was a very exciting day, as we welcomed three new Nursery graduates into the fold. After an uneventful trip from Nairobi, Naleku, Sagateisa, and Suguroi arrived just after breakfast. The trio of graduates had a happy, seamless first day in Ithumba, filled with reunions with old friends and meetings with new friends.

February brought a return to dry conditions. As a result, wild elephants and ex-orphans alike began to circle back, as they know Ithumba is a reliable source for water. One evening, well over 100 elephants congregated by the stockade water troughs. Among them, we were very happy to see a wild family led by a one-tusked female, who had last visited about five years ago. As the saying goes, an elephant never forgets.

February also delivered an end to a family feud. When ex-orphan Sidai gave birth to Silas in 2021, her eldest son, Sita, resented the fact that he was no longer permitted to nurse. Perhaps in protest, he broke away from his mother and started spending time with other ex-orphans. Sita lost some weight during the drought, which was hardly surprising, as he was at an age when he should ideally still be nursing. The rains provided a much-needed respite, restoring the calf to full condition. In February, we observed that he had rejoined his mother and little brother. Sita is a survivor; he made it through a very harsh season without a single drop of milk!

On Valentine's Day, we enjoyed a real treat: Ex-orphan Mutara and baby Mambo reappeared after a prolonged absence. This set our hearts at rest, as we couldn't help but worry when Suguta, Sities, Turkwel, and Kainuk showed up a few days prior, without mother and son. Elephant society is fluid by nature, but Mutara's ex-orphan herd has remained intact ever since they joined the wild.

In March, we were called to rescue a juvenile elephant from community land. It remains a mystery how he ended up fifty kilometres away from the park, but he was found alone and in the heart of human habitation. Motomo, as we named him, spent several weeks recuperating at the

Ithumba stockades. Once he had sufficiently regained his strength, he rejoined his friends in the wild — but this time, safely within park boundaries.

On the morning of 26th April, our Ithumba herd again grew by three when new graduates Olorien, Lodo, and Esoit arrived from Nairobi. Naleku, Suguroi, Sagateisa, and Neshashi were brought in first to meet the trio, who they knew from their shared Nursery days. A few hours later, ex-orphans Mulika, Mkuu, Loijuk, Lili, Lenana, Lapa, Ithumbah, Iman, Naisula, Nyx, Mteto, Esampu, and Maramoja emerged from the mist. They had clearly returned to welcome the newcomers and help shepherd them through their first full day in Tsavo.

Lodo seems to be the new Dololo. In years past, the ex-orphans were gripped by 'Dololomania' and were constantly scheming to claim the young bull as their own. This year, Lodo set everyone's hearts aflutter. Unsurprisingly, it was wily Wendi who ultimately succeeded in kidnapping him. The Keepers had to devise a clever plan, distracting the herd with tasty treats, in order to reclaim the youngster. Dependent orphans Mukkoka, Esoit, Naleku, Naboishu, Olorien, Roho, and Kuishi all surrounded their friend, welcoming him back with a tangle of trunk hugs.

25th May was another graduation day. There was a palpable excitement in the air — the elephants always know when something special is going to happen. Nursery graduates Kinyei, Kindani, and Bondeni arrived mid-morning and had a seamless transition into Tsavo life. This was a return home for the 'Kaluku Trio,' as they started their journey at our Kaluku Neonate Unit in Tsavo.

Given his mischievous personality, it was little surprise that Bondeni quickly established himself as Ithumba's resident noisemaker. Before the sun was even up, he would start shrieking as he waited for his morning milk. While his theatrics elicited groans from sleepy orphans and Keepers alike, his long-suffering 'sisters,' Kindani

and Kinyei, didn't bat an eye — they know that Bondeni loves the spotlight!

By June, the dry season started to bite across Tsavo. Ithumba, which received good rains in April, emerged as one of the few remaining green places in the region. One evening, a staggering 150 wild elephants and ex-orphans showed up at the stockades for water. The Keepers observed several families who were totally new to the area, which is an indication that the number of elephants in the northern sector of Tsavo East is increasing. It was gratifying to know that they have found a place where water and food is plentiful.

On 11th July, an incredible treatment unfolded right outside the Ithumba stockades. The story actually began the previous weekend, when a wild bull with an arrow injury showed up at the water troughs. He moved off a short while later, and despite extensive aerial searches, we were unable to locate him. Then, on the morning of the 11th, he reappeared at Ithumba with ex-orphans Zurura and Kasigau. This time, he stuck around the compound, clearly seeking help. While the SWT/KWS Tsavo Mobile Veterinary Unit treated his wound, Zurura remained by his side and observed the whole operation. He stood by until the treatment was over and his friend was safely back on his feet.

Later that week, Neshashi decided to go wild. We knew this moment was on the horizon — Neshashi had been plotting her reintegration from the moment she graduated to Ithumba! We often find this is the case with orphans who were rescued at an older age. When the dependent herd returned to the stockades in the evening, she remained outside with the ex-orphans and flatly refused to walk into her bedroom. She was in very good company, joining junior ex-orphans Nabulu, Malima, Malkia, Mapia, and Ndiwa.

On 26th August 2023, we welcomed a rather unique graduate to Ithumba: After making it abundantly clear that he had outgrown the Kibwezi Forest, Ngasha — the resident rascal of Umani Springs — was translocated over to Tsavo.

On the day of his arrival, a large group of ex-orphans happened to be visiting, including a familiar face from Ngasha's early days with us: Kauro, who had a year of overlap with Ngasha at the Nairobi Nursery. Given how he made a point to stay behind and greet the newcomer,

we can be sure that they remembered each other. Ngasha and his friends, both new and old, melted into the wilderness.

After months of experimenting with her independence, Kamok finally made the transition to a fully wild life. In classic Kamok fashion, it wasn't without its twists: At first, she tried to assemble her own little herd. She orchestrated private excursions with Ambo and Larro, reluctantly returning them to the main herd at sundown. When she realised they weren't ready to go wild, she teamed up with Barsilinga, Sana Sana, Kauro, Malkia, Rapa, Pare, and Kithaka, all of whom are in her general age group. Bolstered by this support system, she finally had the confidence to go wild.

By October, Ambo, Kuishi, Dololo, and Sattaog had also started testing their independence, splintering away from the Keepers and showing up to things on their own schedule. In fact, the only thing holding Kuishi back from a wild life is her love for Esoit. She fusses over him like a mother hen!

In Ithumba, October through December is typically baby season, and this year was no different. On 22nd October, we welcomed our second Ithumba 'great-grandbaby' (a calf born to the offspring of an ex-orphan). An otherwise normal afternoon took an joyful turn, when Mwende appeared with a newborn baby girl! Mwende was the very first wild baby born to our Ithumba ex-orphans — she is the daughter of Mulika, one of Ithumba's founding females — so this was a beautiful, full-circle moment. We named her little girl Mala.

Just two days later, ex-orphan Tumaren arrived at the stockades with a newborn baby boy in tow. This was a poignant moment for Tumaren, who was found standing guard over her dying mother in 2009. After losing her mother so cruelly at such a young age, we are delighted that she now has the opportunity to raise her own baby in the wild.

We saw nearly all our ex-orphan mothers throughout October. Sunyei and her baby Saba were mainstays at the mud bath — they love wallowing. Wendi and her three girls were frequent visitors, as were Yatta, Nasalot, Mulika, Naisula, Ithumbah, Kinna, and their respective families. Juniors Esampu, Mteto, Maramoja, Roi, Siangiki, and Oltaiyoni linked up with Mulika's herd, while Kinna seemed to be recruiting a few more additions! One day,





November brought more happy arrivals. Just before the orphans emerged from their stockades, Yatta and her herd arrived at the compound. It quickly became clear that this was no ordinary visit:

They were accompanying first-time mum Olare, who was debuting her newborn baby girl!





the senior girl convinced Jotto, Ambo, Sagateisa, Satta, and Suguroi to leave with her. It took the Keepers two hours to find the wayward group of five.

On 16th October, we were treated to an almighty storm. Late afternoon, dark clouds gathered on the horizon, and before long, it was raining heavily. This caught everyone unaware, including the orphans. They were already making their way back to the stockades, but they quickened their pace to get back to the sheltered compound. More rain continued throughout the month.

November brought more happy arrivals. On the morning of 28th November, just before the orphans emerged from their stockades, Yatta and her herd arrived at the compound. It quickly became clear that this was no ordinary visit: They were accompanying first-time mum Olare, who was debuting her newborn baby girl! This was a wonderful development for Olare; she has always been such a nurturing female, and we know she will be an excellent mother. We named her baby Ola.

As it turned out, the arrivals weren't over yet. The following day, Chyulu arrived with her firstborn, three-year-old Cheka... and a newborn baby bull! This was a welcome surprise, as we had not even realised she was expecting again. We named her baby, a little boy, Charli.

We often remark that the wild-born babies of Ithumba's ex-orphans are too big for their britches. They know that they can antagonise the dependent herd to their hearts' content, and that their mothers and nannies will always back them up! But in November, the orphans got their revenge. Sidai's son, Sita — who is shaping up to be quite a menace — was antagonising Naleku, no doubt anticipating a complete lack of repercussions. Much to his surprise, however, Sagateisa, Roho, and Naboishu ganged up against him to defend their friend. The four-year-old rascal had no option other than to run away whilst calling out to his mother.

After much consideration, Ambo, Naboishu, Satta, Dololo, and Jotto decided that November was the month to explore their independence, joining Kithaka, Rapa, Sana Sana, Enkikwe, and Kauro in the bush. As is typical during the early phases of re-wilding, the five boys reported back the following morning. Kuishi, who had spent the night alone in the 'Class Five' stockades, spent a long time chatting with them, no doubt asking them about their nocturnal adventures.

While 2021-2022 was marked by a grievous drought, the end of 2023 brought unusually bountiful rains to Tsavo. Ithumba received an enormous amount of precipitation, transforming the dusty landscape into a lush jungle.

On the morning of 6th December, there was an unusual air of excitement about Ithumba. The orphans didn't even bother feeding on lucerne; instead, they ran into the bush, bashing and trumpeting. This is often the case on the day of a noteworthy event — it's as if the elephants know what is coming! Just before 9:00 AM, the lorry delivering Nursery graduates Ahmed, Taabu, and Tingai pulled into the stockade compound.

Two days later, the second group of Nursery graduates arrived. Kitiak, Elerai, and Rafiki were warmly welcomed into the herd. In the evening, Tingai, Taabu and Ahmed confidently led the trio into their shared stockade. They were only two days into Tsavo life, but they already had the routine down pat.

But then, on 10th December, the graduates' story took an unexpected turn. As the orphan herd was quietly browsing, a group of lesser kudus sprinted by. This caused panic amongst the elephants, who scattered and ran. While the Keepers managed to round up the rest of the herd, the six graduates continued running towards Lesilau dam, with the Keepers in hot pursuit.

Despite extensive, daily search efforts — on the ground and in the air — we did not manage to track down the six missing orphans. However, we are confident that wherever they are, they are faring well. Thanks to generous rains, Ithumba is a tangle of vegetation, and they have endless food and water at their disposal. Because the orphans were not spotted from the air, we remain hopeful they have joined up with ex-orphans or wild elephants, making it more difficult to spot six elephants on their own.

The year ended with the beginning of a new chapter for three of our older dependent orphans: After months of experimentation, Dololo, Musiara, and Jotto decided to embark upon the next phase of their reintegration journey. Accompanied by Rapa and Enkikwe, they started spending nights away from the stockades. Mukkoka was very intrigued to hear all about their nocturnal adventures, while Satta gave them a wide berth — perhaps he did not want to be coerced into a night in the wild!

Umani Springs Reintegration Unit - Est. 2014

8 stockade-dependent orphaned elephants

8 semi-independent / ex-orphans living wild



We had long suspected this moment was on the horizon, but by the time 2023 rolled around, it became abundantly clear that Murera was pregnant. While we were overjoyed that our matriarch was expecting, it also came with some measure of apprehension, simply because we didn't know how her compromised body would handle delivering a baby.

Murera became quite finicky and short-tempered during these months — as is an expectant mother's right! She had little patience for most of the other orphans, particularly Kapei and his high-maintenance demands. Instead, she chose to surround herself with Mwashoti and little Amali. One day, Murera went so far as to banish the rest of the Umani herd from the lucerne pellet pile, so she and her chosen duo could eat in peace.

Murera may have found him tiresome, but everyone else's obsession with Kapei continued into the new year. A drought victim, Kapei was rescued in September 2022 and went directly to Umani Springs. Being the youngest bull in the orphan herd came with certain privileges — privileges he was only too happy to take advantage of! For instance, one of Kapei's favourite pastimes became screaming loudly for no reason at all. He knew that the moment the older girls heard him trumpeting, they would rush to his side. No matter how many times he 'cried wolf,' Sonje, Lima Lima, and Quanza never ceased to respond. He always looked quite smug after pulling this little trick, relishing all the attention.

The year also began with broadened horizons for one member of our Umani herd: On 7th January, Quanza decided to go wild! She historically led the orphans back to the stockades, but on this particular evening, she was reluctant to leave a wild bull who had linked up with the herd. Much later, the Keepers heard Quanza trumpeting outside the stockades. They opened the gate, but she disappeared back into the bush, definitively communicating that she was ready to be a 'nightclubber' (the nickname given to the semi-independent orphans). Still, the Keepers appreciated that Quanza checked in before continuing her night out in the forest.

Of course, going wild is not always a linear process. Towards the end of February, Quanza decided that she wanted a break. As the dependent herd came home for the evening, she ran into the stockades and trumpeted loudly, making it crystal clear she did not want to spend the night out in the bush. The Keepers let her inside the compound, and she promptly went to check on the babies before joining Kiasa in her old room. Kiasa was

not happy to have a roommate again, as she had grown accustomed to having her own space.

On 12th March, a miracle was delivered into our midst. At mud bath time, Murera let out a short trumpet and then disappeared into the bushes. A few minutes later, all the orphans gathered round and started calling to the Keepers. They quickly realised the cause for celebration: Murera had given birth to a beautiful little girl — the first wild baby born to our Umani herd! We named her Mwana, which means 'child' in Swahili.

The first night, Murera did not move, instead remaining where she had given birth. The Keepers brought milk bottles, lucerne, and fresh greens to the new mother. Lima Lima remained by her side all night.

At first light, the dependent orphan herd gathered around their matriarch. Even Ngasha, Jasiri, and Faraja joined the birth celebration. Perhaps realising the gravitas of the occasion, they were on their best behaviour. Interestingly, for several days after Murera gave birth, a big, wild bull stood vigil by mother and baby. He kept his distance, but was clearly asserting himself as their personal protector. Given how attentive he was, the Keepers suspected that he must be Mwana's father.

However, there was one hiccup in Murera's entrée into motherhood. Perhaps because of the hip and leg injuries she sustained as a calf, she found it difficult to stand in the proper position for baby Mwana to suckle. The first days are pivotal for any newborn elephant, and the Keepers worried that her daughter was not getting the all-important colostrum and milk she needed to thrive. So, they stepped in and began milking Murera, then bottle-feeding Mwana. In an incredible display of trust, Murera accepted these measures without any reservations.

This continued, night and day, for more than a week. Then, on the 11th day, we finally had a breakthrough. Without preamble, Murera propped her leg forward and allowed Mwana to suckle. From that moment forward, she nursed her like an old pro.

The arrival of Mwana transformed the Umani herd in the most wonderful way. Overnight, everyone became fully focused on ‘their’ new baby. Even as an infant, Mwana proved to be a remarkably bright and brave young elephant, eager to learn new things and dive into the next adventure. She quickly became the star of the mud bath, wrangling the entire herd into the pool even on chilly, overcast days.

Kiasa and Enkesha wasted no time in establishing themselves as Mwana’s chief nannies. Murera accepted their assistance gratefully. However, she seemed leery of the older girls, perhaps a bit worried that they might kidnap her daughter. For the likes of Lima Lima and Zongoloni, who are notorious for coveting babies, this was a very justified fear!

Even our boisterous boys became enchanted with Mwana. Kiombo and Maktao would shepherd her into the mud bath, gently guiding her to the shallowest area. We wondered if Mwashoti would be jealous of Mwana, given the special bond he has always shared with Murera, but he welcomed her with his usual emotional intelligence. The sweet bull would browse alongside Murera until he saw Mwana approaching, then move off to give her space to feed her baby.

We noticed a distinct change in Sonje following Mwana’s birth. Perhaps inspired to start her own family, she started spending more nights out in the forest with the nightclubbers. Occasionally, she would only link up with the dependent herd much later in the day. We were surprised that Sonje became so independent so quickly, but this was a positive development in her reintegration journey.

Only one orphan was less than pleased by Mwana’s arrival. We are, of course, referring to Kapei. He was not used to sharing the spotlight and resented Mwana for all the attention she received. Whenever the opportunity arose, he could not resist getting his revenge. One morning, he rudely flared his ears in Mwana’s face, trying to scare the little girl. His theatrics worked — but they also backfired. Mwana also trumpeted in fright, which caused all her nannies to rush to her rescue. They found Kapei, looking very guilty.

After a long spell in the wild, Jasiri returned to visit his human-elephant family in May. This was the first time he properly met little Mwana. He walked around the baby,

smelling and gently inspecting her. Then, he walked over to Murera and gave her a big trunk hug, as if to congratulate her on her new daughter.

They were once best friends, but Jasiri and Ngasha became enemies in 2023. So much of elephant dynamics remains a mystery, but we suspect the root of the feud was that they were both vying to be the dominant bull at Umani. Lima Lima and the other girls tried to play peacemaker, but it was to no avail: The boys were intent upon fighting.

The Keepers call Lima Lima their scout, and it’s a nickname she has earned with distinction. Every month is filled with examples: Lima Lima is the first to warn the Keepers about snakes, crocodiles, elephants, leopards — any sort of interloper. In June, she did an excellent job protecting Mwana from some buffalos. The tiny baby, not realising that she had a distinct size disadvantage, tried to charge at the interlopers with her tiny ears flared. Lima Lima saw that Mwana’s efforts were only irritating them to a dangerous degree. She placed herself between the buffalos and Mwana and then trumpeted loudly, sending them running into the bushes.

Ziwa was the first orphan from our Umani family to complete his reintegration journey. He was adopted by a wild herd of elephants, although he continues to stop by periodically. Ziwa usually shows up in the early morning or in the evening, then visits for a bit while his honorary family waits nearby. It is heartwarming to see how enthusiastically these elephants have ‘adopted’ Ziwa; they always collect him from the orphan herd before they move off.

Alamaya is also thriving as a wild elephant, although he and Mwashoti continue to visit the dependent herd on a regular basis. They are both growing into well-mannered, gentle boys. Alamaya has notably huge tusks — he will be an impressive bull when he is fully grown.

July was marred by a great tragedy for our Umani family and the entire Sheldrick Wildlife Trust team. On 19th July, under the most shocking, tragic circumstances, we lost a friend and fellow Keeper, Patrick Muiruri. An unusually aggressive wild bull in musth was pursuing Zongoloni, who was in season. Out of nowhere, he exploded out of the forest and locked onto the Keepers. They took off and found refuge in a nearby cottage. However, Patrick ran in a different direction, taking a longer route. The



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bull caught up with him, killing him almost instantly. The attack was entirely unprovoked, unexpected, and shattering for all who witnessed it.

The orphans were very distressed to see this unfold and disappeared into the forest. They did not return to the Keepers for the rest of the day and didn't even come back to the stockades that night. For many, it was their very first night out in the bush, which must have been frightening.

The entire herd remained hidden until the following day, after our team successfully translocated the bull who killed Patrick out of the Kibwezi Forest. Remarkably, the orphans returned just hours after he was moved. We believe they were distraught by the events that had unfolded and did not want to bring further danger to their Keepers. Once they saw that the bull had been taken away from the forest, they knew it was safe to return home.

It will take time to heal from the events that unfolded that day. The team will always remember Patrick as happy, hard-working, honest, and respectful. He lived a meaningful life and chose to follow a very special calling. In the process, he touched countless lives, both human and elephant.

August began with an evolution for one of the quietest members of our herd. Quanza was always more of a background player — given her traumatic rescue story, in which she saw her family gunned down by poachers, we can understand why she was shy and wary — but that started to change. She began taking on more responsibilities within the herd, acting as a nanny to the younger orphans and a deputy when Lima Lima was on scout duty. It is always incredibly gratifying to see traumatised orphans begin to heal from their circumstances, no matter how long it takes.

26th August was a big day for our Umani family. After great consideration, we relocated Ngasha to our Ithumba Reintegration Unit. Ngasha never quite learned his manners and, as he grew bigger, he became too rowdy for our small herd in the Kibwezi Forest. Only Jasiri could keep him in line, but with Jasiri living wild, we couldn't rely on his disciplining presence. We believe that Tsavo will be a better place for Ngasha, with its vast spaces and large populations of bulls. There, surrounded by so many older mentors, we feel sure that he will learn to respect other elephants.

While Ngasha's move was bittersweet for the Keepers, the orphans were unanimously celebratory once they realised that he had departed the Kibwezi Forest. That day, everyone enjoyed an unusually long, uninterrupted mud bath, savouring the lack of disruptions that Ngasha usually brought with him.

At six years old, Kiombo and Maktao are starting to become very aware of their growing size and strength. Every morning, the boys meet for sparring games. They are evenly matched, but Kiombo often resorts to dirty tricks, like tail-biting and leg-grabbing. Maktao, who is a gentle bull along the lines of Mwashoti, rarely stoops to such a low level.

For several months after her rescue, Amali struggled to find her place amongst the Umani orphans. As 2023 drew to a close, however, she had become an integral part of the herd. Murera relies on her help, Mwana looks up to her like a big sister, and Mwashoti cherishes her as a little sister. It's wonderful to see her coming into her own.

November began with rain in the Kibwezi Forest, which continued throughout December. The forest, which remains relatively lush even during the dry season, became a jungle. This was a wonderful development for the orphans, who had a bounty of delicious vegetation at their feet. Even baby Mwana could be spotted chomping on leaves and branches. For all its happiness and heartbreak, 2023 ended on an emerald and auspicious note for our Umani family.



Kaluku Neonate Unit - Est. 2018

8 milk-dependent orphaned elephants

1 orphaned giraffe

2 orphaned rhinos

The new year began with a sweet new addition to our eclectic orphan herd: Harvey, an aptly named Harvey's duiker. With his tufted mohawk and unusually affectionate manner, he quickly nudged and nuzzled his way into the hearts of everyone at Kaluku.

Every creature we rescue, big and small, is of equal importance. Squeaky is an orphaned ground squirrel who came into our care in 2021. She has been living wild for some time now and has successfully raised several litters of kits. However, she remains a familiar face around Kaluku and visits often for tummy scratches and special snacks. Despite this, she had always been intensely private about her own family, keeping her babies hidden away. But one afternoon, she turned up with several tiny squirrels in tow. Just as we feel when our orphaned elephants introduce us to their wild-born young, it meant so much that Squeaky invited us into this part of her life.

While 2023 was overall a wonderful year for our Kaluku herd, it was blighted by a heartbreaking loss: On 13th September, completely out of the blue, Doldol died. She was a bit off-colour mid-morning, so her Keepers brought her back to her stable to rest. Despite acting fast and working with our trusted veterinarians to determine the best course of action, her condition started to rapidly deteriorate. At 7:30 that night, just six hours from the first onset of symptoms, Doldol passed away. We were unable to confirm the exact cause of death, but it seems possible that she ingested something poisonous in the bush.

Doldol's loss left all of us devastated, but especially her Keepers who dedicated two years of their lives to her. Mishak was the reason that she made it through her precarious initial months, when most neonate elephants wouldn't have had a chance. Thanks to his unwavering care, ably supported by Peter and Jonas, Doldol led a blissful existence for the time she had with us.

But as Daphne always said, we must turn the page to focus on the living. Our Kaluku orphan herd continued to grow in 2023, beginning with a striking rescue on 13th March, when a tiny calf was found trapped inside a manhole on community land. At first glance, it looked like an optical illusion: Peering into the manhole, you could make out the head of a tiny baby elephant. The rest of his body was squashed inside, impossibly claustrophobic. Communities access water via these manholes, which is why the cover had been removed in the first place.

The orphan, who we named Natibu, was flown directly to Kaluku. In the health department, luck was on Natibu's side. Despite the usual challenges that come with teething, he did remarkably well. However, other scars were more difficult to heal: Natibu was very slow to settle, clearly still traumatised by his ordeal. For a long time, he was claustrophobic inside his stable, as it must have reminded him of his time in the manhole. The Keepers patiently earned Natibu's trust, showing him that he was loved and in safe hands.

One special friend paved the way for Natibu: Mayan, who became the little orphan's 'big brother.' When he was let out of his stable in the morning, Natibu would make a beeline for Mayan's bedroom and wait for him to emerge. From there, they walked through the day's activities step in step. Mayan's rescue story mirrors Natibu's in many ways — he was found submerged in a latrine, with only his trunk poking above the water — which makes their bond all the more poignant.

Surprising us all, Rokka turned over a new leaf in 2023. Far from the naughty, mischief-loving elephant of the past, she started behaving herself. It was almost as if she realised that she had become the matriarch of her little herd and that a certain level of decorum came with the role. Mwinzi emerged as her firm favourite. Whenever 'gentle uncle' Mayan tried to spend time with the younger bull, she became jealous and chased him away.

Despite being one of the smallest elephants at Kaluku, Mwinzi runs the show. He is such an easy-going chap, sauntering through life in his signature, laid-back manner. We have never met a calf with such a prodigious appetite for greens: Every night, the Keepers stock Mwinzi's nighttime stable full of so many branches that it looks like a jungle. Come morning, there is not a leaf remaining!

Manda emerged as another changed elephant. He used to be fixated on asserting his dominance within the herd. At last, he seemed to understand that isn't really a priority among our relaxed Kaluku elephants. This realisation helped him relax, too. Manda became a great playmate to Mwinzi and Natibu, particularly in the mud bath. As

the babies wiggled and waddled in the cool, wet earth, he would stand over them, carefully shielding them from the hot sun. Natibu is very similar to Manda in terms of physique; both boys are unusually leggy and tall.

Mayan and Vaarti have always been best friends, and as they grow older, their relationship is only getting stronger. Vaarti is almost a full year younger than Mayan, but because Mayan struggled with his health so much as an infant, they are evenly sized. One could forgive Mayan for being competitive with his younger friend, but that thought never seems to cross his mind. Like Vaarti, he is such a light-hearted, gentle bull.

However, Vaarti is not easy-going when it comes to the hosepipe — his preferred water source. He speeds to be first to milk feeds, propelled by ulterior motives: He finishes his bottles long before the others, which means he can stroll over to the hosepipe in a leisurely manner. By the time Rokka (his main competitor in ‘hose wars’) approaches to wrest the hose from his grasp, he has already had his fill of fresh, cold water.

September was a notable month in the rhino department. On 6th September, rangers spotted a newborn rhino calf on his own by a waterhole. He was located in the free release zone of Tsavo West National Park, which is home to a healthy population of black rhinos. However, his mother was nowhere to be found. We have a few working hypotheses as to why he was orphaned: Given that he was born in the midst of dry and challenging conditions, it is possible that he was intentionally abandoned by his mum, because she knew that she would struggle to produce ample milk. Otherwise, he was born premature and was unable to nurse. It is also possible that an amorous bull set his sights on the new mother, and the baby was abandoned in the melee.

Regardless of the reason, it was a miracle that hyenas, jackals, or other predators hadn’t already snatched the little orphan. After an aerial patrol revealed no rhinos in the area, the calf was rescued and brought to our Kaluku Neonate Unit. We named him Chamboi, after a nearby hill in Tsavo West.

Given his diminutive size, Chamboi had likely never had his mother’s colostrum. As a result, his health was in a precarious state. Fortunately, he helped himself and took to his milk bottle right away. He also became completely hooked on his Keepers. Clad in his cherry red blanket, he toddled after them from sunrise to sunset.

With the arrival of one rhino to Kaluku came the departure of another. At long last, the time had come for Apollo to take the next step in his reintegration journey. He had started to show signs of outgrowing Kaluku, becoming increasingly frisky and flighty.

On the morning of 13th September, Apollo bid farewell to Kaluku — the place he had called home for nearly four years — and made the move to Rhino Base. We created this secure reintegration site specifically with Apollo’s future in mind. It sits in the middle of Tsavo East National Park, an area that has high oversight and is rigorously patrolled by both ground and aerial teams. Abutting his stockade compound is a fully fenced, 50-acre wandering ground where he can establish his new territory. In the fullness of time, he will venture beyond the fenced boundaries and into the wilds of Tsavo, but things happen very gradually with rhinos.

Apollo is thriving in his new home. Showcasing his growing independence, he now only returns to his stockade when he feels like it. Sometimes, despite the best efforts of his Keepers, he only comes home late at night or very early in the morning. Fortunately, his wandering grounds are completely fenced in and secure, so he can safely enjoy his nocturnal roamings. KWS deploys a ‘night shift’ to look after him while he is out and about.

Back at Kaluku, the year ended on a bountiful note. At long last, the rains arrived, transforming the parched bush into a jungle. No one was happier about this development than Twiggy. The dry season was taxing for our orphaned giraffe, as it evaporated most of the browse. She had taken up residence in the treetops of Kaluku, finding every last green leaf to enjoy. The rains marked a turning point in her daily schedule; no longer did she have to focus so wholeheartedly on the hunt for food. We noticed that she suddenly adopted a much more leisurely air, knowing that she was surrounded by an endless bounty of vegetation.

Twiggy has emerged as the ‘queen bee’ of the smaller orphans, notably Nini, Lana, and Daza the gazelles, and Harvey the duiker. Peter — the Keeper who looks after the small orphans — relies on Twiggy as a nanny, assistant, and signpost. Whenever he needs to locate the little ones, he just seeks out the giraffe. More often than not, he finds them loitering at her feet!



At Kaluku, the year ended on a bountiful note. At long last, the much anticipated rains arrived, transforming the parched bush into a jungle. No one was happier about this than our Kaluku herd. Mud baths became a frenzy of activity.







*Remembering our precious Doldol,
who meant so much to so many.*





2023 Orphan Rescues



"As the drought and associated human-wildlife conflict abated, so did the deluge of elephant rescues seen in years prior.

However, even favourable conditions bring orphans.

Our 2023 rescues include 11 orphaned elephants, in addition to one orphaned rhino and a myriad of other small species."

Angela Sheldrick

- Nairobi Nursery -



Loldaiga

Date rescued: 15 January 2023

Reason orphaned: Drought

Age at arrival: 2 years

Rescue location: Lolldaiga Hills, Laikipia

Mokogodo

Date rescued: 13 February 2023

Reason orphaned: Unknown

Age at arrival: 4 months

Rescue location: Mukogodo Forest, Laikipia



Mushuru

Date rescued: 14 February 2023

Reason orphaned: Human-wildlife conflict

Age at arrival: 2 years

Rescue location: Amboseli ecosystem

Taroha

Date rescued: 2 March 2023

Reason orphaned: Unknown

Age at arrival: 12 months

Rescue location: Tsavo West National Park



Sholumai

Date rescued: 5 April 2023

Reason orphaned: Drought

Age at arrival: 23 months

Rescue location: Doldol Group Ranch, Laikipia



Talek

Date rescued: 26 June 2023

Reason orphaned: Unknown

Age at arrival: 7 months

Rescue location: Maasai Mara National Reserve

Pardamat

Date rescued: 28 July 2023

Reason orphaned: Human-wildlife conflict

Age at arrival: 12 months

Rescue location: Pardamat Conservation Area,
Maasai Mara



- Kaluku Neonate Unit -



Natibu

Date rescued: 13 March 2023

Reason orphaned: Trapped in a manhole

Age at arrival: 3 months old

Rescue location: Taita Ranches, Tsavo ecosystem

Korbega

Date rescued: 23 August 2023

Reason orphaned: Fell down a well

Age at arrival: 3 days old

Rescue location: Meru National Park



- Voi Reintegration Unit -



Logoito

Date rescued: 16 April 2023

Reason orphaned: Unknown

Age at arrival: 3 years

Rescue location: Mwatate Sisal Estate,
Tsavo ecosystem

- Ithumba Reintegration Unit -

Motomo

Date rescued: 23 March 2023

Reason orphaned: Human-wildlife conflict

Age at arrival: 8 years

Rescue location: Mutomo Town, Tsavo
ecosystem



2023 Rhino Update

We currently have four orphaned black rhinos in our care, including two infants. Maxwell and Raha are located in Nairobi, Apollo and little Chamboi are located in Tsavo.



Black rhinos are critically endangered: Kenya has emerged as a stronghold for the species, although its population hovers below 1,000 individuals. As such, each new life serves as a beacon of hope. While Maxwell has a forever home with us due to his congenital blindness, every other rhino in our care will be gradually reintegrated into a protected wilderness when grown, so they can contribute to their species' recovery.



Maxwell

Date rescued: 14 February 2007

Reason orphaned: Natural causes

Age at arrival: 12 months

Rescue location: Nairobi National Park

Current location: Nairobi Nursery, Nairobi National Park

Maxwell is a pillar of our Nairobi Nursery. Due to his congenital blindness, he would not survive in the wild, but he has a very happy life with us. He makes full use of his network of stockades, easily navigating them without sight. He has a love-hate relationship with the Nursery's resident wild warthogs, and this year, he also struck up a special friendship with Mzinga the orphaned elephant.



Apollo

Date rescued: 21 September 2019

Reason orphaned: Natural causes

Age at arrival: 6 months

Rescue location: Tsavo West IPZ

Current location: Rhino Base, Tsavo East National Park

2023 was a big year for Apollo. After nearly four years at our Kaluku Neonate Unit, he took the next step in his reintegration journey and graduated to Rhino Base in Tsavo East. Two of his original Keepers travelled with him, providing continuity of care during this change. Apollo has embraced his new home wholeheartedly; in fact, he sometimes flatly refuses to go into his stockade at night, preferring instead to explore in his fully secured roaming grounds.



Raha

Date rescued: 23 September 2022

Reason orphaned: Unknown

Age at arrival: 1 week

Rescue location: Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Laikipia

Current location: Nairobi Nursery, Nairobi National Park

After a difficult beginning, Raha finally hit her stride in 2023. For much of the year, she continued to heal from the horrific predator attack that left her with a mauled rear end. We had a breakthrough in June, when Raha finally started to eat greens. As a result of her newly expanded diet, she has become bigger and stronger. We often compare Raha to a tortoise: She is very slow, very calm, and very reluctant to do anything that doesn't suit her fancy!



Chamboi

Date rescued: 6 September 2023

Reason orphaned: Natural causes

Age at arrival: 0 weeks

Rescue location: Tsavo West IPZ

Current location: Kaluku Neonate Unit, Tsavo ecosystem

Chamboi was our 2023 rhino rescue. He was days old, at most, when KWS rangers found him by a waterhole in the Tsavo West IPZ. We have a few hypotheses as to why he was orphaned, which are detailed in the Kaluku Neonate Unit section. He has embraced his Keepers as his surrogate parents, following them with a heart-warming loyalty and adoration.

Mobile Veterinary Units

6 Mobile Veterinary Units

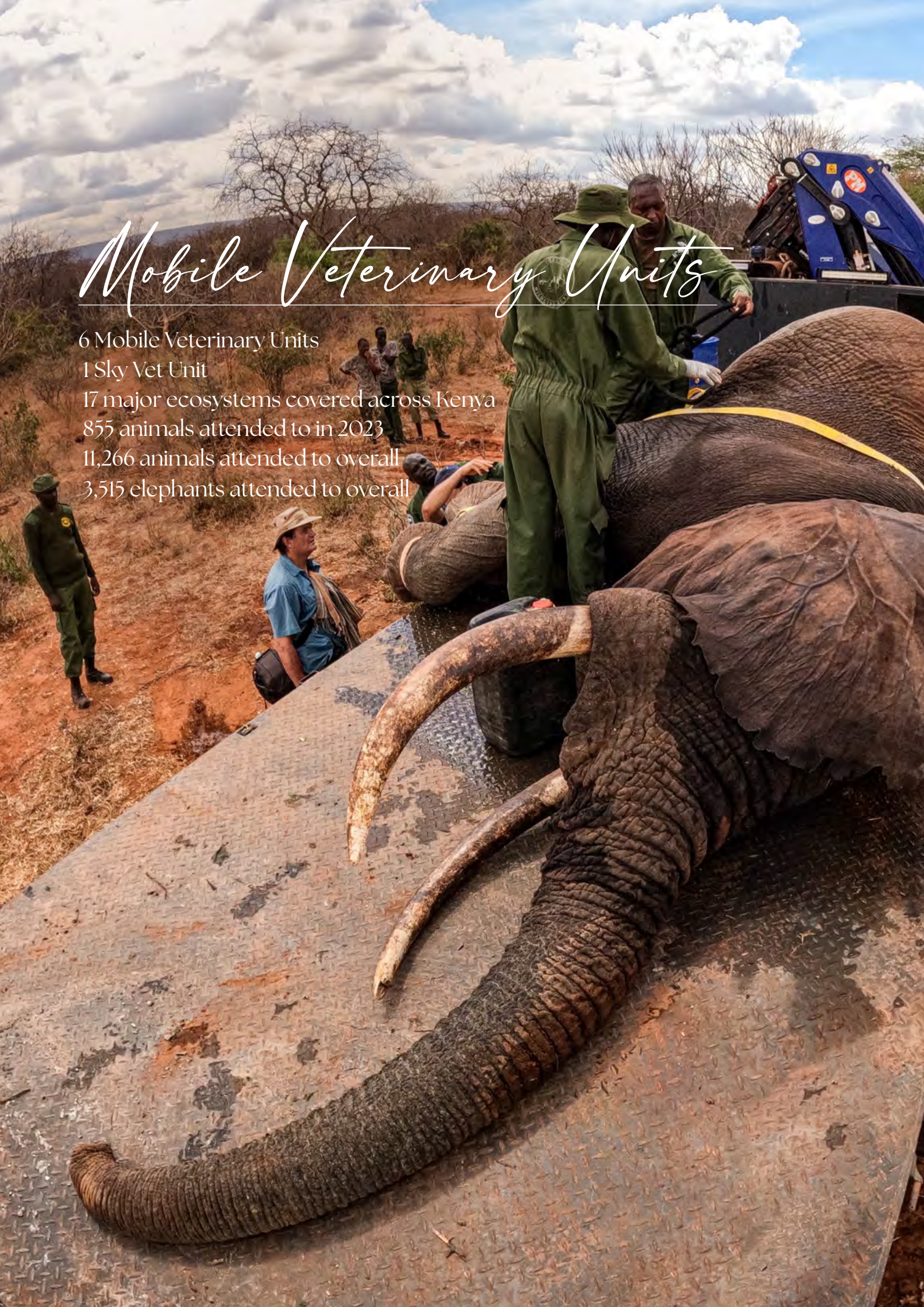
1 Sky Vet Unit

17 major ecosystems covered across Kenya

855 animals attended to in 2023

11,266 animals attended to overall

3,515 elephants attended to overall



Veterinary interventions and field conservation go hand-in-hand. In the course of their daily patrols, SWT rangers and pilots are often the first to spot patients. Similarly, conducting veterinary treatments in some of the most remote corners of Kenya requires a coordinated response, often spanning aerial and ground support. The ability to provide rapid intervention can mean the difference between life and death.

We launched our first Mobile Veterinary Unit in 2003, working in partnership with the Kenya Wildlife Service. The success of the inaugural Tsavo Unit inspired us to expand the program across the country. Today, we operate six SWT/KWS Mobile Veterinary Units and Sky Vets, which collectively cover Kenya's key regions: Tsavo, the country's largest wilderness and home to its biggest population of elephants; the Mara, a plains-dominated landscape famous for its great migration; Meru, a sanctuary for Kenya's white and black rhinos; Amboseli, a small-but-dynamic ecosystem that is celebrated for its tuskers; Mount Kenya, a rugged region dominated by the highest peak in Kenya; and the Rift Valley, a diverse habitat with an equally diverse array of birds and wildlife.

Anchored by these ecosystems, our Mobile Vet Units work broadly across the country. The Mara Unit responds to cases as far as Lake Victoria, on the border of Uganda, while the Tsavo Unit extends as far as the Indian Ocean. The Meru, Mount Kenya, and Rift Valley Units serve the north-central reaches of Kenya, while Amboseli covers down to Tanzania. Sky Vets, our rapid-response aerial veterinary unit, covers any gaps, ensuring no area goes uncovered.

Sheldrick Wildlife Trust fully funds every Vet Unit. Each team is led by a KWS field veterinarian, along with KWS capture rangers and a SWT driver. Each team is equipped with a customised Land Cruiser, along with a full suite of veterinary equipment. They operate from a central headquarters, travelling within the wider region in response to all manner of wildlife emergencies.

Collaboration underpins the success of the Vet Units. Teams rely upon crowdsourced information to alert them about patients in need. This informal surveillance network includes KWS personnel, local NGOs, lodge staff, guides, tourists, pilots, and local communities. The Vet Units also work closely with other SWT conservation programs — most notably, the Aerial Unit. In the course of their daily patrols, pilots often make the initial discovery of an ill or injured animal. Given the rugged terrain and remote locations involved, aerial support is often required to successfully complete a treatment.

Be it darting a patient from the air or helping the team rapidly reach an inaccessible area, our Aerial Unit has vastly increased the number of patients Mobile Vet Units are able to successfully treat. Meanwhile, rangers from SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Teams provide invaluable assistance on the ground.

This year brought about some changes to the KWS field veterinarians in charge of each SWT/KWS Mobile Vet Unit. Dr Poghon, who led the Tsavo Unit for ten years before moving to Nairobi Headquarters to lead the Animal Capture Unit, returned to the field in January to run the Mount Kenya Mobile Vet Unit. Dr Njoroge, a veterinarian with more than two decades of experience, took the helm of the Mara Unit.

Over the course of 2023, Mobile Vet Units attended to 855 animals in 655 cases. As per usual, elephants made up a significant portion of patients, accounting for 28.7 percent in 2023. It is interesting to note that the number of elephants treated in 2023 increased 20.7 percent from the year prior. In addition to 245 elephants, teams also attended to 97 leopards and other predators, 92 giraffes, 87 rhinos, 212 plains game, and a variety of other species.

Nearly a third of 2023 veterinary cases were the victims of poaching activities (264 in total, or 30.9 percent), while nearly one-fifth were victims of human-wildlife conflict (175 in total, or 20.5 percent). It is interesting — and worrying — to note that poaching victims represented 14.6 percent of animals treated in 2022, while 19.7 percent were victims of human-wildlife conflict. While the number of human-wildlife conflict cases remained relatively stable, the proportion of poaching cases more than doubled between 2022 and 2023.

The caseload of the Vet Units reflect pressures on the ecosystem. While this year saw a blessed reduction in drought-related cases, it was worrying to still see a stable number of human-wildlife conflict victims, despite the abatement of the drought. Even more sobering was the increase in poaching cases. Bushmeat poaching, which was historically a subsistence-level practice, is now done on a commercial scale. Snares, their weapon of choice,

TSAVO MOBILE VET UNIT

UNIT LEADER: DR CAMPAIGN LIMO

ESTABLISHED: 2003

AREAS OF OPERATION: GREATER TSAVO CONSERVATION AREA, CHYULU HILLS NATIONAL PARK, AND SHIMBA HILLS NATIONAL RESERVE

MARA MOBILE VET UNIT

UNIT LEADER: DR MICHAEL NJORGE

ESTABLISHED: 2007

AREAS OF OPERATION: MASAI MARA NATIONAL RESERVE, THE ADJACENT MARA TRIANGLE, NEIGHBOURING COMMUNITY AREAS, RUMA NATIONAL PARK, AND LAKE VICTORIA.

MERU MOBILE VET UNIT

UNIT LEADER: DR DUNCAN AMINGA

ESTABLISHED: 2012

AREAS OF OPERATION: MERU NATIONAL PARK, BISANADI NATIONAL RESERVE, KORA NATIONAL RESERVE, AND SURROUNDING WILDLIFE DISPERSAL AREAS, PARKS, AND RESERVES

AMBOSELI MOBILE VET UNIT

UNIT LEADER: DR EDWARD KARIUKI

ESTABLISHED: 2014

AREAS OF OPERATION: AMBOSELI NATIONAL PARK AND THE SOUTHERN CONSERVATION AREA, ENCOMPASSING KAJIADO, NAMANGA, MAGADI, AND LAKE NATRON; SOUTHERN TSAVO WEST, INCLUDING LAKE JIPE

MOUNT KENYA MOBILE VET UNIT

UNIT LEADER: DR JEREMIAH POGHON

ESTABLISHED: 2017

AREAS OF OPERATION: MOUNT KENYA, THE ABERDARE RANGE, AND SOUTHERN LAIKIPIA

RIFT VALLEY MOBILE VET UNIT

UNIT LEADER: DR TITUS KAITHO

ESTABLISHED: 2021

AREAS OF OPERATION: LAKE NAIVASHA-ELEMENTAITA-NAKURU REGION AND BOGORIA-BARINGO REGION

SKY VET

UNIT LEADER: ON-DUTY KWS VETERINARIAN

ESTABLISHED: 2013

AREAS OF OPERATION: THE WHOLE OF KENYA, WITH A FOCUS ON CASES IN REMOTE OR INACCESSIBLE AREAS

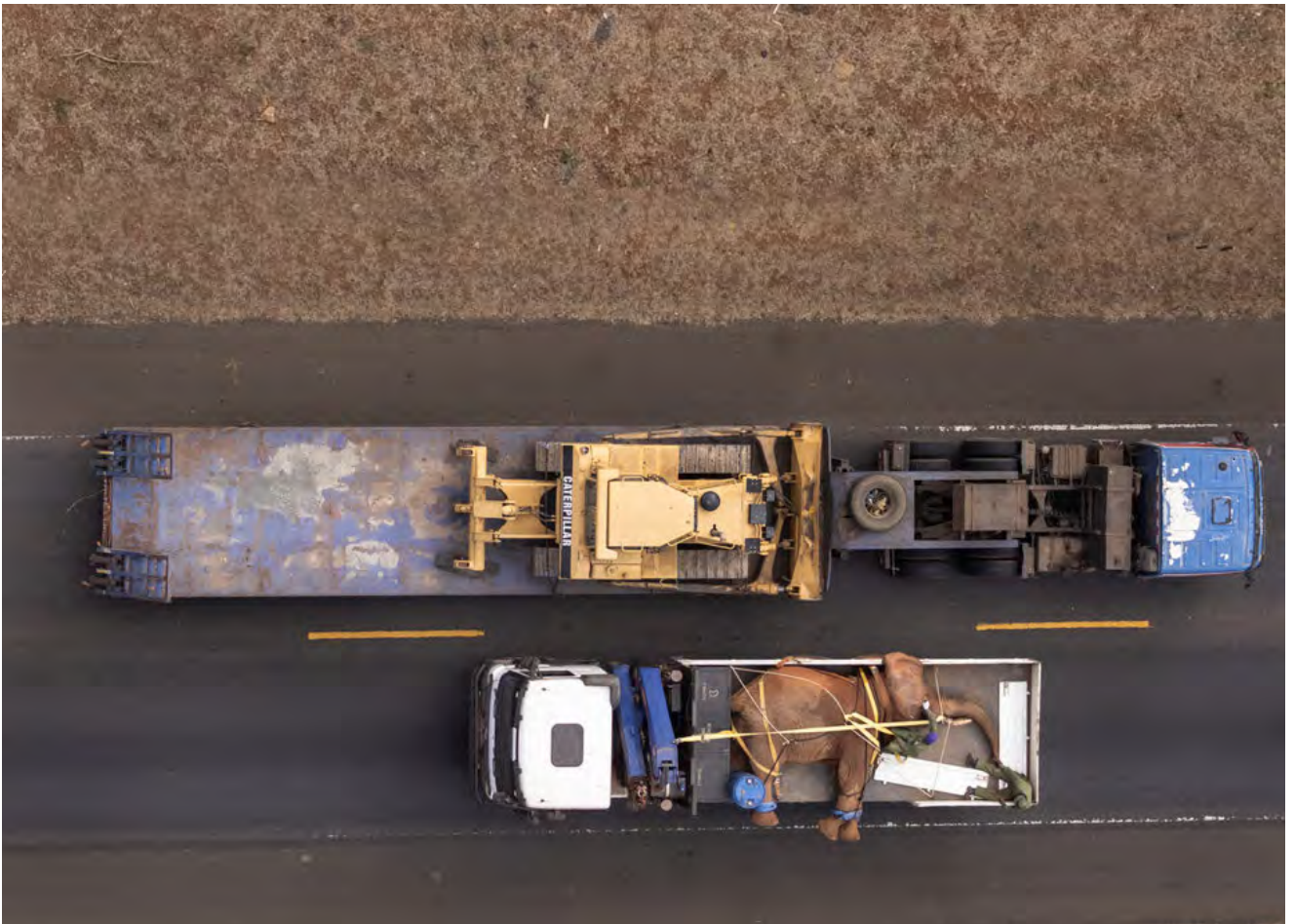






For all the heartbreak they witness in the field, veterinary units are also the frontline facilitators of feel-good outcomes.





are indiscriminate and have an infinite lifespan. Set to catch small game, the wire or rope loop tightens noose-like around any animal unlucky enough to cross its path. While ivory and rhino horn poaching has declined in recent years, the threat seems to be creeping back to prominence. Vet Units saw a rise in elephant, rhino, giraffe, and predator poaching attempts.

Throughout the year, poaching victims made up more than a third of all cases treated by the Vet Units, ranging from a high of 42.6 percent of cases in Q1 to a relative 'low' of 35.8 percent in Q4. ('Poaching' encompasses both bushmeat poaching and ivory/rhino/trophy poaching.) Among all species treated for poaching-related injuries, elephants accounted for 39.8 percent of all cases, representing the largest proportion of poaching victims.

Over the course of 2023, teams treated a range of bushmeat poaching victims, from an endangered Grévy's zebra with a snare wound tightly around his neck, to a large bull elephant with a cable slicing around his foreleg. In the Mara, a towering giraffe and comparatively tiny aardvark were treated for snare wounds in the same month, demonstrating the indiscriminate nature of these weapons. Worryingly, towards the end of the year, we saw a marked increase in elephants who had been targeted by ivory poachers. While the Vet Units were able to save the majority of their patients, they still encountered a tragic number who succumbed to their injuries.

For all the heartbreak they witness in the field, teams are also the frontline facilitators of feel-good outcomes. On 15th June, the SWT/KWS Tsavo Mobile Veterinary Unit received a report of two young lion cubs who had become trapped in a four-metre-deep pit. They were met with a grim scene: The cubs, who were approximately six months old, had been in the pit for about 36 hours and were visibly weak and frightened. The team immobilised the pair — despite their young age, they were still predators capable of packing a punch — and lowered a ladder into the pit to extract them, one by one.

The team gave the cubs a thorough veterinary examination. Cognisant of their empty stomachs, they also distributed supplemental food, which the girls ate with gusto. Signs indicated that lions were still in the area, so rangers monitored the cubs overnight, ensuring they didn't come to any harm. The following day, 12 hours after their rescue, their pride prowled through the area and scooped up their babies. We can only imagine how relieved their mother must have been to discover that her cubs had been miraculously rescued.

One more miracle emerged from this harrowing situation: Students and teachers from Iltital Secondary School watched the rescue of the cubs unfold. They were captivated by the operation and delighted by its positive outcome. These experiences go a long way in engendering a passion for conservation among Kenyans. This is particularly important in rural areas like Iltital, where many have a complicated and often fraught relationship with wildlife. In fact, the students felt so invested that they volunteered to fill the pit, in order to avert any future incidents. In a single afternoon, seeds were planted to nurture the next generation of conservationists.

Our Ithumba stockades were the site of not one but two incredible treatments this year. This area has become a hub for Tsavo's elephants of the north. They know it is a safe place to congregate and take water. While the Ithumba Keepers give these visitors the space they deserve, they closely monitor everyone's comings and goings, on the lookout for any elephants who might be in need of help.

The first Ithumba treatment unfolded thanks to a chance sighting. As dusk fell on 23rd February, Head Keeper Benjamin noticed that a visiting bull had a small wound on his trunk that was oozing pus. Suspecting an arrow injury, he reported the sighting, and our fixed-wing pilot managed to re-locate him amidst a group of 15 bulls the following morning. Meanwhile, the SWT helicopter flew the SWT/KWS Tsavo Mobile Vet Unit to the scene. After the pilot separated the patient from the group, Dr Limo darted him from the air. Two SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Teams were on-site to shepherd the bull to an open area, where treatment could commence.

As it transpired, it was a two-part treatment. The bull had a small arrow wound on one side of his trunk, which was attended to first. However, he also had another, more sinister spear wound on the other side of his trunk. Given the nature of the injuries, we suspect that the bull was caught up in human-wildlife conflict. This was by no means a straightforward operation, but thanks to the vigilance and coordination of our teams, the bull was spotted and helped in time. Dr Limo was confident that he would make a speedy and complete recovery. (The second Ithumba treatment is shared in the addendum story.)

As treatments often remind us, many lives rely upon a positive outcome. On 2nd July, Mara Naboisho Conservancy reported a female elephant who had been speared in the abdomen, leaving her with a grievous

wound. Further raising the stakes, she had two young calves who were relying on her to survive. The SWT/KWS Mara Mobile Vet Unit was off-duty, but we had a plan: Sky Vets, our aerial veterinary initiative, exists to reach patients in remote areas and to provide coverage when other teams are on leave. We mobilised our Meru Mobile Vet Unit, which had bandwidth to move outside their usual patch. The team was flown south, to the heart of the Mara ecosystem.

They were met with a sobering sight: The female, who had a young calf and a milk-dependent calf by her side, had been punctured by a spear on her left flank. Omental tissue and muscle tissue were hanging from the wound. Left untended, it was susceptible to infection, which can have lethal complications.

Fortunately, help arrived in time. Dr Aminga darted the patient, then trimmed the contaminated tissue, applied a ligature to control bleeding, sutured the peritoneum, and sealed the wound with green clay. With treatment complete, the mum was revived and reunited with her calves. She has been given a good prognosis for recovery.

But the Sky Vets mission wasn't complete yet! During the initial treatment, the team received a report of a nearby bull who had an arrow lodged in his jaw. Facial injuries can have fatal consequences, as an infected wound can inhibit an elephant's ability to feed. Thanks to speedy intervention, however, this bull was spared such a fate. The team darted the patient, removed the arrow, treated the wound, and sent him on his way with another good prognosis. As this tandem mission illustrates, Sky Vets can mean the difference between life and death. Thanks to aerial capabilities and multiple teams across Kenya, we were able to answer the call, helping two elephants — not to mention the little lives relying on them.

These highlighted cases provide just a peek into the 855 animals treated by SWT/KWS Mobile Vet Units throughout the year. Teams had a 75.6 percent success rate. As these operations remind us, their work saves hundreds of lives every year — not to mention those who rely upon them. We are very proud to be in a position to help these creatures, saving innocent lives and keeping Kenya's wild families together.

Notes from the Field:

An Incredible Treatment at the Ithumba Stockades



Ithumba has been the scene of some of our most incredible field stories in recent memory. There have been not one, but two occasions in which orphaned calves were delivered to the stockades by wild elephants.

It was where Sidai led her little family on the long, drought-stricken trek 'home,' knowing she needed urgent treatment for an arrow wound. In fact, many elephants — ex-orphans and wild elephants alike — have come to Ithumba seeking help. This incident is but the latest in a long line of remarkable stories.

It began in early July, when a bull elephant appeared at the Ithumba stockades. This was not unusual; with the dry season beginning to bite across Tsavo, it was common for 50 or more bulls to converge for water. Our Keepers are always on high alert when these visitors pass through, looking out for any signs of injury or distress.

Thus, amidst a sea of elephants, they were quick to spot that one bull had an arrow wound in his front right leg joint. However, the hour was late — too late to initiate a treatment — and he quickly disappeared back into the wilderness. A SWT pilot subsequently conducted an aerial search for the patient but was unable to locate him.

On 11th July, we had a breakthrough: To the team's delight and disbelief, the wild bull showed up again, this time in the company of ex-orphans Zurura and Kasigau. He proceeded to walk inside one of the stockades (almost unheard of for a wild elephant), where he enjoyed a long, relaxed drink at the interior water trough. As other elephants continued to filter in and out of the area, the bull planted himself at Ithumba, patiently waiting. He could not have made it more clear that he was asking for help.

The moment he appeared on the scene, we mobilised a field treatment. The SWT helicopter collected KWS veterinarian Dr Kariuki and flew him to Ithumba. From there, the treatment unfolded like clockwork. Dozens of elephants were present, wild and ex-orphans alike, but the overall mood was relaxed. The vet walked up to the patient and darted him right at the water trough. He succumbed to the anaesthetic just a few metres away, surrounded by a sea of elephants. At no point did the others show any alarm or concern at the proceedings unfolding before them. It was as if they implicitly understood that whatever was happening was for the patient's own good.

17-year-old Zurura and 14-year-old Kasigau, who seemed to be good friends with the bull, stood sentry throughout the operation. Zurura was particularly attentive and oversaw proceedings. He walked right up to the team as they tended to the wound, calmly observing their work. Once the treatment was complete, he stood by until the bull got back to his feet. Together, they walked back into the Tsavo wilderness.

An arrow to the joint can have dire consequences for an elephant; we have seen a tragic number of elephants felled by a wound that went undiscovered for too long. However, thanks in no small part to his own actions, this chap was lucky. Dr Kariuki is optimistic that he will make a complete recovery.

Not so long ago, it was rare to see a single elephant in Ithumba. But this once-fraught territory has turned into a favourite destination for elephants. Nearly two decades ago, we opened our Ithumba Reintegration Unit and established a field presence in Ithumba in partnership with the KWS. In the intervening years, Ithumba has transformed into a safe haven for elephants in northern Tsavo.

It might seem incredible that an elephant — especially one who is entirely wild and never raised through our Orphans' Project — would come to us seeking help. However, elephants have an awe-inspiring intuition and capacity for trust in those who earn it. We are honoured that this bull came to us in his hour of need. Thanks to our donors, we were able to answer the call, providing life-saving treatment on our very doorstep.

Epilogue:

Exactly one week after treatment, the former patient showed up outside the stockades. In stark contrast to his last appearance, he stood tall and proud. You would never have guessed that, exactly seven days ago, he had been lying anaesthetised in the very same place. After briefly stopping for water, the bull walked back into the wilderness, restored to his natural splendour. It was wonderful to see how well he had already recovered.



Anti-Poaching Teams

28 mobile Anti-Poaching Teams

1 Canine Unit

69,187 kilometres patrolled on foot in 2023

1,056 wildlife offenders arrested in 2023

15,967 snares confiscated in 2023

For nearly a quarter of a century, SWT rangers have been frontline defenders of Kenya's ecosystems. Working in partnership with the Kenya Wildlife Service, they face the most pressing threats to conservation. In addition, they serve as a vital link in our wider field work. A ranger's role is wide and varied; aside from anti-poaching operations, they also support veterinary treatments, orphan rescues, human-wildlife conflict mitigation, and all manner of field emergencies.

In 1999, we launched our first Tsavo-based SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Team. Since then, we have expanded the initiative across the country, protecting the most vulnerable habitats in Kenya. Today, we operate 30 Anti-Poaching Teams with the Kenya Wildlife Service. 23 of these teams are based within the greater Tsavo Conservation Area, collectively securing Kenya's largest national park and the surrounding wilderness. In 2014, we expanded our presence to Meru National Park, which provides sanctuary to critically endangered black and white rhinos. Under the direction of Mara Elephant Project, we also fund two teams based in the Mau Forest, an important water catchment area in the Rift Valley.

In 2023, we expanded our anti-poaching presence to Arabuko Sokoke Forest and the Shimba Hills, which are two of the last remaining coastal strongholds for elephants. We also deployed three new teams in the Tsavo Conservation Area: Umbi Mobile, which provides extra support in the northern sector of Tsavo East; Kulalu II, which augments anti-poaching operations in the Galana Conservation Area, Shimba Hills, Arabuko Sokoke, and where needed most; and Kichwa Tembo, based in Tsavo West. Two teams changed their focus: The Shompole Team, which was established in 2021, moved north to provide coverage in Kenya's Great Rift Valley. The rotating Kajiado Team, which was also established in 2021, was permanently deployed to the Arabuko Sokoke Forest, which is a new focus of our Saving Habitats initiatives.

While each team works within a designated region, many also work on a rotating, mobile basis, providing continuous coverage when other teams are on leave. This helps to ensure a constant level of vigilance in Kenya's most vulnerable ecosystems.

SWT rangers are recruited from communities throughout Kenya. Each one then undergoes training at the KWS Training Academy in Manyani. In this intensive, three-month training program, they undergo a rigorous curriculum designed to further enhance their capabilities

as versatile, bush-ready rangers. Subject matter includes bushcraft, navigation, drills, radio communications, first aid, general law, wildlife education, and counter-terrorism.

Each team is outfitted with a driver, a cook, and a specialised 4x4 vehicle capable of navigating rugged, backcountry terrain. These vehicles log significant distances: In 2023 alone, SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Teams collectively drove 450,381 kilometres — roughly the equivalent of driving the entire length of continental Africa's coastline 14.8 times in a single year.

In the field, each team is accompanied by two armed KWS rangers who have the power to make arrests. Drawing from aerial and ground sightings, along with intel from a meticulously cultivated intelligence network, they hone in on hotspots for illegal activities. Ambushes are meticulously orchestrated: Rangers block escape routes and confiscate paraphernalia, while KWS authorities make the arrest. Over the course of 2023, SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Teams supported the arrest of 1,056 perpetrators of wildlife crimes.

One thing is certain: The threat landscape continues to evolve. Each year brings about new and unique challenges, shaped by environmental factors and commercially-driven trends. In order to do their jobs, it is vital that teams are equipped with the latest tools and technologies. In 2023, we installed an extensive digital radio network at Ngulia and Galana, which provides enhanced connectivity across the vast Tsavo Conservation Area.

In 2023, we rolled out EarthRanger, software developed specifically for data collection, management, and analysis in the wildlife conservation sphere. The tool allows us to monitor teams' movements in real-time, which are then collated into reports that provide a unified view of all field initiatives. It also provides immediate insights into trends around wildlife crime and identifies hotspots for illegal activities.

Anti-Poaching Teams

TSAVO CONSERVATION AREA

Mtito - Tsavo Triangle, Tsavo East, Tsavo West National Parks (est. 1999)

Peregrine - Trust land, Tsavo East National Park (est. 2001)

Burra - Southern Tsavo East National Park and surrounding ranch lands (est. 2002)

Ithumba - Northern Tsavo East National Park, including Ithumba Reintegration Unit (est. 2002)

Tiva - Northern Tsavo East National Park (est. 2004)

Ziwani - Southern Tsavo West National Park and surrounding ranch lands (est. 2004)

Chyulu - Chyulu Hills National Park (est. 2006)

Kenze - Kibwezi Forest Reserve - Chyulu Hills National Park (est. 2013)

Yatta - Northern Tsavo East National Park, including the Yatta Plateau (est. 2016)

Mobile North - Where most needed in the northern sector of Tsavo Conservation Area (est. 2016)

Sobo - Central and western sectors of Tsavo East National Park (est. 2018)

Mobile South - Northern Chyulu Hills National Park and KARI Ranch (est. 2018)

Chyulu Mobile - Where most needed in Chyulu Hills National Park, Kibwezi Forest, and KARI Kiboko Ranch (est. 2019)

Mukururo - Northern Chyulu Hills National Park (est. 2020)

Thabagunji - Thabagunji area and Yatta Plateau (est. 2020)

Lake Jipe - Lake Jipe area, bordering the Tanzania border (est. 2021)

Dakadima - East of Tsavo, bordering Lali Hills (est. 2021)

Kulalu - Southern border of Tsavo East National Park, within Kulalu and Galana Ranches (est. 2021)

Kapangani - Galana Conservation Area and where needed (est. 2022)

Umbi Mobile - Northern sector of Tsavo East National Park (est. 2023)*

Kulalu II - Galana Conservation Area, Shimba Hills, Arabuko Sokoke and where needed (est. 2023)*

Kichwa Tembo - Tsavo West National Park (est. 2023)*

SHIMBA HILLS

Kwale - Shimba Hills (est. 2023)*

ARABUKO SOKOKE FOREST

Kajiado - Arabuko Sokoke Forest (est. 2021, relocated 2023)*

NAKURU-NAIVASHA

Shompole - Naivasha, Soysambu and Lake Nakuru (est. 2021, relocated 2023)*

* Denotes new or relocated teams for 2023

MERU NATIONAL PARK

Meru - Meru National Park and Mwea National Reserve (est. 2014))

MAU FOREST

Mau Forest Alpha Team (2018)

Mau Forest Charlie Team (2019)

In addition to our 28 SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Teams, we also fund fuel, rations, and supplies for teams operated by our partners and the KWS, including:

TSAVO ECOSYSTEM

Tsavo Rapid Response Team operated by the KWS

MOUNT KENYA

Mount Kenya Rapid Response Team operated by the KWS

Mount Kenya Team operated by Mount Kenya Trust

MARA ECOSYSTEM

Security scouts operated by Mara Conservancy

MWALUGANJE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

Security scouts operated by the Golini–Mwaluganje Community Conservancy

NASARU OLOSHO CONSERVANCY

Security Scouts operated by Nasaru Olosho Conservancy Trust

AMU RANCH

Security Scouts operated by Lamu Conservation Trust



For 24 years and counting, these brave, dedicated rangers have proven the value of having boots on the ground in Kenya's key ecosystems.



While wildlife crime covers a wider range of offences, bushmeat poaching continues to be an unfortunate frontrunner. This cruel and unsustainable method of hunting has reached a commercial scale, decimating wildlife populations and causing untold suffering in the process. Snares, the poacher's weapon of choice, have an immortal lifespan. Affixed to a tree trunk, post, or other stable base, they lie in wait and then cinch noose-like around their victims. Snares are indiscriminate by nature, capable of killing a creature as small as a dik-dik or as large as a bull elephant. Caught around an animal's leg or neck, they inhibit the ability to eat, drink, and move. As they get tighter, snares also cause grievous injuries, which ultimately leads to their victim's demise.

Our Anti-Poaching Teams are vital in combating snares. They are able to discern subtle signs of poaching activity — disturbances in the ground, telltale broken branches, cannily disguised snares — that would go unnoticed by most. Over the course of 2023, rangers seized 15,967 snares. This marks a 280 percent increase from five years prior. This figure represents an increase in poaching, but it also demonstrates the impact of boots on the ground. In the course of their daily patrols, rangers confiscate snares

that would have otherwise had a perpetual capacity to kill.

Bushmeat poachers have also adopted a new strategy called lamping. Unlike bushmeat poaching, lamping is devastatingly effective and yields immediate results. On moonless nights, they shine bright torches at their quarry, oftentimes accompanied by loud bells. The animal is temporarily blinded and startled into submission, which gives the poacher the opportunity to move in and butcher them with a panga.

Worryingly, we also witnessed a rise in ivory and rhino poaching as the year wore on. While this has always been a lurking threat, it is one that has largely lay dormant in recent years. However, over the course of 2023, we noticed a definitive uptick in reports of poisoned arrows and guns, both of which are preferred weapons of ivory and rhino poachers. In response to these threats, we focused teams in known hotspots and ramped up aerial and ground patrols.

The team also supports wider field initiatives. While a reprieve from drought conditions led to a slight decline in human-wildlife conflict, it remained a persistent





challenge throughout 2023. Anti-Poaching Teams are the first responders in these instances. Typically working in tandem with the Aerial Unit, they shepherd wayward animals back into a protected area. Rangers temporarily remove a section of fenceline and create a funnel, while the helicopter pushes the targets through the opening.

Elephants are the most common victims of human-wildlife conflict. Tempted by an accessible meal, particularly during times of drought, they venture off protected areas and onto community land. These excursions can have devastating implications: A single elephant can decimate a farmer's crops in a single night, while run-ins with humans can have fatal results for both parties. By mitigating human-wildlife conflict, Anti-Poaching Teams save untold wild lives each year — and in the process, protect local communities and preserve their livelihoods.

Rangers have developed a strong rapport with local communities, which has long-term benefits for conservation: People know they can rely upon our teams to quickly respond to reports of marauding wildlife. As a result, they are far less likely to resort to violence. Throughout the year, rangers also responded to all manner of field emergencies, veterinary treatments, and

orphan rescues that unfolded throughout the landscape. In one memorable operation, detailed in the addendum story, two SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Teams worked for two days to save a bull elephant who had become trapped in a ditch.

While poaching in all its forms remains the greatest focus of our Anti-Poaching Teams, rangers must also contend with a myriad of illegal activities. Bushfires, charcoal burning, livestock incursions, and illegal logging and mining remain persistent challenges.

As illegal activities continue to decline within Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks — a testament to our extensive presence within the landscape — other ecosystems remain highly vulnerable. Galana and Kulalu Ranches, a vast landscape that forms much of Tsavo East's eastern boundary, had become a hotbed for bushmeat poaching, charcoal burning, and livestock incursions. Our efforts in there began in May 2021, and over the past two years, we have seen a marked decline in illegal activities, although there is still much work to be done.

This year, we also turned our focus to other plagued landscapes, including the Arabuko Sokoke Forest and the Shimba Hills. These unique coastal forests struggle with bushmeat poaching, human-wildlife conflict, and illegal logging. We expect that having a permanent anti-poaching presence in these ecosystems will yield dramatic results in the coming months and years, following the successful conservation management template we rolled out in KARI Ranch, Kibwezi Forest, and most recently, Galana Ranch.

On 2nd November 2023, our latest group of SWT rangers graduated from the KWS Training Academy in Manyani. This group consisted of ten talented recruits, each selected from a different SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Team. Manyani presents a rigorous curriculum, but each ranger passed this milestone with flying colours. Their dedicated training over the course of 90 days was both an enormous accomplishment and an important investment in the future of Kenya's wildlife and wild spaces.

Our Anti-Poaching Teams are ever-evolving, adapting to face the challenges of today and plan for those on the horizon. For 24 years and counting, these brave, dedicated rangers have proven the value of having boots on the ground in Kenya's key ecosystems. As new threats come to the forefront, our Anti-Poaching Teams will be ready to face them head-on.

Canine Unit



Our anti-poaching operations began with a single Tsavo-based team in partnership with the KWS. Building off their initial success, we expanded the initiative across the country. We launched our Canine Unit in 2016. Also operated in partnership with the KWS, this specialised team complements our existing anti-poaching operations through scent-based tracking.

While the KWS has used individual tracker dogs on an ad hoc basis, no permanent Canine Unit existed in the Tsavo Conservation Area. Tsavo is a vast and vital landscape, home to Kenya's largest national park, its biggest population of elephants, and a staggering array of biodiversity. As such, it is also inherently vulnerable to wildlife crime. Poaching — of the bushmeat, ivory, and rhino variety — is a constant threat, and one we must vigilantly monitor.

The Canine Unit had an immediate impact. The mere presence of tracker dogs in the landscape proved to be an effective deterrent to poachers and other would-be perpetrators. Now seven years into its operations, this specialised team has become a formidable anti-poaching asset in Tsavo.

In addition to a rotation of KWS dogs-in-training, we have two permanent members of our team:

AYA — 'The Workaholic'

Born 2018. Belgian Malinois / German Shepherd mix.

Aya is known for her determination. She is an excellent tracker, working methodically and indefatigably when she is on the trail.

ZORA — 'The Tank'

Born in 2018. Belgian Malinois.

Zora is known for her ability to detect ivory, ammunition, and other contraband. She is powerful and purposeful, but also a sensitive soul who requires delicate handling.

The Canine Unit is based in a state-of-the-art kennel facility at our Kaluku Field Headquarters. This fully secured site is designed around the dogs' welfare: It includes fly-proof kennels, snake-proof fencing around the outdoor runs, and a climate-controlled system that regulates temperatures. Handlers check their charges' vitals throughout the day in order to monitor for any changes in condition.

Recognising that a dog's emotional well-being is just as important as their physical health, they also prioritise enrichment and one-on-one attention. The dogs have

plenty of downtime back at base, in which they enjoy relaxing grooming sessions and lots of play.

The Canine Unit is led by a KWS Corporal. SWT handlers, each of whom has undergone rigorous training, have developed very special working relationships with the dogs. Armed KWS rangers accompany the team on every patrol. When an operation culminates in an arrest, they move in to apprehend the suspect.

The Canine Unit works hand-in-hand with our Anti-Poaching Teams. Based on field intelligence, they take up 'residency' with rotating teams to address security concerns within the region. Rangers appreciate the enhanced support from their four-legged friends.

We often reflect on this telling display of camaraderie: On long-distance patrols, Canine Unit handlers must carry enough water for themselves and their dogs. This adds up to about eight litres of water — which is no small load, particularly in sweltering Tsavo temperatures. Despite their own not-insignificant cargo, anti-poaching rangers often volunteer to shoulder this burden.

Consistent training is vital to ensure the dogs and their handlers remain in peak form. Daily exercises reinforce protocols and keep the Canine Unit in prime condition. Every year, we invest in a six-week training course with external experts. This allows the team to further hone their tracking capabilities and focus on emerging threats. In light of the ever-evolving poaching landscape, in which poachers are constantly changing their tactics, we must always be one step ahead. Zora and Aya have become adept at motorbike tracking, which is an invaluable asset in apprehending poachers.

Before the Canine Unit was established, signs of illegal activities were commonplace throughout the Tsavo Triangle. Now that the dogs have become a permanent presence in the area, it is rare to find so much as a footprint out of bounds. Looking forward, we are planning to install kennels in Ithumba and Galana, so the Canine Unit can take up longer-term residence in these threatened landscapes.

Notes from the Field:

A Two-Day Odyssey to Save a Trapped Elephant

If there is one certainty about saving elephants, it is that things rarely go according to plan. When Plan A doesn't work, we create a Plan B. This herculean operation to free a trapped bull began with hands-on digging and ended with heavy machinery.

On the same day that Naleku, Sagateisa, and Suguroi took the next step in their reintegration journey, a wild elephant was fighting for his life. On the opposite side of Tsavo East, near the eastern boundary of the park, a bull fell into a deep well. The steep, muddy sides created a trap, leaving him hopelessly stuck within.

Upon discovering his plight on the morning of 17th January, local members of the community raised the alarm. Unfortunately, we are all-too-familiar with these types of rescue operations. Typically, it takes a persistent combination of manpower and horsepower to free an elephant of this size.

Two SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Teams responded to the scene, along with reinforcements from our Kaluku Field Headquarters. They had three Land Cruisers, which would be used to pull the elephant out with ropes.

Several exhausting hours later, however, the elephant still hadn't budged. The depth and steepness of the well, coupled with the not-insignificant body within, created an impossible situation. The team tried everything, even clambering inside and digging by hand, but he remained discouragingly stuck.

It was time to get creative. The following day, we sent a low loader to pick up our JCB backhoe from Kaluku. This excavator has already proven its worth

within the park, from road works to conservation projects, but this would be a new application.

Getting the JCB to such a far-flung, remote area of Tsavo was no small task. It could never make the journey itself, which is why the low loader was brought in. Once the excavator was secured, the convoy embarked on a nearly 100-kilometre odyssey to reach the elephant. It was slow going — Tsavo roads are not designed for heavy machinery — but they made good time, considering the terrain.

At last, the convoy arrived at the elephant's side — and not a moment too soon. After more than 24 hours stuck in his mud, he was starting to lose steam. The window to save him was closing by the minute.

Fortunately, the JCB made quick work of the rescue. With a few swift digs, it created a ramp up one side of the well. However, it was still quite steep, so the elephant needed a helping hand. The JCB arm provided this, giving it a sturdy push up the ramp. At last, the bull found his footing and was able to clamber the rest of the way to freedom. He was a bit wobbly from all his time recumbent, but he soon came to his senses. Everyone felt an enormous sense of relief when he walked off into the bush.

Supporters from around the world allow us to rise to these field challenges again and again, forging a future for our giant neighbours.



This elephant's' story could very well have ended at the bottom of a well. Thanks to teamwork, tenacity, and some serious thinking outside the box, he now has his whole life ahead of him.

Aerial Operations

9 fixed-wing aircraft

3 helicopters

6 pilots

2,462 hours flown in 2023

335,016 kilometres covered in 2023



Aerial capabilities and successful conservation go hand-in-hand. Kenya is home to some of the last great wildernesses in Africa. A rarity in today's world, entire landscapes are untouched by man. Protecting these vast habitats presents a significant conservation challenge. Patrolling for illegal activities, accessing remote areas, rapidly responding to field emergencies — all of these essential, everyday tasks range from challenging-to-impossible when tackled from the ground alone.

David Sheldrick, in whose memory Sheldrick Wildlife Trust was established, was an early advocate of aviation for conservation. When serving as the founding warden of Tsavo National Park, the versatile, bush-friendly Super Cub was his wing of choice. Fittingly, it was a Super Cub that served as the inaugural aircraft in our fleet, launching the Trust's Aerial Unit in 2008. This plane marked a turning point in our operations, quite literally elevating our field-level impact.

Our Aerial Unit has become the vital link between all our field operations. Aerial capabilities provide us with access, agility, and an expanded ability to rescue orphans, patrol swathes of wilderness, mitigate human-wildlife conflict, access ill and injured animals, respond to field emergencies, conduct search-and-rescue operations, medevac injured personnel, extinguish bushfires, and more.

Pilots complement the forensic strengths of our ground teams with capabilities that can only be achieved in the sky. They can cover an area in a fraction of the time it would take on the ground and land in places that are inaccessible to vehicles. With their bird's eye perspective, they are uniquely positioned to spot things that would otherwise be invisible — be it a poacher's blind, orphaned elephant, or injured animal.

In the 15 years since our Aerial Unit was established, our fleet has expanded to nine fixed-wing aircraft and three helicopters. Each plays a vital role in our conservation operations:

CUBCRAFTERS TOP CUB (5Y-DTP)

CubCrafters took the famous Piper Super Cub and redesigned it, keeping what made the original so great and making it even better with modern aerodynamics and wing structure, increasing the gross weight carrying capacity, and adding a 180 HP engine. The Top Cub has become the benchmark of backcountry surveillance, flying in and out of rugged surfaces with ease. Our pilots

spend up to six hours at a time in slow flight with all-around visibility, patrolling the vast landscape of Tsavo. Our Super Cubs are the backbone of our air-wing operations, flying around 250,000 miles a year on patrol.

CUBCRAFTERS TOP CUB (5Y-NRC)

In 2023, we added a second Top Cub to our aerial fleet. The NRC is based at our Lali Headquarters in Galana. It is used to patrol Galana and Kulalu Ranches, the Arabuko Sokoke Forest, and other vulnerable landscapes in the area.

PIPER SUPER CUB (5Y-STP)

Piper Super Cub (5Y-STP): This aircraft is an original Super Cub that has been modified and modernised, including increased gross weight, bigger 180 HP engine, and an amazing 'Wide Body' conversion, which adds four inches to cabin width. With huge 'Tundra Tyres' and the more comfortable wider cabins, STP is perfect for bush flying patrol work. It is a firm favourite amongst our pilots, as she handles beautifully and just wants to get off the ground and fly.

PIPER FAMILY CRUISER PA14 (5Y-TRA)

This is a larger four-place version of the standard 'Tandem Two-Seat' Super Cub. Fitted with huge, 35-inch 'Tundra Tyres,' this aircraft is ideally suited to carry three people and their gear; for example, it would be the perfect aircraft to transport a veterinarian and his assistant, along with their tranquillisation equipment and drug box, and land in a remote riverbed or open field to treat an injured elephant. This is a fantastically versatile aircraft and a favourite amongst our pilots.

CUBCRAFTERS CARBON CUB FX3 (5Y-STR)

With the FX3, Cub Crafters once again set the bar very high. They took a Carbon Cub and added a slew of features, including constant speed propeller, wider cabin space, higher gross weight capacity, and modern avionics, to make one of the most amazing bush planes on the market today. For example, you can take off from a sand

bank next to a river in ten rotations of the big 35-inch Tundra Tyres, climb at 1,500 feet per minute, pull the prop RPM back, and quickly cruise back to base at 140 miles per hour with a digital autopilot. The FX3 takes our patrolling of the Tsavo landscape to a new level.

CUBCRAFTERS CARBON CUB EX3 (5Y-STB)

The FX3 proved to be so essential to our field operations that, in light of our increased operations across the Tsavo landscape and further afield in Kenya, we added another to our fleet. The EX3 is just like its sister, the FX3, except it was assembled by a professional aircraft builder in South Africa. One of our pilots flew it north to Kenya when it was ready, and it has already made a marked impact as part of the Aerial Unit.

CESSNA 206 (5Y-CFZ)

The 206 is Cessna's infamous 'truck.' Like the Cessna 185, the 206 is renowned for its reliable, tough load carrying capabilities, making it a favourite amongst many-a bush pilot all over the world. For us, this aircraft is most suited for carrying personnel to further afield places or, for example, to fly one of our tracker dogs and a handler on a specialist operation.

CESSNA 'BABY' CARAVAN 208 (5Y-STW)

Relatively new to the SWT Air Wing, the Cessna Caravan is one of Cessna's best-selling aircraft and is widely regarded as the premier medium-sized bush plane. This robust aircraft can carry eleven people, including the pilot, or haul a large cargo or rescued wildlife in and out of rugged terrain. The vast majority of our orphaned elephants have been carried back to the Nursery in a Cessna Caravan. Equipped with the latest avionics technology, this aircraft can safely fly in most weather conditions and on night operations. This aircraft is equipped with a Life Port system for medical evacuations.

CESSNA 185 (5Y-FLY)

5Y FLY is a Cessna 185 much favoured by bush and backcountry pilots all over the world. It is a robust, tough aircraft that can carry a lot in and out of unprepared airstrips. 5Y FLY also has STOL (short take off and landing) conversions fitted that really make it perform well when access remote bush airstrips is needed. This is vital when dropping a vet, their assistants, and all their gear to treat an injured animal, for example.

AIRBUS AS350/HS125 (5Y-CXP)

The addition of our first helicopter was a game-changer. Being fortunate enough to have an Airbus AS350 has

taken our operations to a whole new level. This helicopter is so versatile: In anti-poaching operations, it drops our sniffer dogs and handlers at remote, inaccessible sites. In human-wildlife conflict operations, it shepherds wildlife back into parks and reserves. During fire-fighting efforts, it drops water on fires with a Bambi Bucket. It sling-loads cargo into difficult-to-get to places; conducts medical evacuations of injured personnel, taking them from site directly to hospital; and supports our veterinarians, providing a perfect platform for them to dart wildlife from the air. If there was one piece of equipment that has dramatically changed our operations for the better, it would be this helicopter.

AIRBUS AS 350/H125 (5Y-KUI)

Given the game-changing success of the Airbus A350, and through the generosity of our incredible supporters, we were fortunate to add a second Airbus to our fleet last year (5Y KUI). Out of great demand, we have expanded our field veterinary initiatives in collaboration with KWS to the northern and central parts of Kenya. This helicopter will expand our aerial reach across the country, specifically in these northern and central regions. It will enable our Mobile Vet Unit to rapidly access and treat injured wildlife, and will provide invaluable support to KWS in conservation efforts in the same region.

AIRBUS EC120B (CXT)

This is the smallest of our three helicopters. Still with the robust Airbus technology and TurboMeca turbine engine, this five-seater helicopter is ideal for economical surveillance, patrol work, responding to human-wildlife conflict, medical evacuations, and deploying rangers and tracker dogs. When conditions are right, it is used in many veterinary cases to dart wildlife from the air and land close by for the vet to jump out to treat the animal. Because of the economy of using this helicopter, it is also very useful in human-wildlife conflict mitigation.

2023 was a very busy year for our Aerial Unit. Our six pilots logged a total of 2,462 hours in the air, covering a distance of 335,016 kilometres on patrol.

The new year began on a busy note. The lull in illegal activities that marked the end of 2022 — a lull heralded in by the arrival of the rains — was short-lived. A number of poaching incidents were recorded throughout January, including the aerial sighting and subsequent arrest of a bushmeat poacher on Galana Ranch. The suspect was apprehended in the possession of 24 dik-diks, two bustards, one gerenuk, and one African hare.





Our six pilots logged a total of 2,462 hours in the air, covering a distance of 335,016 kilometres on patrol. To put that figure into perspective, that is the equivalent of circumnavigating the globe 8.4 times in a single year.



January also brought about two medevacs: a Tsavo Trust ranger who had been critically injured by a charging buffalo while on patrol, and a young child from Kone who had been bitten by a poisonous snake. The Aerial Unit flew them to nearby hospitals and both have since made complete recoveries. In the case of the ranger, it is likely that his life was saved as a result of the quick response.

Unfortunately, poaching activities continued to increase throughout February. Several elephant carcasses were found during the month, two of which were confirmed poaching victims. After this discovery, we organised an extensive operation with KWS which culminated in the arrest of a poacher with ivory in his possession.

March saw a notable increase in human-elephant conflict cases. Over the course of the month, the Aerial Unit responded to 12 callouts, including three translocations of elephants who had moved onto community land. In the month's most significant aerial intervention, the SWT helicopter herded approximately 80 elephants out of a heavily settled area and back towards Taita Hills Sanctuary.

Rapid intervention is essential in cases of human-elephant conflict, as is persistence. Elephants have a mind of their own. One might think an aircraft would easily shepherd them in a chosen direction, but many are unmoved by the humming presence of a helicopter. Our pilots must be precise and patient, flying low enough to coax their targets towards openings in the fenceline without inciting panic. The challenge is compounded when they have to wrangle an entire group of unruly bulls, as is often the case. Despite the difficulty involved, our pilots are experts at human-wildlife conflict mitigation and have a high success rate in removing elephants from community land.

The rains began in late March and continued throughout April. Following three months of increasing illegal activities, this caused a definitive lull as everyone enjoyed the good fortune brought by the change in conditions. Unfortunately, illegal livestock incursions remained a persistent challenge, particularly in Tsavo West National Park. In the southern sector, over 10,000 head of cattle were recorded in a single patrol. All the green vegetation provided too much temptation.

Throughout the year, the Aerial Unit assisted in the rescue of several orphaned elephants, including Taroha

and Natibu in February, and Korpesa and Losoito in April. Losoito was actually discovered by our fixed-wing pilot, who spotted a young calf trailing a big bull. He immediately clocked that she was an orphan who had sought refuge with a much larger protector. Because of this canny sighting, a rescue was mounted and Losoito was brought to our Voi Reintegration Unit.

May started with a daring river rescue by two of our pilots. A fuel tanker crossing a Galana River causeway got caught up in floodwaters and overturned. The driver, unable to escape through the raging waters, was trapped in the cabin. The full account of this rescue is shared in the addendum story.

In another challenging operation, the Aerial Unit helped remove more than 100 wild animals stranded inside the National Irrigation Board's fenced farm on Galana Ranch. 200 personnel on the ground were guided from the air to form an extended line, which successfully pushed 90 Grant's gazelle, five kongoni, two oryx, three eland, and three zebra through a small opening in the fenceline and into the freedom of the ranch.

May also delivered a special sighting: On patrol, a pilot spotted a female black rhino in Tsavo East who had gone undetected for several months and was feared dead. She was in the company of her six-month-old calf, bringing the official population of black rhinos in Tsavo East to 26 individuals — nearly three times its 'population low' of just nine individuals following years of intense poaching.

June was a relatively quiet month — but 'relatively' is a relative term! The Aerial Unit responded to ten veterinary cases, including a tandem treatment of two bulls in a single day, one who had been arrowed and one who had been shot. Working with SWT/KWS Mobile Vet Units, the Aerial Unit was also involved in the translocation of a 'problem elephant' off community land. The young bull was first located by fixed-wing aircraft, then darted from the helicopter, loaded onto a SWT crane truck, and transported into Tsavo East National Park.

July was a very busy month for our Aerial Unit, driven by a rise in human-elephant conflict, poaching, livestock incursions, and other illegal activities. This increase is all-too-common as the dry season begins to bite. There was also an increase in human-elephant conflict cases, both in the common hotspots and also to the south and east of the Parks, where coastal rains tempted elephants



out of the drought-stricken park. Literally hundreds of elephants concentrated in these areas, which led to frequent run-ins with humans.

In most cases of human-elephant conflict, the Aerial Unit employs a ‘shepherding’ method: The fixed-wing aircraft first locates the elephant(s), which are then pushed by the helicopter away from heavily settled areas and towards protected areas. In rare instances, more serious measures are necessary. After Umani Keeper Patrick Muiruri was tragically killed by a rogue bull, the Aerial Unit and SWT/KWS Mobile Vet Unit was called in to track down and dart the culprit, who was then collared and translocated to a remote part of Tsavo East.

Typically, August is prime bushfire season, but this year proved to be a welcome respite. Just one fire was fought in the Chyulu Hills, which is usually a hotspot. The blaze appeared to be accidental, started by illegal miraa harvesters. The fixed-wing pilot first spotted smoke emanating from a small patch of forest. The SWT helicopter mobilised to the scene, deploying SWT and Big Life teams on the ground and assisting with three Bambi bucket drops. Thanks to a quick response, the fire was immediately extinguished.

While pilots are used to elephant cargo, the September rescue of a newborn, orphaned black rhino was quite novel. The calf was discovered on his own near a waterhole in Tsavo West National Park. At the request of KWS, the SWT helicopter flew to the scene and rigorously patrolled the landscape in an attempt to find the orphan’s mother. After several hours of searching yielded no results, it was clear that a rescue was in order. Chamboi, as we named him, was flown to our Kaluku Neonate Unit, where he is thriving.

September also brought several hopeful indications of impending rain, including widespread acacia blooms and several ostrich nests. By the following month, these signs had transformed into fully-realised rainstorms. As a result, we observed a marked drop in most illegal activities.

In October, the Aerial Unit attended to seven cases of human-elephant conflict. The most challenging operation involved an elephant family of four who had become marooned outside a newly fenced area. For several months, they had refused repeated attempts to be shepherded by helicopter. When the matriarch of the herd tragically attacked a woman from the community,

it became imperative that the family be moved. With the coordination of a large number of SWT assets, including a helicopter, fixed-wing aircraft, flat-bed lorry, frontend loader, tractor, trailer, crane truck, and several Land Cruisers, along with the participation of dozens of personnel, two SWT/KWS Vet Units, and a representative of Save the Elephants, we were able to successfully dart and translocate the entire family back into the safety of Tsavo East National Park. A translocation of this scale was an SWT first.

The SWT helicopter was also called out to medevac a young boy from Kone, a small town on the Eastern boundary of Tsavo East, who had been bitten by a snake. He was flown with his parents to Mutomo, where he could receive the emergency care needed.

By November, it became clear that the highly anticipated ‘El Niño’ rains had indeed arrived in full force. As people took advantage of the good fortune at home and elephants enjoyed the bounty of vegetation in the parks, we saw a marked decline in both poaching activities and human-elephant conflict. However, there was a rise in livestock incursions in protected areas, as pastoralist communities took advantage of the fresh graze and abundant waterholes. Despite this, it should be noted that thanks to concerted efforts, we have seen a significant reduction in livestock compared to previous years.

Exceptional rains continued throughout December, transforming the parks into paradise. This year saw the most widespread, above-average rains in recent memory — both in Tsavo and across the country as a whole. Pilots had a firsthand view of the dramatic, miraculous recovery of vegetation, even in areas most severely degraded by the drought, such as the southern sector of Tsavo East National Park.

The bountiful conditions led to unusually large aggregations of elephants. During any given patrol, it became commonplace to see gatherings numbering in the hundreds. As the month progressed, these aggregations gave way to more even distribution and dispersal of elephants, including to many parts of the park that had long been under-utilised due to drought.

Despite the good fortune bestowed by nature, 2023 concluded with a sobering rise in elephant and rhino poaching activities. Human-wildlife conflict also remained a persistent challenge, despite the abatement of the drought. Over the course of the year, pilots

responded to 705 ‘problem’ elephants — a 39 percent jump from the year prior. While this increase is testament to the growing challenge of human-wildlife conflict, there is also a positive side: We can partially attribute the increase to improved community buy-in to report cases of marauding elephants, coupled with having more pilots and aircraft to answer the call.

Being a pilot is a demanding job, particularly in the conservation sphere. Our pilots carry enormous responsibilities on their shoulders: Far from simply flying an aircraft, they are also honorary wardens, rescuers, and first responders.

But for all the challenges the job brings, our Aerial Unit has an extraordinarily unique view into the wild world. Notable sightings this year included a melanistic serval, a pair of quarrelling honey badgers, and a striped hyena soaking up the morning sun on a black lava flow in Tsavo

West. Wild dog populations have rebounded following a rash of illnesses last year; in one memorable patrol, a pilot saw a pack of 25. After the rains, buffalo were observed in the northeastern sector of Tsavo, a place where they haven’t been observed in recent years. The rain also gathered extraordinary aggregations of elephants, including a herd of 300 seen during a patrol.

From their bird’s eye perspective, pilots see things that few humans have the privilege to witness. This provides us with unique insight about the health of an ecosystem: Rich biodiversity serves as the most telling measure of success in a landscape. The fact that endangered species such as wild dogs, elephants, and even rhinos have become common sightings within the Tsavo Conservation Area — particularly in areas that were long devoid of much wildlife — speaks volumes about the positive impact of field conservation measures.







Notes from the Field:

A Daring River Rescue

It was 4:30 PM on the afternoon of 3rd May 2023 when our Galana Operations Manager raised the alarm: A tanker was driving across the Galana-Kulalu causeway when the river suddenly flooded and surrounded it. Flooding is a constant threat during the rainy season, and it is often impossible to predict when or how quickly water levels will rise.

Surrounded by floodwaters, the driver was trapped inside the vehicle. The crisis intensified when the water pushed the tanker on its side, smashing the windscreen and engulfing the cabin.

The man clung to the top, but it was only a matter of time before the river engulfed the entire vehicle. To further compound the situation, this section of river is a favourite haunt for crocodiles and hippos.

Onlookers watched helplessly from the shore, horrified but unable to intervene, as the raging currents made any water crossing impossible.

The moment we received the call, our Aerial Unit sprung into action. Taru Carr-Hartley flew the SWT helicopter to the scene, accompanied by Roan Carr-Hartley. They could immediately spot the breached truck, dwarfed by the angry river. As they flew closer, they were relieved to see the driver, still hanging on. Gusting winds were compounded by the swirling water, which created very challenging flying conditions.

Danger lurked below, between the raging river and a tanker full of petrol. Slowly, steadily, Taru inched the helicopter down towards the truck, hovering an astonishing six inches above. Meanwhile, Roan strapped into a harness that was attached to the aircraft. In one smooth motion, he stepped onto the tanker, grabbed the driver's hand, and helped him onboard.



The driver had been stuck in the floodwaters since 10:00 that morning. We can only imagine what was racing through his mind as the water continued to rise around him. Within minutes of the helicopter's arrival, however, he was back on firm ground. It was a high-stakes rescue mission that ended with the best possible outcome.



Working in conservation means being ready to answer the call, whatever it may be. On that particular day, our Aerial Unit saved a life. We never know what tomorrow will bring!

A wide-angle landscape photograph showing a vast savanna with rolling hills and scattered acacia trees. In the background, several prominent, rounded hills or small mountains rise against a bright blue sky filled with fluffy white clouds. The foreground is a lush green field, possibly a riverbank or a wetland area, with a small stream visible in the lower left corner.

Saving Habitats

Kenya is home to 27 national parks, 34 national reserves, and a bevy of protected areas and sanctuaries. These dedicated areas for wildlife are vitally important and, in an age of relentless development, their existence must never be taken for granted.





We use the analogy that Kenya's national parks and reserves are the beating heart of its natural world. But what is a heart without its arteries? No wilderness should be an island; elephants and other animals do not understand the distinction between land that has been designated for them and land that is no longer their own. They are driven by something far more ancient and innate, following migratory paths that have been etched through the generations.

This is important context when considering the greatest threat facing Kenya's wildlife: habitat loss and fragmentation. Kenya's Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife 'National Wildlife Strategy 2030' report revealed a 68 percent loss of wildlife populations in savanna ecosystems over a 40-year period (1977-2016).

Habitats once lost are lost forever — and more often than not, their wild denizens disappear with them. This is not an overnight process, but an insidious one, as human-wildlife conflict and other ripple effects of habitat loss chip away at long-established populations.

Habitat loss and fragmentation have far-reaching implications for Kenya's wildlife and the communities who live alongside them. For that reason, we have prioritised our efforts in securing and preserving threatened ecosystems across the country. Most of these landscapes are significant rangelands for elephants — which, as earth's largest land animal, is also its most vulnerable to habitat loss. However, they are also areas of rich biodiversity, which provide a home for all manner of creatures.

In partnership with key stakeholders, local communities, fellow conservation organisations, and the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), we are working to secure Kenya's endangered habitats. Measures include the implementation of on-the-ground conservation management, the erection of fencelines to secure wildlife areas and reduce human-wildlife conflict, and financial support to empower community-led conservation initiatives.

Habitat Initiatives in the Tsavo Conservation Area:

- **Galana & Kulalu Ranches:** 1.8 million-acre ranchlands that make up the 'eastern frontier' of Tsavo East; conservation support provided in collaboration with ADC

- **Galana Wildlife Conservancy:** 60,000 acres sharing an unfenced border with Tsavo East; managed in collaboration with the Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC)
- **KARI Ranch:** 63,321 acres at the foothills of the Chyulu Hills; managed in collaboration with the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation (KALRO)
- **Kibwezi Forest Reserve:** 18,000-acre groundwater forest adjacent to the Chyulu Hills; managed in collaboration with the KFS
- **Peregrine Conservation Area:** 5,500-acre buffer zone along Tsavo East; fully managed by SWT

Habitat Initiatives in Other Conservation Areas:

- **Amu Ranch:** 63,000-acre mangrove forest on the north Kenya coast; support to Lamu Conservation Trust to manage the ecosystem
- **Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve:** 104,000-acre tropical coastal forest; conservation support provided in collaboration with the KFS
- **Kimana Corridor:** 17,700-acre elephant corridor linking the Amboseli, Chyulu Hills, and Tsavo ecosystems; funding of land lease since 2016
- **Kimana Sanctuary:** 5,700-acre continuation of Kimana Corridor; funding of land lease (2018-2022) and security costs (2023)
- **Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary:** 6,100-acre elephant corridor adjacent to Shimba Hills; funding of land lease and security scouts
- **Shimba Hills:** 74,132-acre coastal forest and national reserve; funding of security fence, managed in collaboration with the KWS

GALANA & KULALU RANCHES

GALANA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY

Location: Eastern border of Tsavo East National Park, extending towards the coast

Total Size: 2 million acres

Ecological Significance:

Galana/Kulalu Ranches stretch along almost the entire eastern boundary of Tsavo East, collectively covering 2 million acres that extend towards the coast. They share an unfenced border with Tsavo East, meaning wildlife can roam freely between the park and the ranches. It is an important habitat for elephants, lions, cheetahs, giraffes, wild dogs, leopards, and plains game. The security of Galana/Kulalu is inextricably linked with the security of its neighbouring national park.

Our efforts in Galana began in May 2021, when we were asked to assume management of Galana Wildlife Conservancy by its board of directors. Spanning 60,000 acres, the dedicated wildlife conservancy sits within Galana Ranch. Fully annexed for conservation, it is essentially a continuation of Tsavo East; wildlife roam seamlessly between the two. Insecurities in Galana affect not only the conservancy, but also the national park.

It quickly became apparent that in order to truly secure the eastern frontier of the Tsavo ecosystem, we needed to work across Galana and Kulalu Ranches as a whole. These vast, mixed-use ranches are stacked atop each other and bisected by the Galana River, with Galana Ranch to the north and Kulalu Ranch to the south. They collectively cover 2 million acres, sharing their western borders with Tsavo East and extending east nearly to the Indian Ocean.

Galana and Kulalu Ranches are managed by the Agricultural Development Corporation, a parastatal that oversees sustainable agriculture development in Kenya. The land is designated for mixed-use, hosting selective ranching activities that are complementary to conservation efforts. However, it is an enormous landscape, and ADC lacked the resources to focus on the conservation aspect. In recent decades, illegal activities had taken hold across Galana-Kulalu.

Bushmeat poaching was rampant; poachers saw it as open season across the ranches, killing scores of creatures for the commercial bushmeat trade. This, coupled with illegal cattle incursions from the north and widespread charcoal burning, degraded the land and created a hostile environment for wildlife. Thus, as we continued to build upon our conservation work in Galana Wildlife

Conservancy, we also agreed upon a second arrangement with ADC, in which SWT manages the conservation mandate of Galana and Kulalu Ranches.

The tragic and irreplaceable loss of Mark Jenkins in December 2022 left us reeling. However, knowing Mark as we did, we also knew that the best way to honour his legacy was to continue the work he started. Indeed, 2023 began with a poignant reminder of how much he had achieved in the landscape. One year prior, the teams were arresting bushmeat poachers on the current Lali Headquarters site and it was rare to see a single elephant — or any wildlife, for that matter — in the area. Our pilot's patrol notes from 23rd January 2023 demonstrated a marked improvement: 'A herd of approximately 100 oryx were seen... 417 elephants in 29 sightings were seen south of the tarmac road on eastern Kulalu. A pair of elephants amongst the largest herd was seen mating.'

In January, we hired Ed Ghaui to oversee operations in Galana-Kulalu and continue to build upon the foundations laid by Mark. In addition to his ground management role, Ed is also an accomplished pilot and took over aerial patrols in Galana-Kulalu. A new SuperCub was deployed in the landscape for this purpose. Aviation plays a key role in supporting ground operations and searching for illegal activities such as bushmeat poaching, illegal grazing and charcoal burning.

Another focus area of 2023 was improving and expanding a network of roads and tracks across Galana Wildlife Conservancy. By year-end, this network totaled 375 kilometres, giving conservation teams easy access to all parts of the conservancy while also enhancing the visitor experience.





When protecting an area the size of Galana-Kulalu, aerial capabilities are absolutely essential. Over the course of the year, 336.7 aerial hours were dedicated to the landscape, covering 43,757 kilometres.



In 2023, SWT/KWS Mobile Vet Units intervened in seven veterinary operations on Galana-Kulalu. Patients included five elephants (one who was treated twice) and one giraffe. All were the victims of human-inflicted injuries, including poisoned arrows, spears, and snares. These interventions had largely successful outcomes: Four of the five elephants recovered, while the giraffe was freed from a wire snare and quickly rejoined his tower. Sadly, one elephant died from his injuries.

The dedicated SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Teams installed in the Galana-Kulalu landscape show the impact of having boots on the ground. Over the course of the year, teams covered 8,300 kilometres on foot and 81,512 kilometres by vehicle. They undertook 1,074 anti-poaching operations in the field.

All told, teams contributed to the arrest of 77 perpetrators over the course of 2023. Bushmeat poaching was far and away the most prevalent crime, with illegal grazing coming in second. Teams confiscated a total of 446 snares throughout the year. While this number would ideally be

zero, it is heartening to see a marked decline in snares recovered from core areas, which is tangible proof that our patrols are making an impact.

We also undertook several infrastructure improvements throughout the year. A primary focus was establishing Lali Camp as a fully operational field headquarters for all our operations in Galana-Kulalu.

Works included: construction of a new ranger base for the SWT/KWS Kulalu II Anti-Poaching Team; installation of the Lali Hills repeater to extend the radio network to connect the landscape; rebuild of the Lali Camp fuel storage; installation of an aircraft hanger, offices, and stores at Lali Camp; extensive acacia planting for reforestation; installation of a well and water storage in Galana Wildlife Conservancy; installation of a solar-powered reverse osmosis machine for potable water; installation of a sunken well and solar-powered pump, which provides all other water needs; and the creation/refurbishment of airstrips at Kulalu Hills, Ngamia, Dakabuko, Dakabuko Hill, Geofries, Alishora, and Tank E.

KARI RANCH

Location: Northern border of Chyulu Hills National Park

Total size: 63,321 acres

Ecological Significance:

KARI Ranch begins in the northern foothills of the Chyulu Hills, to the immediate northeast of the Kibwezi Forest, which is one of Kenya's last remaining groundwater woodlands and home to our Umani Springs Reintegration Unit for orphaned elephants. KARI is an important dispersal area for the Chyulu Hills and a gateway to the Tsavo Ecosystem.

KARI Ranch is a 63,321-acre wilderness spread across the foothills of the Chyulu Hills. It sits within a zone of recent volcanic activity, making it of marginal agricultural use. However, it is a favoured rangeland for all manner of wildlife. Chyulu Hills National Park, which lies to the immediate south, is a pristine habitat but lacks surface water due to its porous volcanic earth. As a result, wildlife venture into KARI Ranch to drink and forage.

This landscape also has special significance for our Orphans' Project. Our Umani Springs Reintegration Unit sits within the nearby Kibwezi Forest, which is essentially a continuation of the Chyulu Hills. KARI Ranch will be

a favoured rangeland for the orphaned elephants being raised, once they are grown and living wild.

Our conservation mandate in KARI Ranch began in 2019, when we finalised a 25-year lease with the Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Institute (KARLO). Years of human-wildlife conflict, illegal livestock grazing, charcoal burning, bushmeat and ivory poaching, and human encroachment had taken their toll on the landscape. These issues largely originated from KARI's at-the-time unfenced eastern border, which abuts community farmland. Upon commencing management of KARI Ranch, our first priority was to construct an

elephant exclusion fence along the fraught eastern boundary. Spanning 43 kilometres, the fenceline proved to be an immediate success for wildlife and people who live alongside them. It effectively deters elephants from leaving the protection of KARI Ranch, while also sparing neighbouring farms from crop-raiding, which has massively reduced cases of human-wildlife conflict. Askaris (guards), who are based at seven fence outposts, conduct daily patrols and ensure fence maintenance.

Last year, we established a new community road which runs from the north to south of the ranch, along the river. This road allowed us to close the original community road, which ran through the middle of the ranch and created security vulnerabilities. We also created a new security road to improve accessibility for field teams.

As works on KARI Ranch continue to expand, it became apparent that water was an issue: The landscape lacked natural water sources (or infrastructure) to support both its field conservation projects and its resident wildlife. For this reason, we established two new boreholes, one at the 'Yellow Thorn' site and another at the 'Pool' site. Both are fully operational and powered through a solar pump system.

In 2023, a new tented ranger camp was erected at KARI airstrip. This centrally located, fully outfitted site will be used by the SWT/KWS Mukururo and Mobile South Anti-Poaching Teams, who patrol the area on rotation.

As KARI Ranch demonstrates, successful conservation benefits both wild lives and people's livelihoods. Prior to our establishment in the landscape, human-elephant conflict was rife. Today, these incidents have been reduced to zero. Patrol teams have reported a notable rise in elephant, eland, hartebeest, zebra, and giraffe populations. We are hopeful that the resident rhinos of Chyulu Hills National Park will eventually venture into KARI Ranch, as it extends into their traditional rangelands.





KIBWEZI FOREST RESERVE AND THE CHYULU HILLS

Location: Northeast extension of Chyulu Hills National Park

Total Size: 18,000 acres

Ecological Significance:

The Kibwezi Forest is one of Kenya's last remaining groundwater woodlands. The Umani Springs, located within the forest, is a vital water source for local human and wildlife populations. It is an area of rich biodiversity — and it is also home to our Umani Springs Reintegration Unit, our third re-wilding centre for orphaned elephants.

Upon first visiting the Kibwezi Forest, Daphne Sheldrick famously said, 'I honestly cannot see the potential.' It was easy to see her point: Years of illegal activities had denuded the forest to a shell of a landscape. However, we were never one to shy away from a challenge. In 2008, we were presented with the opportunity to fund, manage, and protect the Kibwezi Forest in partnership with the Kenya Forest Service. In the intervening years, the landscape has flourished and set the standard for our conservation management template.

Upon assuming management of the Kibwezi Forest, our immediate priority was to erect fencelines. The purpose was twofold: prevent human incursions, which led to illegal activity within the forest, and protect bordering homesteads from marauding wildlife, which inevitably led to human-wildlife conflict. The fencelines connect the forest to the Chyulu Hills National Park, essentially turning it into an extension of the park, and creating a much-needed buffer for the neighbouring community in the process. In total, we have erected and continue to maintain 93 kilometres of fencelines throughout the Kibwezi-Chyulu landscape.

In 2013, we established the SWT/KWS Kenze Anti-Poaching Team, based full-time in the Kibwezi Forest. Thanks to their dedicated presence in the landscape, bushmeat poaching and other illegal activities were quickly brought under control.

The following year, we established Umani Springs, our newest reintegration unit, in the Kibwezi Forest. The forest's gentle, perennially lush environment makes it an ideal habitat for orphaned elephants — particularly those who are physically compromised — to reclaim their place back into the wild. Currently, Umani Springs is home to eight stockade-dependent orphaned elephants and eight semi-independent / ex-orphans living wild. In March 2023, our extended family grew by one, when Umani's matriarch, Murera, gave birth to a healthy little girl. Mwana, as we named her, is the result of Murera's union with a wild bull. Given Murera's compromised

condition, mother and baby remain very connected to the dependent herd.

To deepen community engagement and generate even more local employment opportunities, we established a Kibwezi Women's Beekeeping Group in 2021. Women from the local community are employed to look after the apiary's 30 hives. The proceeds from honey sold go back into community projects. The Kibwezi Forest is also home to a tree nursery, which nurtures saplings that are then planted in degraded areas that would benefit from reforestation. Tree plantings are a collaborative initiative, engaging participants from the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Forest Service, and, crucially, individuals from the local communities. The current capacity of the Kibwezi Forest Tree Nursery exceeds 55,000 seedlings, which are planted on an annual basis. Since 2018, we have planted 246,705 seedlings.

We sit on the board of the Chyulu REDD+ Program, a local chapter of the global REDD+ initiative. Collectively, Chyulu REDD+ partners own or manage 410,533.84 hectares of wilderness in the Chyulu Hills ecosystem, including Chyulu Hills National Park (KWS), a sector of Tsavo West National Park (KWS), the Kibwezi Forest (KFS, under our management), Mbirikani Group Ranch, Kuku Ranch, Kuku A Ranch, and Rombo Ranch. Funds disbursed from carbon credits are used for local conservation initiatives. Recent initiatives include the construction of infrastructure for KWS to expand its rhino programme in the Chyulu Hills, the purchase of a tipper truck for road creation and maintenance in Kibwezi/Chyulus, and the development of a community outreach programme to provide bursaries to local students.

Wildlife numbers are always a telling barometer of success in a landscape. When we started our work in the Kibwezi Forest, it was rare to encounter a single elephant. Today, it is an everyday occurrence. Even family herds with tiny babies in tow, who always err on the side of caution, have become a familiar sight. To see such a transformation in just 15 years is heartening indeed.

PEREGRINE CONSERVATION AREA

Location: Corner of Tsavo East National Park, at the intersection of the Mtito and Athi Rivers

Total size: 5,500 acres

Ecological Significance:

The Peregrine Conservation Area makes up a small-but-vital extension of Tsavo East National Park along two borders, where the Mtito and Athi Rivers meet. It provides an essential buffer zone for the park's vulnerable corner boundary, which would otherwise be surrounded by human habitation at the junction of the rivers.

The Peregrine Conservation Area (PCA) sits at the heart of the Tsavo Triangle. Established in 1997, it positions our Kaluku Field Headquarters in the heart of the Tsavo ecosystem and creates a vital buffer zone for two segments of the Tsavo East National Park boundary. To date, it makes up about 5,500 acres of protected land.

The PCA creates a soft transitional boundary in an area that would otherwise be a funnel for wildlife. It is located in the corner of two riverine borders of Tsavo East, a vulnerable triangle of land where the Mtito and Athi River intersect. Surrounded by human habitation on two sides, this area is susceptible to human-wildlife conflict and illegal incursions into the park. By creating a buffer zone, both wildlife and neighbouring communities benefit.

As plots in the Tsavo Triangle come up for sale, we purchase them to augment the buffer zone. Last year, we purchased an additional 650 acres of land from willing sellers.

The Peregrine Conservation Area is home to our Kaluku Field Headquarters. This site serves as an essential hub for all our Tsavo-based projects, housing our Aerial Unit; Canine Unit; Kaluku Orphan Unit, which raises neonate orphaned elephants, rhinos, and other wildlife; Operations Room, which oversees all field operations;

Vehicle Garage and Store; and essential personnel.

In 2019, we resuscitated Tsavo Farm on the periphery of the Peregrine Conservation Area. Using sustainable farming methods, it provides important employment opportunities for members of the local community. An on-site tree nursery and reforestation program can nurture over 600 indigenous trees, which are then planted in the surrounding ecosystem. In addition, we have installed a 17,000-litre aquaponics system. Vegetables grown through aquaponics require about 10 percent of the water needed to grow the same crops through conventional, soil-based agriculture. The farm is also sustainably raising a number of chickens and goats.

We are currently rolling out our Community Petal Project at Tsavo Farm. This community engagement initiative provides employment for local women, while also raising funds for conservation through the sale of bougainvillea petals, which are sustainably farmed and harvested.

When we established the PCA, illegal activities plagued the landscape. Today, it is rare to see any sign of human interference. Leopards, lions, buffalo herds, and elephant families frequent the area. Demonstrating the trust we have built with our wild neighbours, wild zebras and antelope often sleep on the Kaluku lawn, which they recognise as a safe haven.

AMU RANCH

Location: North coast of Kenya, near Lamu

Total Size: 63,000 acres

Ecological Significance:

Amu Ranch is home to some of the greatest biodiversity on the African continent. It is one of the world's largest and oldest mangrove forests. Mangroves are essential natural pillars that stabilise the coastline and prevent erosion. They also provide an important habitat for a variety of marine and land creatures.





Tucked on Kenya's north coast, Amu Ranch is an important habitat for an array of marine and land creatures, from small herds of elephants to large populations of reticulated giraffe, Cape buffalo, topi, and eland. Some of the most genetically diverse lions in East Africa can be found in Amu, ranging from the maneless Tsavo lions to the blue-eyed Somali lions.

Like so many coastal landscapes, this ancient habitat has come under siege in recent decades from human encroachment, development, and illegal activities. Despite this, Amu is a resilient place and has thus far escaped the massive deforestation that has plagued much of northern Kenya's coastline. However, such a vulnerable area needs vigilant oversight and on-the-ground management if it is to remain untouched.

Since 2012, we have been working to protect this fragile ecosystem in partnership with the Kenya Forest Service, Kenya Wildlife Service, and local stakeholders. We proudly provide financial support and management expertise to the Lamu Conservation Trust (LCT), a community-led organisation that manages marine ecologies in the greater Lamu region and preserves local wildlife populations.

Through our funding, Amu Ranch now has the infrastructure and equipment to support comprehensive conservation measures, from a network of roads to fully kitted security camps and outposts. We also fund the salaries of security rangers patrol the landscape.

In 2020, we embarked on an ambitious tree-planting project in Amu, with the goal to regenerate its coastal mangrove forests. Under the leadership of Eden Reforestation Projects (ERP), our tree-planting partner, an astounding 13.9 million mangroves have been planted in Lamu to date. By partnering with Eden, we are able to capitalise on economies of scale: Eden plants tens of millions of trees in Africa every month, which brings cost-effectiveness and vital expertise to the project.

Our first tree plantings took place in 2020 in Lamu's Milihoi Channel, which extends into Amu Ranch. We explored the channels by air, boat, and foot, scouting out potential planting sites and assessing the potential for a large-scale restoration effort.

To conduct this work, ERP has employed a talented group who had previously formed a 'beach management' volunteer unit in an attempt to protect their local

mangrove forest. They had sought assistance from the SWT in the past to support their patrol efforts, so it seemed only fitting that we were able to offer them this employment opportunity.

Thus began an extremely productive reforestation initiative that has stretched more than three years. Most of the seeds planted are mangroves, which line the many channels that snake through the Lamu archipelago and mainland. Given that a single mangrove can live for upwards of a century, each seed planting represents a significant investment in the future. The mangrove reforestation is helping to restore thousands of acres of degraded habitats for marine, insect, and bird life that were lost due to illegal logging, charcoal burning, and heavy flooding.

Kenya's mangroves are a national treasure. They are biodiversity hotspots, home to an incredible array of species. Their sinewy roots and branches provide breeding habitats for fish and shellfish, migratory birds and even sea turtles.

Mangroves are also the first line of defence for coastal communities, stabilising shorelines by slowing erosion and providing natural barriers to protect against flooding. Given that fishing is at the heart of Lamu County, our ability to preserve this habitat benefits wildlife and the people who live alongside them. With the ability to store three times the carbon of an equivalent area of tropical rainforest, mangroves are also essential in the fight against climate change.

We have also worked with ERP to expand our existing tree nursery on Amu Ranch to a capacity of 260,000 trees per annum, which are being planted in strategic areas on Amu Ranch. We have faced several challenges getting started, including security concerns and a multi-year drought, but activities in the nursery are ramping up. The recent construction of a large water reservoir that holds millions of litres of rainwater will sustain the tree nursery through the drier months.

This ongoing reforestation initiative has created more than 75 full-time jobs for the local community, along with dozens of seasonal opportunities for workers who collect seeds and plant the terrestrial trees in the rainy season.

ARABUKO SOKOKE FOREST

Location: Central coast of Kenya, near Watamu

Total Size: 104,000 acres

Ecological Significance:

The Arabuko Sokoke Forest is the largest single block of indigenous coastal forest remaining in East Africa. It is a stronghold for endangered species, including the golden-rumped elephant-shrew, the Sokoke dog mongoose, and the Ader's duiker, along with a rare population of coastal elephants.

Not so long ago, lush forests spanned the entire East African coastline. The Arabuko Sokoke Forest is the largest extant remainder of these forests. It covers more than 100,000 acres — a significant size, particularly given the rampant fragmentation of coastal habitats.

Located just inland from the coastal town of Watamu, the Arabuko Sokoke Forest is home to a spectacular array of flora and fauna. In this day and age, it is rare to find elephants so close to the Kenya coast, but the forest is home to about 200 elephants who have found refuge beneath its leafy canopy.

However, years of illegal incursions and activities have taken their toll on the Arabuko Sokoke Forest. The area is completely surrounded by human habitation, which creates pressures on its boundaries and contributes to human-wildlife conflict. Illegal logging, charcoal production, and bushmeat poaching continue to degrade the forest and chip away at its biodiversity. In order to secure the Arabuko Sokoke Forest for the long-term, it is vital to ramp up aerial and ground patrols, improve infrastructure, secure its boundaries, and implement a comprehensive conservation management template.

In 2022, we put forth a proposal to co-manage the Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve in collaboration with the Kenya Forest Service (KFS). This year, the Framework for Collaboration was finalised and signed. We have already started our ground initiatives and look forward to ramping up our efforts in the year to come.

To establish a field presence, we deployed our SWT/KWS Kajiado Anti-Poaching Team to the Arabuko Sokoke Forest, where they are now based full time. In addition, the newly established Kulalu II Anti-Poaching Team will be deployed to the forest on an as-needed basis. Our Galana-based pilot conducts regular aerial patrols over the forest, while the rest of the Aerial Unit flies in for targeted operations.

The KFS teams based in the Arabuko Sokoke Forest did not have vehicles, which put them at a significant disadvantage to conduct field operations and security patrols. To ensure they are fully mobile at all times, we purchased two new Land Cruisers for the KWS teams. These vehicles are maintained by the Trust and manned by Trust drivers. Meanwhile, we also created and cleared security roads to improve accessibility for all teams.

Our efforts are just beginning in the Arabuko Sokoke Forest, but already we are seeing momentum. This year was focused on laying the groundwork to execute much larger plans, beginning with infrastructure improvements within the forest. Looking forward, our greatest task is to surround the Arabuko Sokoke Forest with an electric fenceline, both to secure its vulnerable boundaries and alleviate human-wildlife conflict with neighbouring communities.







KIMANA SANCTUARY AND CORRIDOR

Location: Southeast of Amboseli National Park, spreading towards the Tsavo ecosystem

Total Size: 23,400 acres

Ecological Significance:

Kimana Sanctuary and Corridor make up a small-but-critical corridor for the elephants of Amboseli, linking them to the Chyulu Hills and Tsavo ecosystem beyond.

There is perhaps no sight more iconic in Africa than the hulking form of Mount Kilimanjaro rising above the plains of Amboseli. This is the land of giants, one of those rare places still presided over by elephants whose tusks sweep the grass beneath their feet.

However, human activities have whittled away the wider Amboseli ecosystem, turning the sweeping wilderness into a fragment of what it once was. This imperils all wildlife, but especially elephants. They are a species who needs space, and lots of it.

While we cannot reclaim all the wilderness that has been sacrificed for development, we can work to secure ancient migratory routes through community partnerships. This creates a safe passage that allows elephants to move unimpeded between ecosystems with the seasons, as nature dictates. It also provides vital income for local

landowners, incentivising them to choose conservation over development.

In 2018, when the need arose to secure the last remaining open tracts that connect Amboseli to the Chyulu Hills and Tsavo ecosystem, we leapt at the opportunity. Kimana Sanctuary and Corridor form a vital connection between the habitats of the southeast and west. Flanked on either side by settled areas, it offers a safe passage and permanent habitat for all manner of creatures.

We partner with Big Life Foundation and local Maasai landowners to protect this special jewel. Historically, we covered the annual lease fees for Kimana Corridor and Kimana Sanctuary, which provides local Maasai landowners with a reliable and competitive income stream, effectively incentivising them to use their land for conservation, instead of farming.

In 2022, an agreement was finalised with Angama, a respected tourism outfit, to hold the tourism mandate in Kimana Sanctuary. This year, they opened Angama Amboseli, a thoughtfully constructed lodge.

Thanks to this new revenue stream, Kimana Sanctuary will be able to become self-sufficient, simultaneously covering its own running costs and increasing income to its landowners. While Big Life retains the head lease and management responsibilities, Angama has taken over the sanctuary's lease fees.

In lieu of lease fees, we now fund security fees for Kimana Sanctuary, including the salaries of community game rangers who are employed and managed by Big Life. We also continue to pay the lease fees for the Kimana Corridor, which comprises land that is privately owned and leased from individual landowners. Big Life similarly deploys rangers to the corridor and oversees all management in this ecosystem.



SHIMBA HILLS AND MWALUGANJE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

Location: South coast of Kenya, south of Tsavo East National Park

Total Size: 80,232 acres

Ecological Significance:

Shimba Hills National Reserve is one of the largest coastal forests in East Africa and home to the highest population density of elephants in Kenya. Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, which sits due north, serves as an important corridor for elephants and other wildlife between Mwaluganje Forest Reserve to the north and Shimba Hills to the south.

The Shimba Hills and Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary are the collective site of our latest large-scale conservation initiative. As one of Kenya's last remaining substantive coastal forests, the Shimba Hills are a priceless habitat for all manner of creatures. Combined with Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, this ecosystem also provides sanctuary to Kenya's coastal elephants. When ivory poaching decimated Tsavo's elephant population in the 1970s and 1980s, many sought refuge towards the coast. The forested Shimba Hills have remained a small but mighty stronghold for the species.

However, over the years, human encroachment has chipped away at the landscape and inhibited the migratory passage back to Tsavo. It was vital that this corridor did not fall into the hands of developers. In 2021, we purchased an 800-acre corridor between the Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary and the Shimba Hills to further enhance the sanctuary and protect its elephant population for the future.

The success of Shimba Hills / Mwaluganje hinges on community engagement. Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary is a community-owned sanctuary, in which local landowners lease their privately-owned property to a community-based trust. Our first priority was to increase the annual compensation payments to the landowners and subsistence farmers in the program. In addition we fund wages for sanctuary staff and Mwaluganje rangers, and subsidise essential infrastructure and works within the landscape.

In December 2023, we finally finished a massive project to secure the Shimba Hills Conservation Area through a 117-kilometre electric fence. This was an extensive undertaking, which took the better part of two years to complete. However, it was vital to further conservation within the landscape, as the old fence was dilapidated and had little oversight. With the support of KWS, local village chiefs, and the chairman of Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, an educational drive was initiated to inform

the local community about the proposed project and its benefits, in order to ensure we had local support and buy-in for such a large-scale initiative.

We began by fencing Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, before working south along the reserve's western boundary. From there, fencing teams tackled the eastern side of the reserve, heading north towards Kwale. This proved to be a challenging section, with steep descents and multiple river crossings.

Throughout the project, the fencing teams were met with a positive response from the local communities. They were appreciative of the new fenceline, which will allow them to cultivate and farm their land right up to the reserve boundary. Previously, their crops risked being raided and destroyed by wildlife. In the long-term, this fenceline will reduce human-wildlife conflict and improve local livelihoods.

We also constructed 11 outposts at regular intervals along the fenceline. From these bases, attendants — who are employed full-time — can patrol the fence on either side. Their presence will ensure continued maintenance and proper functioning of the fence. They can also share intelligence about wildlife sightings and possible breaches.

To tackle prevalent threats in the Shimba Hills and Mwaluganje, we deployed the SWT/KWS Kwale Anti-Poaching Team in 2023. This newly established team is based in the landscape and is fully focused on its security. In addition, the Kulalu II Anti-Poaching Team will be deployed to the landscape on an as-needed basis.

Already, Kwale's daily patrols have helped to reduce illegal activities in the area, notably bushmeat poaching and charcoal burning. Augmenting the efforts of our rangers, Mwaluganje community scouts also patrol the landscape. We provided them with new uniforms, which contributed to a more visual, cohesive presence in the

area, and taught them enhanced training methods. The scouts have now intensified their daily foot patrols, covering six to eight kilometres per day in the sanctuary.

In 2023, we installed two new boreholes in the Shimba Hills. These safe, strategically placed drinking sources will draw elephants and other wildlife deeper into the protected area and away from community borders, reducing human-wildlife conflict in the process.

Three ranger outposts have been established at strategic points, which monitor vehicular and pedestrian traffic at the edge of the protected areas. In time, the goal is to place permanent scouts in these locations and issue them with handheld radios, which will allow all three bases to be in communication and monitor commuters as they enter and exit the sanctuary, which will help identify any illegal activities.

Thanks to a permanent SWT presence, intensified patrols, and a new electric fence, the future now looks hopeful for Mwaluganje and Shimba Hills. As the habitats are better preserved, there is the possibility to reintroduce more wildlife, which will drive more visitors to the area. Increased tourism will provide additional economic benefits for the community, which should also reduce illegal activities.



Water for Wildlife



In Kenya, water is an increasingly scarce resource. The seasons have always been characterised by stark contrast: long dry spells, reprieved by a month or two of rain. Typically, the long rains arrive in March through May. They tide over the landscape until late October–December, when the short rains arrive. Historically, droughts were a periodic occurrence — a severe but necessary way of regulating wildlife populations and helping land recover.

However, human activities have changed the natural order. Climate change is unfolding before our very eyes: Here in Kenya, long-established weather patterns have been replaced by a climactic toss-up. Dry seasons are growing longer, rains come late, scarcely, or not at all; and both flooding and droughts happen more frequently. Climate change undoubtedly contributed to the drought that defined 2021, 2022, and the beginning of 2023.

Faced with an increasingly uncertain climate, Water for Wildlife, our supplemental water program, helps us forge a path forward. Working in consultation with hydrology experts and the Kenya Wildlife Service, we implement tailored water solutions in areas that struggle with limited or irregular rainfall.

Water for Wildlife has made an immeasurable difference in the Tsavo Conservation Area. While Tsavo, with its vast, untouched spaces, provides an ideal habitat for all manner of creatures, huge swathes of the park lack natural drinking sources during the dry season. Without suitable water, even the most ideal habitat cannot support long-term habitation.

We install boreholes in places where aquifers are plentiful, but surface drinking water is scarce. Sustainably powered by wind and/or solar, and augmented by generators where needed, pumps tap into subterranean water tables. Water is then filtered up into nearby troughs and pans, which are designed to accommodate creatures great and small. To date, we have established 34 boreholes within the Tsavo Conservation Area and beyond.

SWT-Funded and Maintained Boreholes:

- Ndii Ndaza
- Ndara
- Voi
- Aruba
- Ithumba (rehabilitated)
- Ithumba Dam
- Ithumba Stockades
- Kamboyo
- Kanderi
- Tiva
- Didea / Ndara Plains
- Kone
- Taita Hills Sanctuary
- Wangala Borehole
- Kaluku 1
- Kaluku 2
- Canine Unit
- Kenze
- Kenze Standby
- Thabagunji borehole
- Mbololo borehole
- Peregrine Rock Camp borehole
- Didea Windmill (new)
- Amu 1
- Amu 2
- Kiasa
- Rhino Base
- Galana Ranch
- Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary
- Kari Yellowthorn
- Kari Pool
- Enasoit
- Shimba Hills 1
- Shimba Hills 2

In 2023, we installed a new solar system for the Aruba borehole, which now pumps 6,500 litres of water an hour for wildlife. We also installed two new boreholes in the Shimba Hills. This is a relatively small habitat surrounded by human habitation. During the dry season, human-wildlife conflict is a persistent challenge, as elephants and



*To date, we have established 34 boreholes within
the Tsavo Conservation Area and beyond.*



other creatures venture forth for food and water. The establishment of these new drinking sources, which are located deep within the hills, will alleviate this challenge. In the same vein, we are also planning to install two new boreholes in the Arabuko Sokoke Forest. We are currently in the surveying stage of this project.

We strategically locate each watering point far from communities, drawing wildlife deeper into protected areas. With the dry season comes an inevitable increase in human-wildlife conflict, as elephants and other creatures venture onto community land in search of food and water. By creating water sources deep within the park, we are able to mitigate these oft-lethal encounters. Boreholes can also support wider conservation initiatives, supplying water for field teams and facilities.

In areas where boreholes are not a viable solution, we bring in water on wheels. Our bowzers source water from a borehole or well-flowing river, which they then distribute in protected areas. We have a fleet of eight bowzers, five of which have a holding capacity of 20,000 litres. Bowzers are essential in delivering water to our Ithumba and Voi Reintegration Units, which serve older dependent orphans, ex-orphans, and wild elephants. In total, we have the capacity to rapidly transport 124,000 litres of water.

Large-scale water distribution in a vast wilderness like Tsavo is an enormous undertaking, requiring dedicated, full-time resources. Every ten days, our field teams conduct service checks of all water projects, cleaning

troughs and tuning equipment as needed. Meanwhile, our drivers have carefully orchestrated daily routes, delivering water across the Tsavo Ecosystem.

Tsavo Wetlands Project:

2023 was dominated by the Tsavo Wetlands Project. This is one of our most ambitious field initiatives to date. The goal of the Tsavo Wetlands Project is to abstract sustainable amounts of water from the Athi River (which runs freely along the western side of the Yatta Plateau), convey it over the Yatta Plateau, and deliver it to the plains on the eastern side, where elephants and other animals can access water in a safe part of the park.

This project was designed to mitigate human-wildlife conflict, which has become a growing threat on the western side of the Yatta Plateau. During the dry season, elephants converge upon this area — which also happens to share a border with community land. With the availability of drinking water on the eastern side of the Yatta Plateau, we expect that fewer animals will venture over the plateau and onto community land.

The conveyance of water from the Athi River to the storage unit atop the Yatta Plateau has been designed to work without any external use of power. Instead, we have implemented a hydraulic ram pump, which uses the momentum of the flowing river water to divert and pump a relatively small amount of water uphill. To date, the pipeline has been laid and we expect that the project will conclude in mid-2024.





SUPPORT FOR
The Kenya Wildlife Service



We have a long-standing history of collaboration with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), using our expertise and resources to further conservation initiatives in protected areas across the country. As the Kenya Government's authority for conservation and management, the KWS has the mandate to conserve and manage wildlife in Kenya, and to enforce related laws and regulations.

In addition to the extensive conservation projects we operate in partnership with the KWS, we continue to provide significant financial support to enhance their field-level efforts. Historically, our collaborations were focused in the Tsavo Conservation Area. In recent years, however, our support has expanded to address conservation challenges across the country.

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT MITIGATION

Human-wildlife conflict has emerged as one of the greatest threats to wildlife, particularly elephants. As the human footprint continues to expand, we have seen a notable surge in competition over resources. This is particularly true during the dry season, when elephants venture onto community land in search of water and food. Without rapid intervention, these encounters can be fatal on both sides.

In response to this growing challenge, we rolled out our Tsavo Elephant Translocation Unit in 2020. This specialised unit is on-call to support KWS in the translocation of 'problem' elephants. In situ intervention is always the first response, but in instances where elephants cannot be safely pushed into protected areas by vehicle or helicopter, our Elephant Translocation Unit is mobilised. We have also supported the KWS Animal Capture and Translocation Unit through the donation of vehicles and equipment over the years.

We saw a dramatic rise in human-wildlife cases during the 2021-2022 drought. Even as conditions improved in the field, it remained a persistent challenge throughout 2023. We have worked hard to develop productive relationships with local communities, who flag wildlife incursions to our teams or to KWS.

Upon receiving a report, we rapidly coordinate an aerial and/or ground response, pushing the elephants back into the protection of the park. Over the course of 2023, our Aerial Unit responded to 505 reports of 'problem' elephants.

Details of one of our most challenging human-wildlife conflict mitigation operations to date, involving the translocation of an elephant family of four, is shared in the addendum story.

FENCELINES

Fencelines have emerged as one of the most effective tools for conservation. These 'wild borders' benefit both wildlife and the communities who live alongside them. Not all landscapes can be fenced — in certain areas, it is essential that natural migratory movement of movement is unimpeded — but fencelines are indispensable on precarious boundaries.

Over the years, we have financed the construction, patrolling, and continued maintenance of over 400 kilometres of fencelines across Kenya. These wild borders prevent human-wildlife conflict and inhibit poaching, charcoal burning, logging, livestock incursions, and other illegal activities within protected areas. We employ more than 80 locally engaged, full-time staff who are

responsible for the maintenance and monitoring of fencelines. Teams are in constant radio communication with the corresponding SWT/KWS Anti-Poaching Unit, who are positioned nearby to respond to any security breaches. Most fencelines have been constructed in the Tsavo Conservation Area, with a focus on areas that struggle with human-wildlife conflict or illegal activities.

In 2023, we completed upgrades on a 25-kilometre section of the original Meru Rhino Sanctuary fenceline along the eastern boundary, which had fallen into a state of disrepair. Meru Rhino Sanctuary is a stronghold for Kenya's vulnerable black and white rhino populations. These upgrades will help ensure it holds up to the stringent security required of such an important area.

Our biggest fencing accomplishment of 2023 was the completion of a 117-kilometre fenceline securing the Shimba Hills Conservation Area. Sanyati Ltd. was contracted for this extensive project, which spanned two years. The teams began by fencing Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, before working along the western boundary of the hills. In the final phase, they installed the fence along the eastern side, heading north towards Kwale.

The eastern side of the Shimba Hills proved challenging to fence, given its steep descents and many river crossings which head towards the sea. However, throughout the project, the teams met positive feedback from the local communities, all of whom were appreciative of the new fenceline. As they shared, it will allow them to cultivate and farm their land right up to the park boundary. Before, this had been impossible, as their crops were targeted and destroyed by wildlife.

Successful fenceline implementation and management requires significant resources. First, there is the upfront investment to construct the fenceline. Then, there must be dedicated patrols to ensure their ongoing maintenance and security. However, given how successful they are at protecting habitats and communities, they are well worth the investment. As of 2023, our fenceline projects protect the following parks and conservation areas:

- **Northern Tsavo East — 63 kilometres**

Over the years, we have constructed a 63-kilometre elephant-proof fenceline along the Tsavo East northern boundary, bordering the Ithumba area. In 2023, we added two extra wires to the bottom of the fenceline to deter livestock incursion, while rehabilitating any old posts or problem areas.

- **Voi - Ngutuni — 17 kilometres**

Stretching from Voi Safari Lodge towards the Ngutuni Ranch boundary to Ndara, this fenceline ensures elephants and other creatures are protected from the Nairobi-Mombasa Railway. It also provides further security for our Voi orphans.

- **Kibwezi Forest — 79 kilometres**

The Kibwezi Forest is now protected along three sensitive boundaries, connecting it with Chyulu Hills National Park and preventing all manner of illegal activities. The presence of the fence has had a transformative effect on the forest.

- **Kamboyo IPZ — 16 kilometres**

This fenceline was built to enhance the protection of Tsavo West's free release rhino population. To further secure this threatened species, we also built a new electric fence around the KWS Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ) base in Rhino Valley.

- **Meru Rhino Sanctuary — 50 kilometres**

We partnered with the KWS to upgrade and extend the Meru Rhino Sanctuary, which sits within Meru National Park. The resulting fortified fenceline nearly doubled the size of the sanctuary, providing more space and heightened security for its growing resident rhino population. In 2023, we rehabilitated at 25-kilometre stretch of the original fenceline.

- **Ndii Ndaza — 4 kilometres**

This fenceline fortifies the area around the Ndii Ndaza KWS camp, further enhancing security in this crucial sector of Tsavo East National Park.

- **KWS Voi Headquarters — 15 kilometres**

As the hub of all KWS operations in Tsavo East National Park, security around the Voi Headquarters is absolutely vital to conservation in the region.

- **Nairobi National Park — 10 kilometres**

As one of the only national parks within a capital city, Nairobi National Park is known as the 'World's Wildlife Capital.' Securing this precious wilderness not only benefits the myriad of creatures who call it home, but also the orphaned elephants growing up at our Nairobi Nursery, which sits within the park.

- **KARI Ranch — 43 kilometres**

KARI Ranch is an important buffer zone in the Tsavo Conservation Area, with a direct link to Chyulu Hills National Park. Securing precarious boundaries has protected the landscape and benefited neighbouring communities, who historically struggled with human-wildlife conflict.

- **Mwaluganje - Shimba Hills — 117 kilometres**

In our most ambitious fenceline project yet, we secured the vulnerable boundaries of Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary and the Shimba Hills. This project generated immense goodwill from the local community, who had long struggled with human-wildlife conflict.



OPERATIONAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

In addition to partnering with KWS on large-scale conservation projects, we also fund essential operational and infrastructure support that underpin the success of these initiatives. We support one-off and ongoing conservation initiatives through the donation of vehicles, equipment, and supplies; and using SWT resources to rehabilitate and upgrade KWS infrastructure.

To date, SWT has built or rehabilitated 27 buildings on behalf of KWS, including ranger stations, security bases, and water tanks. We have also donated 21 vehicles to KWS and rehabilitated many more vehicles to further conservation work across Kenya. In addition, we donate field equipment and supplies to KWS on an annual basis, including mobile camps, radio equipment, and solar power units. This results in enhanced KWS operations and a heightened conservation impact across Kenya.

In 2023, support included:

Vehicle and Equipment:

- The installation of a new water tank and tower for the renovated camp at Lake Jipe
- Ongoing fuel support for KWS conservation vehicles operating in Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks
- Fuel donations for the KWS Tsavo Rapid Response Unit and KWS Tsavo East Company Commander
- Rehabilitation of the KWS Motomo Land Cruiser, the KWS Tsavo East Rapid Response Unit Land Cruiser, and the KWS Company Commander of Tsavo East's Land Cruiser

Operations:

- Donation of six four-man tents for KWS field operations in Tsavo East and West
- Significant donation of medical equipment to Mtito Hospital in support of the rural communities bordering Tsavo East National Park
- Expansion of the Community School Lunch Program to Nasaru, KARI, Kulalu, Galana, Kone, Assa, Ithumba, Gazi, Ngulini, and Kamunyu
- Donation of an extensive radio system (repeater, two control room radios, radio tracking dispatch

software complete with a PC server, six base radios, 10 mobile vehicle radios, 25 non-display handsets, 10 display handsets), which has been installed at Ngulia Mountain

- Donation of a radio system, which has been installed at Ithumba Hill

Construction and Road Works:

- Rehabilitation of KWS Thabagunji ranger base
- Renovation of the Lake Jipe camp, including a new water tank/tower and new staff quarters
- Refurbishment of Rhino Base in Tsavo East, including the installation of a borehole

Upgrades and maintenance of game drive roads, security roads, and airstrips throughout the Tsavo Conservation Area for enhanced accessibility and security, including:

- New road bulldozed along the interior of the Tsavo East Northern Area fenceline
- Ndarakana, Msobobo, Roka and Gazi airstrips graded
- New security road graded atop the Yatta Plateau, stretching from Tsavo Safari Camp to Thabangunji
- Old road from lower Ndarakana to Tiva opened and refurbished
- Kiasa to Msobo airstrip to Tiva graded
- Chamaneze to Tiva Causeway graded
- Tiva Causeway to Bisadi Falls graded, including Roka Voi Road along the north and south bank
- Road from Tiva, Shetani caves to Ndi Ndaza Road graded, then widened from Kalovoto to Ithumba to serve as a fire break
- Kaluku to Mtito road graded within the Tsavo East Triangle



Notes from the Field:

Moving an Elephant Family of Four to Safety

On 24th October 2023, we pulled off one of our most challenging field operations to date. For the first time, we translocated a family herd of four elephants — two mothers and two babies — off community land and back to the safety of Tsavo East National Park.

A lot of careful consideration went into this operation. The family consisted of a very strong-willed matriarch (in Swahili, we would call her ‘kali’) and her sub-adult calf, plus a younger mother (who was also likely the matriarch’s daughter) and her four-year-old baby. They had been living on community land for at least eight months. Earlier this year, a new fenceline was erected by the county government around community land bordering the Tsavo ecosystem. This is ultimately a very positive development to help alleviate human-wildlife conflict. However, during the fenceline’s construction, this particular family of elephants were ‘marooned’ on community land.

Over the past several months, our teams had dedicated hours and hours trying to shepherd the family back into the park. It might take two aircrafts and many attempts, but even the most stropy bulls can usually be coaxed in a certain direction. But this matriarch was different. She was fiercely protective of her family and refused to cooperate, despite numerous attempts. After she had a run-in with a local woman, leaving her gravely injured, the situation escalated.

For everyone’s welfare, it was time to give these elephants an emergency exit. We have done many translocations in partnership with the KWS, several involving multiple elephants. However, these operations almost always involve bulls. We had never before moved an entire family unit. Every logistic — of which there are many, in a translocation — was quadrupled.

Wheels started turning at 3:00 AM that morning, when the first SWT teams departed from Voi. An operation of this scale required three KWS veterinarians on-site, so Dr Limo and his assistant drove up from Voi headquarters while Dr Rono flew down from Nairobi. Meanwhile, based on aerial reports of the sizes of the various elephants, we assembled our fleet to translocate them. The SWT crane truck, tractor and low-bed trailer, low-bed truck, backhoe, and team vehicles departed from our Kaluku Field Headquarters. Everyone gathered at the meeting junction by 7:00 AM.

As the ground teams left Kaluku, our SWT fixed-wing and helicopter pilots embarked on the all-important search mission. We had a general



idea of the family’s last known location, but they were very difficult to find. The bush is thick in this area, providing good coverage for four elusive elephants. After flying dozens of transects, they were spotted camouflaged in the scrub.

Every single detail had been organised: The vehicles were in place, the aircraft were moving, and nearly 50 people were



Translocations are a last resort, only to be mobilised in situations where elephants cannot be safely pushed back into protected areas by vehicle or helicopter.



standing by to bring the translocation to life. Now all we needed were the stars of the show.

However, elephants keep us humble. Metre by metre, the SWT helicopter painstakingly shepherded the family towards an open area that ground teams could access. Just when they were perfectly positioned, a passing truck drove along the main road and sent the elephants scattering in the opposite direction. Wary of over-stressing and over-tiring the family, especially with the little baby in tow, we decided to halt operations and try again later that day.

Mid-afternoon, the SWT helicopter and Super Cub flew a second recce. They found the family in an optimal location, close to the park boundary fence and in an open area. It was all systems go, but we were working against the clock. The elephants had to be darted and loaded in daylight — and time was rapidly running out.

Big machinery moves slowly, especially on rough park roads. As the convoy made their way to the new meeting point, the Super Cub pilot kept eyes on the family while the helicopter scooped up Dr Limo. Moving them to an open area was tricky, as the matriarch was very reluctant to follow any direction from above. It took the better part of an hour, but the Aerial Unit finally got everyone into position. Meanwhile, the backhoe swept the area so all the ground vehicles could access the clearing.

The matriarch was darted first, followed by the second female, and finally the sub-adult calf. Our plan was to manually restrain the youngest calf, given his relatively small size. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief as the matriarch succumbed to the anaesthetic, followed by the other two. Ground and aerial teams did an excellent job ensuring that each elephant fell a safe distance away from each other. From there, everyone was loaded on their various modes of transportation: the matriarch and second mum were lifted onto the crane truck, while the sub-adult calf went on the tractor trailer.

Now, we just needed to get the baby on board — but again, elephants keep us humble. Our Voi team has pulled off countless elephant rescues, including many calves of a similar age. However, he bowled right through them, sending six full-grown men flying in his wake. Clearly, we needed a different tactic.

The SWT helicopter radioed Dr Limo, who was with the three anaesthetised elephants, and suggested he prepare a fourth dart. After scooping up the veterinarian, our

pilot shepherded the baby towards the ground team. The moment the dart took effect, the Voi team loaded him onto their trailer. Both our helicopter and fixed-wing pilots flew overhead, directing operations and guiding ground teams towards their final destination. We chose a place fairly close to the Athi River, within the fenced national park boundary. As an added bonus, this area is nice and green thanks to recent rains.

The final leg of the operation, driving the sleeping elephants off community land and into Tsavo East, was a journey of just 8 kilometres. However, it was dark by the time they reached the unloading site. Illuminated by torches and headlights, the matriarch and big female were offloaded from the crane truck, followed by the big calf from the tractor trailer, and finally the little calf from the truck. KWS requested a tracking collar be put on the matriarch in order to monitor her movements.

Both vets worked in tandem to ensure that all four elephants woke up together. The matriarch needed a helping hand from a Land Cruiser with a tow strap, but soon the entire family was back on their feet. They walked off as a family unit towards the river. Only then did the convoy make their way back to Kaluku. The final vehicle pulled into headquarters at 9:00 PM — a full 18 hours since the operation's first vehicle started off that morning.

It took 18 hours, 10 vehicles, 2 aircraft, and 45 people to bring these four elephants to safety. This result will mean a world of difference for everyone. The local community is relieved to no longer face any threat from them, while the elephants are back in a safe and protected environment, where they can live peacefully. Based on collar data, they have moved east about 25 kilometres away, exploring the fertile areas that received the recent rains.

This operation demonstrated how sometimes translocation is the only viable option in order to save lives and keep wild families together. In cases that demand such a monumental response, we are able to answer the call — even when it means moving a family of four. We are very grateful to our donors, who give us the wings to pull off these massive operations.

Rhino Conservation



Rhinos are inextricably linked with our past, present, and future. During their early Tsavo days, Daphne and David Sheldrick were among the first people in Kenya to successfully raise orphaned rhinos. In the 1970s, orphaned rhinos Stroppey and Hoshim were translocated to Solio Ranch, where they became the founding population of the renowned Solio Rhino Sanctuary. In 1982, in partnership with the KWS, we funded the formation of Kenya's first rhino sanctuaries, in Tsavo West and Lake Nakuru National Parks.

Through our Orphans' Project, we have successfully hand-raised 17 orphaned black rhinos. We currently have three young orphaned rhinos in our care — Apollo, Chamboi, and Raha — along with our Nursery mainstay, Maxwell, who is blind and has a forever home with us. Solio, an orphan we rescued in 2010, is now living wild in Nairobi National Park and a mother of two. This year, we were treated to a wonderful visit from her and her growing family.

As we raise Kenya's orphaned rhinos, we are also committed to protecting their wild brethren. Once upon a time, black rhinos flourished across the African continent. Beginning in the 1970s, however, the scourge of poaching decimated the species. In Kenya, black rhinos suffered a catastrophic 98 percent population decline between 1970 and 1983, plummeting from 20,000 to just 350 individuals in just over a decade.

Last year, we donated six customised rhino crates to the KWS Animal Capture Unit. Three were made for black

rhinos, three for white rhinos — each custom-made to accommodate the unique dimensions of the subspecies. These crates were put to good use in 2023, translocating rhinos out of conflict zones and into viable habitats.

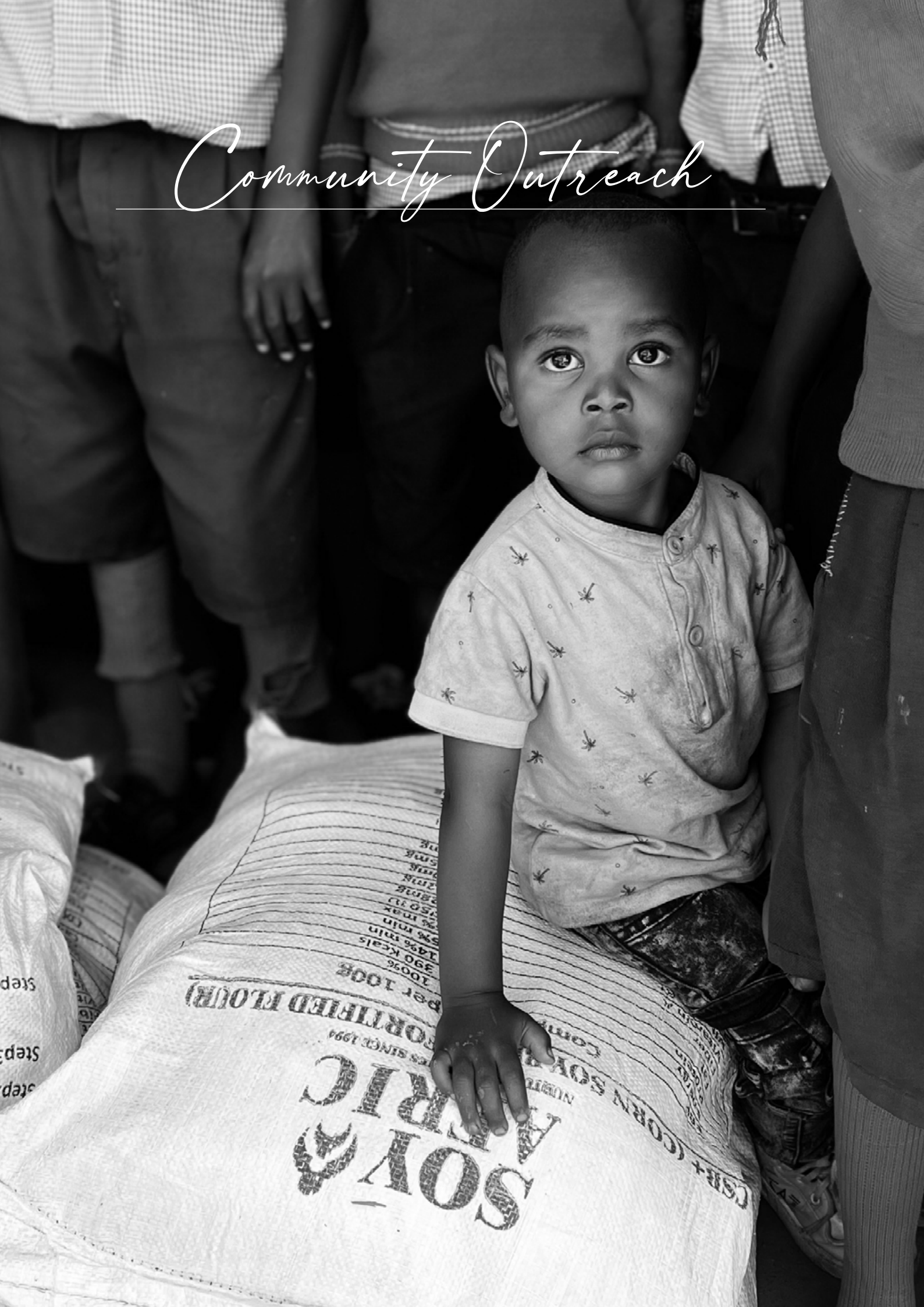
We continue to support Meru Rhino Sanctuary, a vital stronghold for rhinos within Meru National Park. In 2017, we funded a large-scale fenceline project to expand the sanctuary and upgrade its facilities. This nearly doubled the sanctuary's size, providing both increased space and upgraded security for its growing rhino population. Last year, we rehabilitated the original main gate and upgraded a 23-kilometre stretch of fenceline. This year, we embarked on a fenceline clearing exercise in Meru National Park's eastern boundary to discard loose wires and metal poles that were vulnerable to theft by bushmeat poachers. In total, the team cleared a total of 14.8 kilometres along the park's eastern boundary.

On an annual basis, we fund essential infrastructure and operating costs in Meru Rhino Sanctuary, ensuring teams are fully equipped to protect the sanctuary. This includes funding annual fence maintenance and the salaries of full-time staff who patrol the fenceline. We also donated a new Land Cruiser to be used in the landscape for security patrols and operations.

In addition, we devote significant time and resources to rhino conservation within the Tsavo Conservation Area. In 2023, our Aerial Unit conducted regular rhino monitoring and surveillance in Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary, the Intensive Protection Zone in Tsavo West National Park, and the IPZ in Tsavo East National Park, all of which are home to significant populations of critically endangered black rhinos. Over the course of 2023, our pilots dedicated 180.6 aerial hours to rhino surveillance, flying 22,714 kilometres.



Community Outreach



Successful conservation and community engagement are inextricably linked. If we are to secure a future for Kenya's wildlife, we must also support the people who live alongside them. About 38 percent of rural-dwelling Kenyans live below the poverty line. As they struggle to make ends meet, conservation efforts fall low on their list of priorities. Many have a complicated relationship with wildlife, viewing elephants and other creatures as threats to their lives and livelihoods.

Just as we are invested in the long-term welfare of Kenya's wildlife, we are equally committed to their human neighbours. We focus our efforts in rural communities bordering Kenya's National Parks and protected areas, delivering conservation initiatives that also improve their quality of life. This support takes the form of local employment opportunities, education initiatives, food distribution programs, equipment donations, and conservation solutions that benefit both humans and wildlife.

COMMUNITY HOSPITAL DONATION

Healthy communities and successful conservation go hand-in-hand. That is why we were honoured to donate a full suite of critical medical equipment to Mtito-Andei Sub-County Hospital. Strategically located between two national parks — Tsavo East and Tsavo West — this community hospital is a crucial care centre in a remote and largely rural part of Kenya.

In early 2023, we received a letter from the administrator of Mtito-Andei Sub-County Hospital, highlighting a need for a newborn Resuscitaire machine and baby incubators. Given that Community Outreach is one of our core conservation projects, we welcomed the opportunity to provide support — and we wanted to see if there were additional ways we could bolster the hospital's capabilities. After visiting the hospital, we identified several areas that would benefit from new and upgraded equipment.

On 6th December 2023, Angela Sheldrick, Robert Carr-Hartley, and several members of the SWT team presented the Mtito-Andei Sub-County Hospital and Governor Mutula Kilonzo Junior, the governor of Makueni County, with the following equipment donated by Sheldrick Wildlife Trust:

- Portable X-ray machine
- Portable ultrasound
- Resuscitaire infant warmer
- Automated haematology analyser
- Automated chemistry analyser
- Electric microscope
- i-Chroma analyser
- Baby incubators (x5)
- Dental chair
- Oxygen concentrators (x3)
- Multi-parameter patient monitors (x2)
- Infusion drip stands (x10)
- Stretchers (x5)
- Medicine trolleys (x3)
- Dressing trolleys (x5)
- Beds and mattresses (x20)
- Industrial laundry washer (x2)
- Industrial dryer (x2)
- 200-litre freezers (x4)
- No-frost refrigerators (x4)
- Generator

This state-of-the-art equipment will help the hospital provide comprehensive care for all patients. The Resuscitaire infant warmer and incubators will improve neonatal capabilities, while the X-ray machine, ultrasound, analysers, and other machines will help doctors offer even better care.

Equally important are the stretchers, trolleys, beds, and other equipment that enhance the hospital's operations and accommodations. These donations are already being put to good use, saving lives of all ages and enhancing medical care in the Tsavo area.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

Our successful school lunch program is now in its third year. Conversations with Tsavo-area communities revealed that many families struggled to adequately feed their children, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent drought. Many children were forced to skip meals, which also impacted their studies. Our school lunch program, which serves learning institutions in struggling areas, is a direct response to these hardships. We provide a balanced, nutritious porridge, which forms a complete meal for students to eat at school.

Continuing their support from 2022, Chantecaille Conservation Foundation and Helen Danson sponsored our Tsavo school lunch program this year. Over the course of 2023, we distributed food supplies to a total of 84 schools, providing 16,020 schoolchildren with nutritious lunches every day. This year, we expanded the program to community schools in Ithumba, Nasaru, and all the Gazi schools. In total, we donated 12,308 kilograms of maize, 11,558 kilograms of beans, 12,525 kilograms of rice, 1,242 litres of cooking oil, and 71,544 kilograms of uji.

We have received very positive feedback about the school lunch program. Before its implementation, schools struggled with under-enrollment. Some even closed early because children lacked the energy to focus on their studies. Teachers have reported that the school lunch program has improved student morale and increased attendance.

CHYULU WATER CATCHMENT PROJECT

Water is a persistent challenge for rural communities in arid areas. While some schools collect water on a small scale, young students often have to carry water from home or pay for drinking water. In an effort to create sustainable, subsidised water sources, we unrolled the Chyulu Water Catchment Project this year.

We installed water catchment tanks at eight schools in the Chyulu ecosystem: Usalama Secondary, Usalama Primary, Maikuu Primary, Muusini Primary, Kithasyu Secondary, Kithasyu Primary, Sumbi Secondary, and

Kasasule Primary. These tanks capture and store rainwater, which is then turned into potable drinking water. Each tank has a 100,000-litre holding capacity, which should provide enough water for the entire year.

To date, the Chyulu Water Catchment Project serves 2,559 students across eight schools. Looking forward, we plan to install water catchment tanks at seven additional schools.

SCHOOL TRIPS

Class trips have always been a cornerstone of our community engagement. In rural communities across Kenya, children view their wild neighbours through a fraught lens. Some have never seen an elephant, while others associate them with frightening encounters or crop destruction. By introducing young students to Kenya's natural world from the safety of a school bus, we are able to engage the next generation with their country's natural heritage in a safe and accessible way.

Over the course of 2023, we led 2,417 students and 208 teachers on fully subsidised class field trips into Tsavo West National Park, and Tsavo East National Park, and one partially subsidised trip to Haller Park at the coast. Each trip is guided by our Community Outreach Officer, a talented, charismatic leader who has a knack for fostering the next generation of conservationists.

STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

In our quest to support the continued education of rural Kenyans, we proudly fund a scholarship program. We currently sponsor the education of 25 students from communities in the Tsavo Conservation Area. 17 of these students are in secondary school, while eight are studying at the university level. In the Mwaluganje area, we subsidise the partial bursary for 42 students in secondary school.

COMMUNITY TREE DONATIONS

We conduct community tree plantings throughout the year, targeting schools, government facilities, and other strategic areas that would benefit from reforestation. Saplings, which are nurtured in our tree nurseries, are donated at no cost to the community.



In 2023, we donated a total of 10,424 seedlings, which were dispersed to 15 Tsavo-area communities. In the coming years, they will flourish into tall, sturdy trees that provide much-needed shade and sequester carbon from the atmosphere.

BEEHIVES AND BEEHIVE FENCELINES

We launched our beehive fenceline project in 2014 as a sustainable, non-aggressive method to mitigate human-wildlife conflict. Elephants have an innate aversion to the buzzing sound of bees, so the presence of beehives on farm fencelines can act as a powerful deterrent. Over the years, we have installed 144 hives on community farms that were historically targeted by crop-raiding elephants. We also have 78 beehives in the Kibwezi Forest and Tsavo Farm, along with ten catcher boxes in the Kibwezi Forest. In total, we manage 222 beehives.

In 2021, we established a women's beekeeping group in the Kibwezi Forest. This program further connects local communities with conservation initiatives and

provides valuable employment opportunities: Women from the local community are employed to look after 30 hives in the Kibwezi Forest. Each has undergone a five-day training course and is outfitted with professional beekeeping equipment.

COMMUNITY PETAL PROJECT

Last year, we revived the bougainvillea fields at Tsavo Farm as a new community support project. Employing women from the local community, we are organically farming and harvesting bougainvillea. The petals will be used for production of botanical confetti, a sustainable alternative to traditional confetti that does not use pesticides, chemicals, or fertilisers. The proceeds from the exported bougainvillea petals will go towards our conservation projects.

The Petal Project is staffed by women pickers and sorters, providing valuable employment opportunities to traditionally marginalised members of the local Tsavo community. In 2023, we completed our first petal harvest.





Eco Lodges

6 Eco Lodges

Supporting conservation through sustainable tourism



Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's Eco Lodges add a unique dimension to our conservation projects, inviting supporters into the most wild corners of Kenya and immersing them in the work they make possible. Thoughtfully designed and sustainably managed, our portfolio of Eco Lodges offer a bespoke safari experience for the discerning traveller. Each Eco Lodge is located within close proximity to one of our three Reintegration Units, giving guests exclusive visiting privileges to meet the orphaned elephants there and experience the Orphans' Project firsthand.

Simply by staying in our properties, guests directly support these elephants and the ecosystems they call home: Operated through a not-for-profit model, all proceeds from our Eco Lodges support vital conservation projects in the area. Our portfolio includes three lodges in Ithumba, the remote, northern sector of Tsavo East; two on the Galana River, a destination for some of Kenya's most iconic species; and one in the Kibwezi Forest, a groundwater forest known for the array of life it supports. A new lodge, based in Tsavo West National Park, is in its final phase of construction.

- **Ithumba Hill Camp** is a luxurious tented camp built into the hill that earned it its name. Designed with the discerning traveller in mind, this camp offers panoramic views of Tsavo's rugged wilderness.
- **Ithumba Private** is a special annex to Ithumba Hill Camp. Built among the rocks of Ithumba Hill and shaded by giant baobabs, this hideaway offers an intimate oasis within the vast wilderness of Tsavo.
- **Ithumba Camp** is a stylishly rustic hideaway set at the base of Ithumba Hill. It is designed for the intrepid traveller who relishes big skies, star-studded nights, and an array of fascinating species at your doorstep.
- **Galdessa Camp** is an enchanting camp set in the heart of the Galana River. Wildlife abounds in this section of Tsavo, from elephants meandering along the shore to hippos wallowing in the mud below.
- **Galdessa Little** is an intimate annex perched on the banks of the Galana River. Fringed with doum palms and overlooking the Yatta Plateau, the camp promises unparalleled wildlife sightings.
- **Umani Springs** is an elegant African lodge tucked within the ancient Kibwezi Forest. It offers an oasis of tranquillity and comfort, surrounded by a spectacular range of birds, butterflies, and other wild creatures.
- **Rhino Valley** — *expected to open in 2025*

In 2023, construction continued on Rhino Valley, a new Eco Lodge located in the heart of Tsavo West National Park. Tucked in the shadow of Ngulia Mountain, it has sweeping views across the free release rhino sanctuary. A waterhole at the base of the property attracts all manner of creatures, while the craggy mountain behind provides an alluring backdrop. We plan to debut this new lodge in early 2025 and know that it will become another beloved destination in our portfolio.

We were honoured to be included in *The New York Times* "52 Places to Go" list. Given that this year's focus was on sustainable tourism locations, this feature was an enormous testament — all the more so that we were the only destination featured from the African continent. As per the write-up, Sheldrick Wildlife Trust "manages six small eco-lodges, which provide local jobs and help its conservation work. In 2024, the Trust will open the first lodge next to the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary, dedicated to saving the critically endangered black rhino."

Lodge enquiries and reservations:
info@sheldrickwildlifetrust.org

ITHUMBA HILL CAMP

A luxurious tented camp built into the hill that earned it its name. Designed with the discerning traveller in mind, this camp offers panoramic views of Tsavo's rugged wilderness.



ITHUMBA PRIVATE

A special annex to Ithumba Hill Camp. Built among the rocks of Ithumba Hill and shaded by giant baobabs, this hideaway offers an intimate oasis within the vast wilderness of Tsavo.



ITHUMBA CAMP

A stylishly rustic hideaway set at the base of Ithumba Hill. It is designed for the intrepid traveller who relishes big skies, star-studded nights, and an array of fascinating species at your doorstep.



UMANI SPRINGS

An elegant African lodge tucked within the ancient Kibwezi Forest. It offers an oasis of tranquillity and comfort, surrounded by a spectacular range of birds, butterflies, and other wild creatures.



GALDESSA CAMP

An enchanting camp set in the heart of the Galana River. Wildlife abounds in this section of Tsavo, from elephants meandering along the shore to hippos wallowing in the mud below.



GALDESSA LITTLE

An intimate annex perched on the banks of the Galana River. Fringed with doum palms and overlooking the Yatta Plateau, the camp promises unparalleled wildlife sightings.





*Simply by staying in our properties, guests
directly support these elephants and the
ecosystems they call home.*





Remembering Patrick Muiruri

On 19th July 2023, the unthinkable unfolded at Umani Springs. Patrick Muiruri, a deeply respected and admired Keeper, was killed by a wild bull. As we grapple with this terrible tragedy, we mourn the loss of a beloved father, husband, brother, friend, and member of the SWT team.

That morning, an unfamiliar bull in musth appeared outside the stockade compound at Umani Springs. He was pursuing Zongoloni, who was in season. Musth is a healthy, periodic condition in male elephants. Their reproductive hormones go into overdrive and they become fixated on asserting their dominance. This bull was a very distinctive elephant, with a severely ragged and ripped ear.

After making a brief appearance at the stockades in the morning, the bull followed Zongoloni back into the forest. The Keepers waited until the coast was clear, holding the orphans back, before escorting the herd out for the day.

Later, the team were right next to the Umani Lodge when the bull suddenly exploded out of the forest. Again he was pursuing Zongoloni, who ran towards the orphan herd for protection. He then locked onto the Keepers, who took off and found refuge in the nearby cottage — all but Patrick, who ran in a different direction. He took a longer route and the bull caught up with him. Patrick was killed almost instantly. His attack was entirely unprovoked, unexpected, and shattering for all who witnessed it.

Everyone acted with great bravery in the face of a shocking tragedy, as they tried so hard to divert the bull's attention and ward him off. We would especially like to commend the Umani Keepers and lodge staff, who showed enormous strength of character and leadership after witnessing such a horrific turn of events. KWS authorised the translocation of the bull, but he had evaporated into the forest. Worryingly, the entire Umani orphan herd — including dependent orphans, ex-orphans, and baby Mwana — had also disappeared. They were not seen for the rest of the day, nor did they return to the stockades that night.

Two pilots flew on rotation that day, searching for the bull and the orphans, but they had vanished. The following morning, we had a breakthrough: The Umani orphan herd was spotted in the west of the forest, with the bull lurking on their periphery. The bull was darted from the aircraft and the translocation took place immediately. He was loaded onto a crane truck and moved to Tsavo East National Park, far from any communities, camps, or human settlements. He has been fitted with a radio collar, so his movements can be tracked and monitored.

And now, we are left to navigate one of the saddest chapters in our 46-year history. Patrick was a singular person. He had a special way with elephants, as his 13-year career as a Keeper can attest to. Orphans of all ages gravitated to his kind, calm presence. Baby Mwana, Murera's newborn daughter, was very fond of Patrick. She loved to suckle his fingers and paddle after him, trunk eagerly extended towards his green jacket. We always say that elephants are the greatest judge of human character, and everyone unanimously cherished Patrick.

Patrick will be remembered as a talented Keeper and a good friend to all who knew him. He had a bright smile that instantly lifted one's spirits — and it was a smile we saw often. His happy, optimistic spirit is one that we could all stand to emulate. Across the board, his teammates remarked upon how honest, hard-working, and respectful Patrick was. Head Keeper Edwin shared a telling anecdote from his tenure at the Nursery: "Everyone wanted to work with Patrick. For example, when I would set the roster and organise for Patrick to cut greens or do another task, all the others would argue to join him. Everyone wanted to be part of his team."

In the Kibwezi Forest, Patrick's elephant family is also mourning his loss. As we mentioned earlier, the orphans didn't come back to the stockades the night of the accident. Even Murera, who always returns with Mwana, and the youngest milk-dependent orphans were absent. However, mere hours after the bull was translocated, they returned to the stockades as a group. We firmly believe that they were trying to draw the culprit far away from their cherished human family, doing everything in their power to avert further tragedy. It was a powerful demonstration of the unwavering love and loyalty they feel for their Keepers. Patrick was taken before his time, but he will never, ever be forgotten.



Patrick lived a meaningful life. He chose to follow a special calling, one that few are cut out for. In the process, he touched countless lives, human and elephant. Our hearts and deepest sympathies go out to Patrick's family, including his wife, Salome, and his daughters, Pauline and Braina.

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KENYA

Sheldrick Wildlife Trust
P.O. Box 15555
Mbagathi, 00503
Nairobi, Kenya
Email: info@sheldrickwildlifetrust.org
Telephone : +254 (0) 202 301 396
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The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust is a charity registered in the U.K.
Charity No 1103836.

Donations to the Trust by U.K. taxpayers can be gift aided.

UK

Sheldrick Wildlife Trust
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Coneyhurst Road, Billingshurst
RH14 9DE
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Telephone: +44 (0)1372 378 321
Email: infouk@sheldrickwildlifetrust.org

Sheldrick Wildlife Trust USA is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt 501c3 public charity to which contributions, gifts and bequests are deductible for U.S. income, gift, and estate taxes as allowed by law. Checks can be made out to The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust USA. Tax ID: 30-0224549

USA

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