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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Kenya, a cornerstone of Africa's biodiversity, is world-renowned for its rich tapestry of ecosystems from vibrant coastal mangroves and savannahs to arid rangelands and montane forests. Spanning over 580,000 km², Kenya boasts an extensive network of protected areas, including 23 national parks, 28 national reserves, and a growing number of conservancies, now covering more than 6.5 million hectares. These landscapes underpin a robust tourism industry that contributes approximately 10% of the nation's GDP and provides livelihoods for over one million Kenyans.

Despite these natural endowments, Kenya faces persistent conservation challenges, including habitat loss and fragmentation, poaching, human-wildlife conflict, climate change, and pressures from rapid population growth and infrastructure expansion. These threats place iconic species such as the African elephant, black rhino, Grevy's zebra, and Hirola antelope at risk, while also affecting the resilience and well-being of local communities. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further strained conservation efforts by reducing tourism revenues and increasing local dependence on natural resources.

Through the support of the IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative, nine projects have been implemented across Kenya's diverse conservation landscapes to address key threats and foster community stewardship:

- In Laikipia's Ewaso ecosystem, a project by Mpala Research Centre helped boost African wild dog numbers by tackling disease and human conflict. Vaccinating domestic dogs curbed the spread of rabies and canine distemper, while community work improved livestock practices to prevent retaliatory killings. Together, these efforts reduced disease risk and supported wild dog recovery.
- Along **Kilifi's coastline**, the Community-Based Environmental Conservation project established a locally managed marine area (LMMA) to protect sea turtles. Community empowerment and patrols reduced turtle mortality by over 60%, promoting sustainable marine resource management.
- In northern arid rangelands, Northern Rangelands Trust projects stabilised populations of endangered Beisa oryx and Hirola through community ranger patrols, SMART-based wildlife monitoring, and alternative livelihood training, resulting in reduced poaching and improved habitat restoration.
- In El Barta Conservancy, Grevy's Zebra Trust deployed local ambassadors, implemented SMART monitoring, and mapped grazing areas maintaining near-zero poaching rates for Grevy's zebra, even during drought, and sustaining vital habitat for both wildlife and pastoralists.





23 national parks



national reserves

Across the South Rift region, the South Rift Association of Landowners enhanced human-carnivore coexistence by training rangers, mapping wildlife corridors, and installing predatorproof bomas, resulting in reduced conflict incidents and stronger community benefits.

- In the Tsavo Conservation Area and Mount Kenya, Tsavo Trust and Bill Woodley Mount Kenya Company reinforced anti-poaching operations and joint law enforcement, strengthening the security of elephants and forests and improving community involvement and ranger capacity.
- In Laikipia and Selous-Nyerere (Tanzania), Lion Landscape advanced large carnivore conservation through camera trapping, community engagement and capacity-building, reducing conflict and strengthening local stewardship.

Collectively, these efforts have secured and improved management of nearly three million hectares of critical habitat, reduced human-wildlife conflict and poaching, and directly built the capacity of over 30,000 individuals in conservation skills and leadership.

Photo credit: © James Lewin



To sustain and enhance conservation impact in Kenya, several strategic priorities are recommended:

- Maintain long-term investment in community-based conservation models, particularly in arid and semi-arid lands. Consistent support empowers communities to steward local resources, increases resilience to funding fluctuations, and ensures that conservation gains are maintained even after project funding ends.
- Scale up proven human-wildlife conflict mitigation interventions to new and emerging regions. Expanding effective tools and practices helps address emerging threats, accelerates species recovery, and improves safety and coexistence between people and wildlife across diverse landscapes.
- Integrate conservation with county and community land-use planning to address fragmentation and secure ecological connectivity. Embedding biodiversity considerations in development plans helps prevent irreversible habitat loss, maintains vital wildlife corridors, and ensures long-term ecosystem health alongside socioeconomic growth.
- Promote inclusive conservation, actively engaging youth, women, and marginalised groups in planning, leadership, and benefitsharing. Broadening participation brings diverse perspectives, builds community support, and ensures that the benefits and responsibilities of conservation are shared equitably, fostering longterm commitment.
- Invest in local capacity building for governance, financial management, and the use of modern conservation technologies. Strengthening skills and institutional capacity ensures transparent, accountable, and adaptive management, enabling local organisations to respond to evolving conservation challenges effectively.
- Align efforts with government agencies to enhance policy support, resource allocation, and the scaling of successful models. Government backing is crucial for legal legitimacy, sustainable financing, and replicating effective conservation actions at a national level.
- Support conservation approaches such as habitat restoration, water access, and drought resilience planning to help communities and wildlife adapt to environmental change. Proactive adaptation safeguards both biodiversity and livelihoods in the face of increasing climate variability and extreme events.

The experience of the IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative in Kenya emphasises that aligning conservation with community needs not only secures threatened species and habitats but also delivers lasting benefits for people and nature. Continued investment, collaboration, and innovation are critical to safeguarding Kenya's remarkable natural heritage for future generations.

VI Continued investment, collaboration, and innovation are critical to safeguarding Kenya's remarkable natural heritage for future generations. I/

# THE IUCN SOS AFRICAN WILDLIFE INITIATIVE: SCALING CONSERVATION ACTION FOR THREATENED SPECIES

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) envisions "a just world that values and conserves nature." Its mission is to "influence, encourage, and assist societies worldwide to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable." As a global authority on biodiversity conservation, IUCN operates through an extensive network of over 10,000 species conservation experts who guide the development and implementation of its strategy. Through initiatives like Save Our Species (SOS), IUCN supports evidence-based conservation action, strengthens civil society organisations (CSOs), and helps implement biodiversity policies that benefit species, ecosystems, and people.

Africa is home to some of the world's most iconic yet increasingly threatened species, particularly large carnivores such as lions, cheetahs, leopards, African wild dogs, and Ethiopian wolves. These species face escalating threats due to habitat loss, poaching, human-wildlife conflict, and illegal wildlife trade. To address these challenges, the IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative was launched as a partnership between the European Union and IUCN. The initiative focuses on two primary objectives: strengthening CSOs working to protect biodiversity, species, and habitats and demonstrating the impact of conservation actions on threatened species and ecosystems, with a special focus on large carnivores.

The initiative operates through three core pillars.

Species conservation, which involves monitoring and protecting wildlife populations while creating conditions for species to recover and recolonise their native habitats.



Photo credit: © Northern Rangeland Trust

Habitat protection that enhances protected area management, restores degraded ecosystems and tackles threats such as overgrazing and invasive species.

Community engagement which ensures the participation of local communities in conservation action. Supporting communities to adopt alternative livelihoods like beekeeping, agroforestry, and ecotourism reduces communities' reliance on natural resources, while the promotion of coexistence measures supports the needs of those living near wildlife.

To achieve these goals, the initiative funds conservation actions that address human-wildlife conflict through community-based interventions, awareness campaigns, and compensation schemes. It also combats poaching and illegal wildlife trade via anti-poaching patrols, snare removal, and K9 detection units. Additionally, the initiative supports habitat restoration through afforestation, wildfire management, and sustainable pasture planning while strengthening law enforcement and policy advocacy to enhance species protection. Recognising the importance of local participation, it actively involves communities through capacity-building programs, conservation employment opportunities, and education initiatives.

Since its launch, the initiative has provided funding through three calls for proposals (2017, 2019, and 2021), offering two types of grants. Threatened Species Grants support long-term projects implementing a programmatic approach to addressing critical conservation threats, with funding ranging from €25,000 to €450,000 per grant and Rapid Action Grants offering short-term emergency response funding between €25,000 and €100,000 per grant. These grants have been instrumental in driving conservation action across Sub-Saharan Africa.

The IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative awarded 91 grants totalling €10.8 million to 91 civil society organisations, with 70% of grantees being national organisations. As a result:

- Approximately 40 million hectares of key wildlife habitats have been placed under improved management.
- **37 action plans** have been developed or improved for better species protection.
- **30 projects** have mitigated human-wildlife conflict, fostering coexistence between wildlife and communities.
- Capacity-building efforts have trained 44,510 people through workshops and policy events with 665,665 individuals benefiting from direct employment and livelihood activities.
- **85% of grantees** reported improved organisational capacity, thereby strengthening conservation efforts across Africa.

The initiative has also helped amplify conservation awareness among the general public, with over **1,200 conservation stories** published across various platforms.

**\I** The IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative strengthens civil society, protects threatened species and habitats, and empowers communitiesplacing 40 million hectares under improved management and reaching over 665,000 people through conservationbased livelihoods. I/

# KENYA IN FOCUS

Kenya is widely recognised as a global biodiversity hotspot, distinguished by its remarkable range of ecosystems that stretch from the rich coastal mangroves and coral reefs of the Indian Ocean, through sweeping savannahs like the Maasai Mara, to arid rangelands and the cool, misty montane forests of the central highlands. This ecological diversity underpins the presence of an exceptional array of flora and fauna, including more than 35,000 known species of plants, animals, and fungi. Kenya is home to numerous endemic and globally threatened species, such as the critically endangered Hirola antelope, Grevy's zebra and the black rhino.

Photo credit: © Joel Loong'onyo



The country's protected area network is extensive and varied, encompassing over 6.5 million hectares managed as conservancies¹ (KWCA, 2022), alongside 23 national parks, 28 national reserves, four marine parks, six marine reserves, and hundreds of locally managed forests and wetlands. Notable conservation landscapes include iconic sites like Maasai Mara National Reserve, famed for the annual wildebeest migration; Amboseli National Park, renowned for its elephant herds and stunning views of Mount Kilimanjaro, Tsavo is the largest protected area complex in Kenya and Mount Kenya is among the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the country.

Biodiversity not only holds ecological and cultural significance but also forms the backbone of Kenya's thriving tourism industry, which contributes around 10% of GDP and sustains more than one million jobs² (WTTC, 2022). Despite these riches, many species remain under threat from habitat loss, poaching, climate change, and human-wildlife conflict, making Kenya a critical focus for national and international conservation action.

The IUCN Save Our Species (SOS) African Wildlife Initiative has played a pivotal role in advancing conservation in Kenya. Since 2019, the initiative has awarded a total of €1,557,577 through nine grants to civil society organisations (CSOs) and local partners, leading to the following outcomes:

- 1. Secured and managed 2.96 million hectares of critical habitat for endangered species.
- 2. Trained over **30,000 individuals** in conservation practices and built local capacity for effective environmental stewardship.
- Reduced human-wildlife conflict and poaching through innovations such as SMART patrols, community camera trapping, and predatorproof bomas.
- **4.** Enhanced community livelihoods and resilience by supporting ecoenterprises, alternative income activities, and conservation measures.

The awarded grants from 2019 to present are as follows:

- Protecting African wild dogs in the Ewaso ecosystem, which combines vaccination campaigns, community engagement and improved livestock management.
- Scaling up sea turtle conservation in Marereni, Kilifi County, through community-led marine area management and patrols.
- Safeguarding Beisa oryx and Hirola in Nakuprat-Gotu and northern coastal conservancies, with community ranger patrols and alternative livelihoods.

N Biodiversity not only holds ecological and cultural significance but also forms the backbone of Kenya's thriving tourism industry, which contributes around 10% of GDP and sustains more than one million jobs.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA). (2022). State of Wildlife Conservancies in Kenya Report. https://kwcakenya.com

<sup>2</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). (2022). Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Report – Kenya. https://wttc.org

- Strengthening human-carnivore coexistence in South Rift and Laikipia landscapes through conflict mitigation and wildlife corridor mapping.
- Enhancing protection of African elephants in Tsavo and Mount Kenya with joint patrols, aerial surveillance and deterrents.
- Community-led Grevy's zebra protection in El Barta using ambassador programs and data-driven monitoring.
- Supporting primate conservation and sustainable resource use in Tana River.
- Anti-poaching and law enforcement efforts in Mount Kenya and Tsavo.
- Scaling up community-based carnivore conservation in Laikipia and Selous-Nyerere (Tanzania).

Despite these successes, Kenya continues to face significant challenges, including habitat loss due to rapid population growth, land conversion, infrastructure development, and climate change. Persistent threats from poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and escalating human-wildlife conflict also impact both livelihoods and wildlife populations.

Overall, Kenya's rich biodiversity and unique ecosystems call for ongoing and collaborative conservation action. Initiatives like the IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative are essential for safeguarding Kenya's natural heritage and ensuring the long-term well-being of its people and wildlife.

Photo credit: © Joel Loong'onyo



# SOS AFRICAN WILDLIFE INITIATIVE ON THE GROUND ACTIONS IN KENYA

3.1 Scaling up sea turtle conservation through the establishment of a local marine managed Area (LMMA) in Marereni, Kenya (2020 – 2021)

Implementation partner	Community Based Environmental Conservation
Target species	Green sea turtle (Chelonia mydas) Endangered
Project location	Marereni, Kilifi County

### **PROBLEM**

This project tackled major threats to sea turtles in Marereni, Kilifi County, primarily driven by unsustainable fishing practices, poaching, and habitat degradation. Sea turtles faced heightened risk due to harmful fishing methods such as the use of mosquito nets and poison, widespread mangrove deforestation, accumulation of marine litter, and rising mortality rates. These pressures underscored the urgent need for sustainable marine resource management and stronger community involvement, particularly among local fishing communities.

### **APPROACH**

The project adopted a community-based conservation model that led to the successful establishment of a locally managed marine area (LMMA). This approach centred on empowering local communities through targeted education and awareness campaigns, fostering a strong sense of stewardship for marine resources. Governance and management structures were developed through the formation of Beach Management Units, which played a key role in overseeing local conservation efforts. Regular patrols and surveillance activities were conducted to address threats such as poaching and habitat degradation. Additionally, the project implemented beach clean-up initiatives and marine

litter management to improve coastal health. A comprehensive comanagement plan was also developed and put into action, ensuring sustainable use and long-term protection of marine resources through shared responsibility between communities and authorities.

## **KEY OUTCOMES**

The project led to the conservation of a 25km² coastline through the establishment of a LMMA and the creation of the Marereni Area Beach Management Unit Conservation Organization (MABICO), covering 4km². MABICO empowered local communities to manage natural resources and inspired interest in forming additional LMMAs. Around 300 fishermen and resource users received training strengthening community capacity in sustainable fishing and conservation practices. Additionally, intensive patrols totalling 5,760 hours contributed to a 62.5% reduction in sea turtle deaths, significantly improving turtle and habitat conservation.

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Active community participation and ownership played a central role in ensuring the success and long-term sustainability of conservation efforts.
- Strong collaboration with key partners, including Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Fisheries Service and local authorities, enhanced coordination and enforcement.
- Consistent and intensive patrols, totalling over 5,760 hours, effectively reduced poaching and other threats to sea turtles.
- Establishment of community-led structures, such as MABICO, provided a lasting foundation for local governance and resource management beyond the project's lifespan.

# 3.2 South Rift Association of Landowners

Implementation partner	Connecting carnivore landscapes through coexistence and collaboration
Target species	<ul> <li>African lion (Panthera leo) Vulnerable</li> <li>African wild dog (Lycaon pictus) Endangered</li> <li>Cheetah (Acinonyx jubatus) Vulnerable</li> </ul>
Project location	Shompole and Olkiramatian Conservancies

### **PROBLEM**

The landscapes connecting Kenya's iconic wildlife regions, such as the Maasai Mara and Amboseli, faced rising carnivore mortality rates, declining tolerance among communities, and increasing fragmentation of critical wildlife habitats.

# **APPROACH**

The project implemented a community-focused approach to promote human-carnivore coexistence. This included building local capacity by hiring and training carnivore liaisons and community rangers in conflict mitigation, improving response times to human-wildlife conflict, tracking carnivore movements, and assisting in livestock recovery.

The project also strengthened community engagement through intercommunity dialogues and learning exchanges to foster tolerance and collaboration. Additionally, there was enhanced coordination by forming local coexistence working groups involving county governments, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), and NGOs to develop effective conflict prevention and response protocols. Scientific monitoring supported these efforts through habitat mapping, carnivore tracking and spatial surveys to inform targeted conservation strategies.



Photo credit: © South Rift Association of Landowners

## **KEY OUTCOMES**

The project significantly enhanced human-wildlife conflict response across 680,000 hectares by deploying liaison officers and community rangers, reducing the average response time to just 3.5 hours and benefiting eight previously underserved communities. Through the training of over 580 individuals including community members, government officials, and KWS rangers, local capacity to manage and prevent conflict was strengthened, resulting in fewer livestock losses and improved community safety. Simultaneously, close monitoring of lions, cheetahs, and wild dogs helped maintain critical connectivity between the Mara-Serengeti and Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystems.

In support of long-term conservation planning, the project mapped fences, farms, and homesteads to identify vital wildlife corridors and contributed to the first cross-border Kenya-Tanzania data-sharing platform. This facilitated more coordinated, landscape-level conservation efforts. Additionally, the project supported communities in registering land under the Community Land Act (2016), helping to secure 280,000 hectares for communal management ensuring the land remains intact for both wildlife conservation and pastoralist livelihoods.

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Empowerment through community training equipped local people with conflict mitigation skills, strengthening grassroots capacity and significantly improving the response to human-carnivore conflict.

- Establishment of localised coexistence working groups, involving county governments, KWS, and NGOs, allowed for tailored conflict resolution strategies and enhanced coordination at the community level.
- Use of spatial data and mapping tools informed county land-use planning and supported the development of the first cross-border Kenya-Tanzania data-sharing platform for carnivore conservation.
- Knowledge exchange and inter-community learning journeys built trust, fostered tolerance for carnivores, and increased demand for conservation support from local leaders.
- Securing follow-up funding from additional partners demonstrated strong project credibility and ensured the long-term sustainability and scalability of conservation efforts.

# 3.3 Beisa oryx protection project - Nakuprat-Gotu Community Conservancy

Implementation partner	Northern Rangelands Trust
Target species	Beisa oryx ( <i>Oryx beisa beisa</i> ) Endangered
Project location	Nakuprat-Gotu Community Conservancy, Isiolo

### **PROBLEM**

In Northern Kenya's arid landscapes, the survival of the Beisa oryx, an endangered antelope species, faced significant threats. Continuous drought, severe habitat degradation due to overgrazing, subsistence poaching, and charcoal burning increasingly placed the survival of this species in peril.

For the pastoralist communities of Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy, livestock keeping is a lifeline, yet intense grazing and settlement expansion began displacing wildlife and intensifying competition for dwindling resources.

### **APPROACH**

The project adopted a holistic, community-centred approach to strengthen governance and conservation outcomes. It engaged local stakeholders through regular conservancy board meetings and enhanced ranger capacity by training them in advanced wildlife monitoring using the Wildlife-CoMMS system. Conservation awareness was promoted through school clubs and community ambassadors, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship. To support sustainable land use, the project facilitated planned grazing, settlement management, and habitat restoration, all led by trained village

rangeland committees. Additionally, the "Ujuzi Manyattani" vocational training program equipped community members with practical skills for alternative livelihoods, reducing dependence on environmentally harmful practices such as charcoal burning and poaching.

### **KEY OUTCOMES**

Throughout its implementation, no poaching-related deaths of Beisa oryx were recorded, thanks to strengthened ranger patrols, the deployment of the Wildlife-CoMMS monitoring system, and the provision of a dedicated patrol vehicle. Annual population counts indicated a continued upward trend in the Beisa oryx population from 2016 to 2022, reflecting the effectiveness of sustained protection efforts.

The "Ujuzi Manyattani" vocational training program empowered 149 community members with practical, marketable skills, reducing their dependence on unsustainable practices such as charcoal burning and poaching. In addition, the establishment and training of village-based rangeland committees enhanced grazing management, habitat restoration, and conflict mitigation among pastoralist communities. Planned settlement and grazing strategies contributed to the maintenance of 560 km² of viable habitat, benefiting both wildlife and livestock and reinforcing the link between community development and conservation success.

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Consistent community engagement through meetings, school clubs, and conservation ambassadors fostered strong local ownership, trust, and long-term commitment to protecting the Beisa oryx.
- Well-equipped and trained ranger teams were provided with vehicles, gear and patrol support, enabling them to cover larger areas, respond quickly to threats, and effectively deter illegal activities, which significantly strengthened species protection.
- Vocational training for local youth and community members created alternative livelihood opportunities, reducing dependence on unsustainable practices like poaching and charcoal burning, and contributing to broader community resilience.



# 3.4 Recovering a globally important African wild dog population in Kenya's Ewaso ecosystem

Implementation partner	Mpala Research Centre
Target species	African wild dog ( <i>Lycaon pictus</i> ) Endangered
Project location	Mpala Research Centre, Laikipia

### **PROBLEM**

In Kenya's Ewaso ecosystem, the endangered African wild dog faced a rapid population decline due to outbreaks of rabies and distemper, compounded by retaliatory killings from communities affected by livestock losses. By 2019, only two packs totalling around 24 individuals remained, following years of escalating disease and human-wildlife conflict. These challenges not only threatened the species' survival but also strained local livelihoods and public health, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated conservation and community-based intervention to prevent further loss and promote coexistence.

# **APPROACH**

The project implemented a holistic approach to conserve African wild dogs and mitigate human-wildlife conflict in Kenya's Ewaso ecosystem. It focused on disease prevention through mass dog vaccination campaigns targeting domestic dogs, which are primary disease vectors for wild canids. In parallel, the project worked to reduce human-wildlife conflict by promoting better livestock management practices, including improved herding and predator deterrence. Community engagement was central to the approach, involving awareness campaigns, school programs, and the training and deployment of local youth as community conservation officers.

# **KEY OUTCOMES**

The project had a transformative impact on African wild dog conservation and community well-being in Laikipia. Wild dog populations grew significantly from two packs (24 individuals) in 2019 to seven to eight packs (116 individuals) by 2022, with no deaths recorded from rabies or distemper a disease that had previously caused 32% mortality. Human-induced wild dog deaths dropped from 21% to just 9%, and livestock predation declined by 20% due to better livestock management practices.

Public health and community relations also improved, with a 53% reduction in dog bite incidents following widespread rabies vaccination, addressing a major source of fear and tension toward wild and domestic canids. This, in turn, strengthened community trust, reduced retaliatory killings, and built local support for conservation. The project created direct employment for five local youth as community officers and

engaged over 250,000 people through social media and in-person outreach, fostering greater awareness, positive attitudes and long-term coexistence between people and wildlife.

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- High vaccination coverage of domestic dogs, reaching over 75%, effectively reduced the risk of disease transmission to wildlife, livestock and humans. This demonstrated the value of integrated One Health approaches in achieving both conservation and public health outcomes.
- Engagement and employment of local youth played a key role in gaining community support, reducing conflicts and promoting sustainable livestock practices.
- Strong collaboration with government agencies and conservation partners, such as the Laikipia County Government and Kenya Wildlife Service, facilitated resource sharing and enhanced the effectiveness of implementation.
- Collaring and ongoing monitoring of wild dogs generated critical data that informed targeted conservation measures and enabled timely community alerts to prevent conflict.

# 3.5 Support for the joint wildlife protection team for law enforcement including antipoaching and illegal logging patrols at Mount Kenya National Park and Reserve

Implementation partner	Bill Woodley Mount Kenya Company Limited
Target species	African elephant (Loxodonta africana) Endangered
Project location	Mount Kenya National Park and Reserve

# **PROBLEM**

Mount Kenya, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is home to iconic wildlife, including endangered African elephants. Yet, beneath the lush canopies and sweeping moorlands, the region was increasingly plagued by illegal activities. Poaching, driven by demand for bushmeat and ivory, coupled with rampant illegal logging, threatened to unravel the delicate ecological balance. Rangers patrolling the area faced harsh conditions and resource shortages, limiting their ability to protect this critical habitat effectively.

Without immediate intervention, illegal activities posed a direct threat not only to wildlife populations but also to the local communities whose livelihoods depend on the integrity of Mount Kenya's ecosystems.



Photo credit: © Bill Woodley/Mount Kenya Company

## **APPROACH**

The project adopted a proactive protection strategy by intensifying ranger patrols targeting key hotspots vulnerable to illegal logging and poaching. To enhance operational effectiveness, rangers were equipped with essential field gear, including boots, camping supplies, satellite communication tools and vehicle maintenance support. This logistical reinforcement significantly improved their mobility and response capacity. Additionally, the project fostered collaboration through joint patrols with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and Kenya Forest Service (KFS), strengthening inter-agency coordination and boosting law enforcement capabilities across the landscape.

# **KEY OUTCOMES**

The project achieved substantial conservation impact by significantly increasing patrol frequency by 60% compared to previous years. This enhanced field presence played a critical role in deterring illegal activities. Ranger safety and operational capacity improved through the provision of 50 pairs of boots and essential gear, alongside major upgrades to ranger camps, including better shelters, water collection systems and communication tools. These improvements enabled rangers to operate more effectively and safely in challenging terrain.

The project also strengthened law enforcement by facilitating the arrest of individuals involved in illegal activities, reinforcing the area's protection measures. During the COVID-19 period, the project sustained employment for six to nine rangers, providing them with economic security during a time of uncertainty. Additionally, active patrols and joint enforcement efforts helped build local support for conservation, with over 400 community members directly engaged, contributing to increased awareness and participation in protecting wildlife and natural resources.

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

 Increased funding support allowed for more comprehensive patrol coverage, faster response to illegal activities, and substantial improvements in ranger equipment and infrastructure.

- Robust partnerships with KWS and KFS strengthened operational capacity and enforcement, enabling more effective patrols and enhanced legal follow-through.
- Improved internal organisational capacity, particularly in financial management, reporting, and strategic planning, was instrumental in sustaining effective implementation and attracting further visibility and support.
- Stronger relationships with local communities and government agencies enhanced compliance with conservation regulations, improved intelligence gathering, and boosted the efficiency of proactive patrols.

# 3.6 Community species protection initiative

Implementation partner	Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT)
Target species	<ul> <li>Hirola (Beatragus hunteri) Critically Endangered</li> <li>Reticulated giraffe (Giraffa reticulata) Endangered</li> <li>African wild dog (Lycaon pictus) Endangered</li> <li>Tana mangabey (Cercocebus galeritus) Endangered</li> <li>Tana red colobus (Piliocolobus rufomitratus) Critically Endangered</li> </ul>
Project location	Ishaqbini, Lower Tana, Ndera, Awer, Hanshak-Nyongoro, Pate and Kiunga Community Conservancies

# **PROBLEM**

Across Kenya's northern and coastal regions, communities have long struggled with harsh environmental conditions, widespread poverty, limited government services and insecurity. These persistent challenges placed intense pressure on the region's unique biodiversity, threatening the survival of iconic species such as the critically endangered Hirola antelope, reticulated giraffes, African wild dogs, and rare Tana primates. Subsistence poaching, illegal logging and charcoal burning severely endangered these vulnerable populations and disrupted local ecosystems. The situation worsened dramatically with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a sudden drop in funding and support for conservation initiatives, placing further strain on already limited resources.

# **APPROACH**

To ensure continued conservation efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project supported 105 community conservancy rangers across seven NRT-Coast conservancies by providing salaries and operational rations,

maintaining a consistent patrol presence. Joint patrols with the Kenya Wildlife Service were strategically deployed to target poaching hotspots and areas at risk of illegal logging and charcoal production. Community engagement was a key component of the approach, with regular awareness sessions conducted to educate residents on conservation practices and sustainable resource use. To enhance monitoring and decision-making, the project also implemented the Wildlife Conservancy Monitoring of Management Systems, enabling systematic tracking of wildlife populations and emerging threats across the landscape.

# **KEY OUTCOMES**

The project had a significant impact on reducing illegal activities and supporting wildlife recovery in the target areas. No poaching incidents involving Hirola or African wild dogs were recorded during the project period, and subsistence poaching declined notably. Illegal logging cases dropped from eight in the first quarter to just one in the final quarter, while incidents of illegal charcoal burning were reduced to only three. These enforcement efforts contributed to positive wildlife outcomes, including a modest increase in the Hirola population from 140 to 148 individuals representing approximately 25% of the global population.

Primate populations also improved significantly, with Tana mangabey groups increasing from 11 in 2019 to 31 in 2020, and Tana red colobus groups growing from 40 to 100 within the same period. In addition to ecological gains, the project provided direct employment for 105 rangers, boosting household income and community security. Over 400 community members experienced improved livelihood and personal safety, while the project also supported alternative income–generating activities such as eco–tourism, fisheries management and water desalination across multiple conservancies.

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Regular and well-coordinated ranger patrols, combined with joint operations alongside Kenya Wildlife Service, played a critical role in protecting wildlife and significantly curbing illegal activities.
- Establishment of democratically elected conservancy boards promoted transparency, strengthened community ownership, and enhanced compliance with conservation rules at the local level.
- Ongoing community engagement and dialogue fostered more positive attitudes toward wildlife conservation, encouraging community vigilance and cooperation that contributed to the reduction in illegal practices.

# 3.7 Maintaining anti-poaching field operations in the Tsavo Conservation Area, Kenya – elephants security – inside and outside the Tsavo National Parks

Implementation partner	Tsavo Trust Ltd.
Target species	African elephant ( <i>Loxodonta africana</i> ) Endangered
Project location	Tsavo Conservation Area

### **PROBLEM**

In the vast Tsavo Conservation Area spanning 42,000 km² and home to Kenya's largest elephant population, the African elephant faces persistent threats from poaching, bushmeat trade, habitat destruction, and escalating human-wildlife conflict. Communities bordering the parks, already grappling with high poverty, limited access to services and food insecurity, were further strained by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing drought. The impacts of climate change and global economic shifts drove up food and fuel prices, leaving vulnerable populations with few choices beyond exploiting natural resources for survival. Without urgent, sustained intervention, both elephant populations and the livelihoods of surrounding communities were at significant risk.



Photo credit: © Tsavo Trust

### **APPROACH**

The project adopted a comprehensive protection strategy by deploying multiple ground units alongside an aerial surveillance team to patrol poaching hotspots, monitor elephant populations, and enable rapid responses to illegal activities. Scouts were recruited from local conservancies- Kamungi and Shirango-, creating employment

opportunities and strengthening community ownership in conservation efforts. To further support coexistence, the project implemented fencing and deterrent measures to reduce human-wildlife conflict. These efforts were enhanced by the integration of community informant networks, and SMART data tools, enabling real-time threat detection and more effective conservation responses.

### **KEY OUTCOMES**

The project had a strong impact on both elephant conservation and community development in the Tsavo Conservation Area. Elephant numbers increased to an estimated 15,712 in 2022 from14,964, with poaching reduced by 50% and tusks recovered before entering illegal trade. Intensive patrols by foot, vehicle, and air, alongside the installation of a protective fence, led to a 95% decrease in crop raids and improved management of human-wildlife conflict incidents.

The construction of an earth dam benefited around 2,300 people by improving access to water. The project also created local job opportunities by employing 13 community scouts, supported education through five student bursaries, and improved health access through referrals and transport aid. Additionally, it leveraged its success to secure further funding for an ecotourism facility, helping to ensure long-term conservation and livelihood benefits.

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Integrated aerial and ground surveillance enabled real-time detection and rapid deterrence of threats, significantly enhancing protection efforts.
- Employment of local scouts and involvement of conservancy members built trust, improved local intelligence gathering, and strengthened community ownership of conservation activities.
- Strong collaboration with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and community conservancies provided operational legitimacy, extended coverage, and ensured continuity in field operations.
- Adaptive resource management, including adjustments to patrol hours and strategic reallocation during challenges such as rising fuel costs and drought, ensured consistent field presence.
- Application of SMART tools and aerial mapping facilitated accurate monitoring of elephant populations and tusker sightings, while supporting data-driven responses to emerging threats.

# 3.8 Community-based protection of Grevy's zebra and its critical resources in El Barta, Northern Kenya

Implementation partner	Grevy's Zebra Trust
Target species	Grevy's zebra ( <i>Equus grevyi</i> ) <b>Endangered</b>
Project location	El Barata Conservancy

## **PROBLEM**

In El Barta Conservancy, Northern Kenya, the endangered Grevy's zebra lives in fragile coexistence with pastoralist communities. These communities, themselves grappling with persistent droughts, resource-based conflict, and widespread insecurity, are often caught between survival and sustainability. The historic 2023 drought further stressed water and forage resources, intensifying the competition between livestock and wildlife. Amid these challenges, the Grevy's zebra population faced heightened threats from subsistence poaching and displacement, especially as pastoral communities moved in search of pasture and water.

### **APPROACH**

The project advanced Grevy's zebra conservation through a community-led strategy that combined local empowerment, data-driven monitoring and sustainable land management. Sixteen trained and equipped local ambassadors conducted wildlife patrols and collected real-time data on threats and zebra populations, enhancing on-the-ground protection. Community engagement was a cornerstone of the approach, with 739 village meetings reaching over 27,000 people to raise awareness about conservation, habitat use and peacebuilding. Joint patrols with government and NGO partners improved security coordination, while Holistic Land and Livestock Management workshops enabled communities to develop sustainable grazing and land-use plans.

Youth inclusion was prioritised by integrating Morans, young Maasai community members, into the local conservation council, fostering intergenerational dialogue and leadership. The project also leveraged technology by implementing the SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) system, which improved data quality and informed conservation decision-making. This integrated approach strengthened both ecological outcomes and community ownership of conservation efforts.

# **KEY OUTCOMES**

The project made a significant contribution to Grevy's zebra conservation by safeguarding approximately 11% of the global population and maintaining near-zero poaching, with only one incident recorded during an extreme drought. Signs of population recovery were evident, with the foal and juvenile ratio rising from 25% to 29%. The project also secured 241,000 hectares of critical habitat, implementing wet season grazing

plans and ecosystem restoration methods such as semi-circular bunds and rotational grazing, particularly in Barsaloi and Ngilai.

Community engagement played a central role in the project's success. Through 739 meetings that reached over 27,000 people, along with two annual Ambassador workshops and five implemented community action plans, the project strengthened conservation awareness and local stewardship. On the livelihoods front, 30 individuals were directly employed and 181 community members trained in Holistic Land and Livestock Management, further linking sustainable land use with wildlife protection.



Photo credit: © Joel Loong'onyo

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Empowerment of local ambassadors and establishment of core governance groups enabled decentralized decision-making and ensured the continuity of conservation efforts, even during periods of insecurity and conflict.
- Drought resilience measures, including supplementary feeding for Grevy's zebras, improved access to water, and the implementation of grazing plans helped to reduce zebra mortality during harsh climatic conditions.
- Strategic inclusion of Morans and collaboration with law enforcement agencies fostered community trust, reduced local tensions, and allowed conservation activities to continue in highrisk areas.
- Adoption of SMART-based patrol planning significantly enhanced operational efficiency, with all patrols guided by SMART data by the end of the project. Close coordination with Kenya Wildlife Service, NGOs, and police further strengthened the effectiveness of joint patrols.

# 3.9 Sharing and scaling up effective initiatives to strengthen community-based conservation in key East African landscapes

Implementation partner	Lion Landscapes
Target species	<ul> <li>Lion (Panthera leo) Vulnerable</li> <li>Leopard (Panthera pardus) Vulnerable</li> <li>Cheetah (Acinonyx jubatus) Vulnerable</li> <li>African wild dog (Lycaon pictus) Endangered</li> </ul>
Project location	Laikipia (Kenya) and Selous-Nyerere (Tanzania) Landscapes

# **PROBLEM**

In the East African rangelands of Laikipia and Selous–Nyerere, pastoralist communities share space with some of the world's most threatened large carnivores. Yet, coexistence is anything but easy. Lions, leopards, cheetahs, and wild dogs regularly prey on livestock—an act that directly threatens the economic backbone of local households. This has fuelled conflict including retaliatory killings, and even the use of poison, further endangering already vulnerable carnivore populations.

Misinformation, fear and limited exposure to conservation benefits only worsened the situation. In areas like Laikipia, the threat of conflict-related carnivore killings remained high. In both places, the lack of tailored conflict mitigation tools and community benefits hindered the ability to foster coexistence.

### **APPROACH**

To promote peaceful coexistence between people and carnivores, the project launched a community camera trapping (CCT) programme in eight villages including five in Laikipia. residents help choose camera locations, receive training on how to maintain the cameras, and learn how to interpret the wildlife data collected. This information empowers communities to understand which wildlife species share their landscape and how these animals move, allowing them to develop smarter strategies to protect both livestock and wild animals.

A key innovation of the programme is the way community benefits are built in. villages earn points based on the wildlife species captured by the camera traps. These points are converted into cash that supports local development projects, providing a direct incentive for communities to protect rather than fear wildlife.

To foster even deeper engagement, the project organized community film nights where residents viewed wildlife documentaries in their local language. These events helped people appreciate the diversity of local wildlife and recognize the impact of their own conservation efforts. Over 8,600 people across Laikipia in Kenya and Selous in Tanzania attended these film nights, strengthening community support for conservation.

In addition, the project trained and deployed Lion Extension Officers (LEOs) skilled in carnivore behaviour, conflict response, poison awareness, livestock protection, and SMART data collection. These officers were crucial for monitoring conflict incidents, reinforcing predator–proof bomas, treating injured livestock, and recovering animals lost during predator attacks. Finally, the project delivered tailored, site–specific training to 481 people in Laikipia, in partnership with The Peregrine Fund, to raise awareness about the harmful impact of using poison to retaliate against livestock predation and its dangers to wildlife.

### **KEY OUTCOMES**

The project made significant strides in reducing human-carnivore conflict and fostering coexistence. LEOs played a vital role by monitoring conflict incidents, reinforcing predator-proof bomas, treating injured livestock, and assisting in the recovery of animals displaced during predator attacks. To build local resilience, 481 individuals were trained in conflict mitigation, poison awareness, and livestock protection, equipping them with practical tools to manage carnivore-related threats effectively.

The introduction of the CCT program in eight villages resulted in around €21,500 in direct benefits for communities in Laikipia. For example, local villages received new rainwater tanks, infrastructure improvements such as refurbished roofs with iron sheets, enhanced livestock enclosures and bursaries to support school fees. The expanded CCT+ initiative further strengthened the link between wildlife presence and community development, supporting efforts like rangeland restoration and local infrastructure projects. Community engagement activities, including film nights, reached 5,840 residents and significantly improved awareness and attitudes toward large carnivores and protected areas. Followup surveys showed a 12% increase in awareness of the health risks of poison and a 6% rise in individuals willing to discourage its use are clear indicators of growing support for non-lethal conflict resolution strategies.

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Deployment of LEOs from within the local communities enabled swift conflict response and fostered strong relationships and trust with residents.
- Culturally relevant training on poison awareness and livestock protection ensured practical uptake by tailoring content to local needs and realities.
- Community-led decision-making on the use of CCT funds deepened engagement and accountability, with approximately €21,500 distributed as direct community benefits with €11,400 distributed in Selous and €10,100 in Laikipia.
- Cross-border bilateral training between Tanzanian and Kenyan teams enhanced the project's impact and promoted regional collaboration and knowledge exchange.
- Use of local drama and dance groups to deliver conservation messages in native languages helped amplify awareness in a relatable and resonant manner.

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM CONSERVATION ACTIONS IN KENYA



The projects highlighted that long-term conservation success hinges on community ownership. Initiatives that empowered local people through co-management structures, ambassador programmes and community-led patrols saw increased environmental stewardship and reduced human-wildlife conflict. Conservation outcomes were further strengthened when livelihood support was embedded such as ecotourism, vocational training, and temporary conservation employment, reducing reliance on unsustainable activities and fostering local buy-in.

Photo credit: © Bill Woodley/Mount Kenya Company Limited

A key takeaway was that effective human-wildlife conflict mitigation depends on rapid, locally led interventions. Training and deploying community rangers, promoting livestock protection methods, and using real-time monitoring helped prevent retaliatory killings and build trust. These measures improved community safety and contributed to species recovery.

Strong collaboration with government agencies such as the Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Forest Service, NGOs, and local authorities enhanced enforcement, coordination and knowledge sharing. These partnerships lent legitimacy to conservation efforts and increased their reach. Capacity building of community members and institutions was also critical in ensuring lasting impact by equipping stakeholders with the skills and tools needed for sustainability.

The use of data-driven tools such as EarthRanger, camera traps, and spatial mapping enabled adaptive management and better targeting of conservation actions. These tools improved accountability, increased efficiency and supported real-time decision-making in dynamic and high-risk environments.

Tailored communication strategies, particularly those using local languages and culturally relevant platforms like drama and community film nights, proved effective in shifting local perceptions. These approaches helped embed conservation messages within traditional storytelling and community discourse, resulting in increased awareness and support.

Rapid Action Grants demonstrated the importance of flexible financing, especially in emergency contexts such as poaching spikes or disease outbreaks. Quick disbursement allowed project teams to respond swiftly and effectively, reducing risks to both species and communities.

Projects that proactively addressed climate stressors, including drought and resource scarcity, were more resilient. Interventions like water access improvement, grazing plans and ecosystem restoration contributed to both biodiversity conservation and human well-being. The importance of long-term investment and sustained monitoring was also highlighted as vital to scaling successful models and shaping national and regional conservation policy.

VI Projects that proactively addressed climate stressors, including drought and resource scarcity, were more resilient. I/

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SPECIES CONSERVATION EFFORTS

To sustain and scale conservation gains, long-term financial support is essential beyond the life of individual grants. Blending traditional donor funding with innovative financing mechanisms such as conservation-based enterprises, ecotourism and sustainable finance can significantly enhance the long-term viability of conservation interventions. Effective conservation of wide-ranging species like lions, elephants and African wild dogs also demands stronger coordination across administrative and ecological boundaries. This calls for greater investment in transboundary collaboration and regional knowledge-sharing platforms.

Mainstreaming biodiversity into broader development frameworks such as land-use planning and climate adaptation strategies can help position conservation as a driver of socio-economic progress, rather than as a separate or competing priority. Ensuring inclusive conservation also requires dedicated efforts to engage youth and women through tailored programs that promote leadership, education, skills development, and entrepreneurship.

Accelerating the development, review, and implementation of species-specific action plans is another priority. These plans should be adequately resourced, scientifically grounded, and responsive to local community needs. Additionally, investing in modern data collection tools such as SMART, drones, and mobile monitoring systems will enhance real-time decision-making, especially in remote or high-risk areas. Strengthening local capacity to operate and maintain these technologies is crucial for long-term success.



Photo credit: © South Rift Association of Landowners

# CONCLUSION

The conservation of Kenya's remarkable biodiversity, including its critically endangered and iconic species, continues to face significant challenges. The successful projects supported through the IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative demonstrate that integrated, community-led approaches are key to achieving lasting conservation outcomes.

Thanks to this support, key achievements have been made: poaching has declined in Tsavo, illegal logging in Mount Kenya has decreased through enhanced ranger patrols, and locally managed marine areas in Kilifi have helped reduce sea turtle mortality. In El Barta Conservancy, Grevy's zebra poaching remains near zero thanks to local employment of Grevy's Zebra Ambassadors. In Laikipia, human-wildlife conflict has been eased through community camera trap programs and domestic dog vaccination campaigns protecting African wild dogs from rabies and distemper. Together, these efforts serve as strong examples of conservation in action.

These successes highlight the importance of combining habitat restoration, community engagement, technology, and strong partnerships with government and local actors. Future efforts must continue to prioritise inclusive, community-driven models, invest in local leadership, and strengthen both enforcement and adaptive capacity.

Looking ahead, sustaining and scaling up these initiatives will require increased and diversified investment, innovative partnerships, strong policy support, and adaptive management to address both persistent and emerging challenges. More effective, flexible, and sustained funding mechanisms are especially crucial. By building on past successes and incorporating lessons learned, conservation stakeholders can ensure the long-term protection of Kenya's unique biodiversity securing a future for its species and landscapes through strategic planning and continued collaboration.

M Future efforts must continue to prioritise inclusive, community-driven models, invest in local leadership, and strengthen both enforcement and adaptive capacity. I/



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