



COUNTRY  
BRIEF

# UGANDA

AFRICAN  
WILDLIFE  
INITIATIVE



KEEP  
NATURE  
STANDING  
IUCN





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uganda is a biodiversity-rich country home to iconic species including over half of the world's mountain gorillas. Spanning around 241,000 km<sup>2</sup>, it has a robust network of protected areas including 10 national parks, 12 wildlife reserves, and five community wildlife areas covering over 10% of its land. Key sites like Bwindi, Queen Elizabeth, Murchison Falls, and Kibale National Parks also underpin a thriving nature-based tourism sector, which contributes 7.7% to the national GDP and provides over 667,000 jobs.

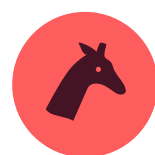
Despite this, the country faces conservation challenges that include habitat loss from land use changes, poaching of wildlife, human-wildlife conflict, and climate change threatening biodiversity, disrupting ecosystems, and undermining efforts to preserve the natural heritage of future generations. The COVID-19 pandemic also compounded these challenges by reducing tourism revenue, limiting operations in protected areas, and increasing community dependence on natural resources.

Through the support of the IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative, six targeted conservation projects were implemented across key landscapes in Uganda, seeking to address threats to biodiversity and enhance community resilience.

- In **Murchison Falls National Park**, a project transformed poaching threats into economic opportunities by removing wire snares, training local artisans to create wildlife art, and establishing market partnerships.
- In **Queen Elizabeth National Park**, a project empowered local pastoralists and reduced retaliatory lion killings and livestock predation by training local youth as conservation ambassadors. This approach not only stabilised the lion population, but also effectively managed conflicts involving other species, demonstrating the effectiveness of community-driven, multi-species conflict management systems.
- In the **Murchison belt**, a project supported community-driven conservation by empowering over 730 households with sustainable livelihoods such as beekeeping and organic farming, alongside creative outreach using music, drama, and innovative tools like a conservation hotline. These interventions significantly decreased poaching incidents and human-wildlife conflicts while increasing household incomes and food security, thereby enhancing overall community resilience.
- In **Bwindi Impenetrable National Park**, a project employed a One Health strategy to protect mountain gorillas from COVID-19 threats through integrated public health interventions, livelihood support, and wildlife health monitoring. The approach resulted in no COVID-19 cases among gorillas, improved household food security, and revised tourism protocols adopted continent-wide, illustrating the value of holistic health and conservation practices.



**10**  
national  
parks



**12**  
wildlife  
reserves



**5**  
community  
wildlife areas

- In **Kibale National Park**, a project implemented targeted actions to safeguard chimpanzees and local communities from COVID-19. The project included health education, wildlife monitoring, and sustainable livelihoods like organic tea farming, which prevented disease transmission, reduced human-wildlife conflict, and improved economic opportunities linked directly to conservation outcomes.
- In two critical lion habitats in **Queen Elizabeth** and **Murchison Falls**, the project launched an emergency response to increased poaching incidents triggered by COVID-19 disruptions. By strengthening ranger capacity, introducing digital monitoring tools such as EarthRanger (a free, real-time conservation platform that integrates data from GPS collars, camera traps, patrols, and sensors for unified site monitoring), and enhancing real-time threat response, the project stabilized lion populations, improved protection in non-tourism areas, and fostered local community engagement through direct employment.

To sustain and enhance these conservation efforts, several strategic actions are recommended in Uganda:

- Prioritising strengthening the capacity of local community-based organizations, and formalising them, this empowers communities to effectively sustain conservation actions and maintain community stewardship beyond the duration of projects.
- Scaling up nature-based livelihood programs by enabling diversified and sustainable income streams to directly reduce local dependence on natural resources, alleviating pressure on wildlife and habitats.
- Increasing investment in ranger coverage and digital monitoring infrastructure for real-time threat response and data-driven decision-making to threats such as poaching, habitat destruction, and human-wildlife conflict, significantly improving protection outcomes.
- Continuing the promotion of One Health approaches particularly in areas with high human-wildlife interaction like Bwindi and Kibale for preventing zoonotic disease transmission and safeguarding both people and wildlife.
- Moving conservation action beyond traditional tourism zones to encompass under-protected and high-risk landscapes that are vital to ecosystem connectivity and species survival.



Photo credit: © Samuel Okulony

\\ Moving conservation action beyond traditional tourism zones to encompass under-protected and high-risk landscapes that are vital to ecosystem connectivity and species survival.\\



# 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: © Ecological Trends Alliance

- **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 amongst the general public, with over **1,200 conservation stories** published across various platforms.

✓ The IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative strengthens civil society, protects threatened species and habitats, and empowers communities—placing 40 million hectares under improved management and reaching over 665,000 people through conservation-based livelihoods.✓



## UGANDA IN FOCUS

Uganda, located in East Africa, is renowned for its exceptional biodiversity, encompassing diverse ecosystems from savannas to dense tropical forests. The country hosts numerous globally significant species, including African elephants, lions, chimpanzees, Nubian giraffes, and over half of the world's remaining mountain gorilla population. Uganda maintains an extensive network of protected areas covering more than 10% of its territory, totalling approximately 241,000 km<sup>2</sup>. These include 10 national parks, 12 wildlife reserves, and five community wildlife areas. Notable conservation areas include Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP), a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for mountain gorillas; Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP), celebrated for its biodiversity; Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP); and Kibale National Park (KNP), renowned for its primate diversity.

Photo credit: ©  
Conservation Through  
Public Health





The IUCN Save Our Species (SOS) African Wildlife Initiative has significantly supported Uganda's conservation efforts. Between 2020 and 2023, the initiative awarded six targeted grants totalling **€523,748** to six civil society organisations, achieving the following outcomes:

- Enhanced management and protection of over **1,014,300 hectares** of critical wildlife habitats that has contributed to species recovery.
- Human wildlife conflict incidences was reduced with retaliatory lion killings at QENP, were eliminated and livestock predation dropped significantly due to the efforts of the "Lion Queens and Kings" project, while in MFNP, beehive fences helped deter elephants and reduce crop-raiding, while in KNP, non-lethal deterrents and trenches minimised chimpanzee-related conflict.
- Across the Murchison belt, over **730 households** adopted sustainable livelihoods such as beekeeping, organic farming, and wildlife art. Over **600 artisans**, many of them reformed poachers, were trained to create wildlife sculptures from snares, generating over \$200,000 in income.
- In BwBINP and KNP, a One Health strategy protected mountain gorillas and chimpanzees from contracting COVID-19. Activities in Bwindi led to the revision of the great ape tourism protocols which was later adopted across 13 African countries, setting new standards for conservation and public health integration.

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Sabrina Krief



Conservation capacities were improved through using technologies such as EarthRanger, GPS collars and digital digital radios enabling real-time lion tracking and threat response. This led to increased ranger patrols, dismantling of poaching camps, and identification of new lion recovery zones. The awarded projects include:

- Conserving wildlife by building capacities in local communities in MFNP through the Snares to Wares Initiative.
- Empowering local pastoralists as custodians against lion persecution in QENP through the Lion Queens and Kings project.
- Supporting community livelihoods in the MFNP through access to sustainable alternative livelihood opportunities and ecosystem conservation strategies.
- Emergency actions addressing COVID-19 threats to mountain gorillas in BINP.
- Protecting wild chimpanzees and local communities from COVID-19 threats in KNP.
- Emergency response to increased lion poaching triggered by COVID-19 impacts in QENP and MFNP conservation areas.

Despite these conservation successes, Uganda continues to face critical challenges, including limited and unsustainable funding, persistent poaching and illegal wildlife trade, and increasing habitat loss due to human encroachment and population growth. Climate change and deforestation further threaten biodiversity, while invasive species degrade natural ecosystems. Additionally, the country's heavy reliance on tourism for conservation funding makes it vulnerable to global disruptions. Despite progress in wildlife protection, these issues continue to strain conservation efforts and require urgent, coordinated action.

Overall, Uganda's extraordinary biodiversity requires continued commitment and support. Initiatives like the IUCN Save Our Species African Wildlife Initiative are crucial to preserving Uganda's natural heritage and ensuring sustainable conservation outcomes for future generations.

❖ Uganda continues to face critical challenges, including limited and unsustainable funding, persistent poaching and illegal wildlife trade, and increasing habitat loss due to human encroachment and population growth.❖



# SOS AFRICAN WILDLIFE INITIATIVE ON THE GROUND ACTIONS IN UGANDA

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## 3.1 Lion Queens and Kings: empowering local pastoralists as custodians against lion persecution in Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda (2020 – 2022)

Implementation partner	Ecological Trends Alliance (ETA)
Target species	African lion ( <i>Panthera leo</i> ) <b>Vulnerable</b>
Project location	Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP)

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### PROBLEM

QENP found itself at the centre of escalating human–wildlife conflict. Local pastoralist communities, whose livelihoods depend on livestock, frequently suffered losses due to lion attacks. In response, the lions became targets and were poisoned and killed in retaliation. The tension boiled over in 2018, when 11 lions were reported killed within the region.

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### APPROACH

Faced with this challenge, the ETA and its partners launched a community-led project. The project aimed to promote coexistence between people and wildlife in the villages of Katwe, Katunguru, and Hamukungu by empowering local youth as conservation leaders. Twenty community members (12 men and eight women) were recruited and formalised as the “Lion Queens and Kings” community-based organisation (CBO), serving as community custodians of lion conservation. Drawing on indigenous knowledge, these custodians guarded livestock at night, monitored lion movements near settlements, and facilitated community engagement through agreements with the Uganda Wildlife Authority.



Real-time GPS data from collared lions was integrated into a community-driven early warning and response system, enabling timely interventions to prevent conflict. Multi-stakeholder partnerships with other organisations such as Uganda Wildlife Authority, Uganda Carnivores Project, and Uganda Conservation Foundation supported the use of science-based strategies including wildlife deterrents, community bylaws, and awareness campaigns to promote coexistence. The approach also emphasised sustained community outreach through radio programs and dialogues and was designed to be adaptable for managing conflicts with multiple species, not just lions, by applying the same response systems to crocodiles, hippopotamus, buffalo, and leopards.

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## KEY OUTCOMES

Retaliatory killings of lions were eliminated in the targeted communities over the two-year project period, while livestock predation by lions dropped dramatically from a baseline of 46 incidents per enclave per month to just three cases in total, none of which involved lions. In addition, lions fitted with collars for monitoring showed indications on stabilisation and early signs of growth with sightings of new lion cubs. The community group Lion Queens and Kings was formalised into a registered CBO, enhancing its ability to access future funding and continue its conservation work independently.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Empowerment of local youth and formalisation of Lion Queens and Kings as a registered CBO, fostered long-term ownership and sustainability of conservation efforts by the community.
- Use of real-time GPS data integrated into a community-based response system enabled timely and effective action to prevent human-wildlife conflict.
- Collaboration with partners including the Uganda Wildlife Authority, Uganda Carnivores Project, and Uganda Conservation Foundation facilitated information sharing, coordinated patrols, and joint conflict response. These partnerships supported the implementation of practical, science-based measures such as wildlife deterrents, community bylaws, and early warning systems.
- Although the lion was the primary target species for human-wildlife conflict interventions, the project's approach was also applied to support the management of other conflict-prone species, including crocodiles, hippopotamuses, buffalo, and leopards.

### 3.2 Conserving wildlife by building capacities in local human communities in Uganda

Implementation partner	The Snares to Wares Initiative (S2W)
Target species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ African lion (<i>Panthera leo</i>) <b>Vulnerable</b></li><li>▪ Nubian giraffe (<i>Giraffa camelopardalis camelopardalis</i>) <b>Critically Endangered</b></li></ul>
Project location	Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP)

#### PROBLEM

In Uganda's MFNP, species faced a deadly and silent threat: wire snares. Often set for bushmeat, these crude traps don't discriminate, ensnaring not only targeted prey but also lions, giraffes, elephants, and other wildlife. Prior to the project, the snare density was four per 100 km<sup>2</sup>, (Snares to Wares Initiative, final project report, 2023) and the park's wildlife was paying the price leading to more injured animals and declining populations. Poverty was a driving factor as people turned to illegal hunting due to lack of alternative sources of income or opportunity.

#### APPROACH

The project was designed to transform a major conservation threat into a powerful opportunity for community development and wildlife protection. At its core, the initiative focused on converting confiscated wire snares into artistic sculptures, while empowering former poachers to become skilled conservation artisans.

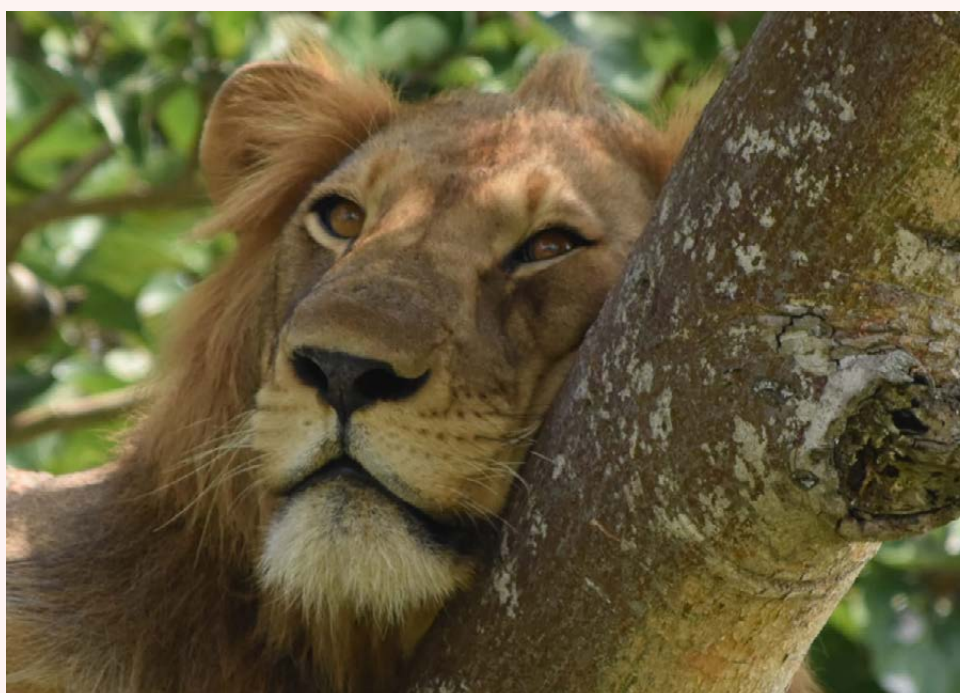


Photo credit: © Okwi John Peter

## KEY OUTCOMES

The African lion population increased from 158 to 170 individuals, while the number of Nubian giraffes nearly doubled from around 1,000 to 1,800 (S2W final report, 2023) making it the largest population of this subspecies globally. The direct threat from wire snares was significantly reduced from 4/100 km<sup>2</sup> to less than 3/100 km<sup>2</sup>, shifting from widespread to more localised areas. Over 600 artisans were trained to craft animal sculptures from recovered snares, generating more than \$200,000 in direct income, with many of the artworks sold internationally. This not only provided a sustainable livelihood option, but also turned former poachers into conservation advocates.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- The innovative repurposing of wire snares into wildlife-inspired art not only provided a sustainable source of income but also fostered a renewed sense of cultural identity. This innovative approach to conservation shifted perceptions and behaviours particularly among the artisans, many of whom were reformed poachers.
- Strong partnerships with institutions and donors, including Uganda Wildlife Authority, the University of Oxford, National Geographic, and The Rufford Foundation, enhanced the project's scale, credibility, and financial sustainability.

### 3.3 Empowering communities for sustainable alternative livelihoods and ecosystem conservation in the Murchison belt during and post COVID-19

Implementation partner	Environment Governance Institute Uganda
Target species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Common chimpanzee (<i>Pan troglodytes</i>) <b>Endangered</b></li> <li>▪ African lion (<i>Panthera leo</i>) <b>Vulnerable</b></li> <li>▪ African elephant (<i>Loxodonta africana</i>) <b>Endangered</b></li> <li>▪ Leopard (<i>Panthera pardus</i>) <b>Vulnerable</b></li> </ul>
Project location	Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP)

## PROBLEM

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Uganda, it threatened humans and wildlife alike. In the MFNP, thousands of locals who once depended on tourism for their livelihoods were suddenly left without income. There was an increased reliance on natural resources with noted increases in poaching, illegal logging, and wildlife conflicts. Threatened species like the African elephant, lion, leopard, and chimpanzee were directly impacted as poaching and wildlife conflict intensified.



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## APPROACH

The project implemented a holistic, community-based conservation strategy across five districts surrounding MFNP, placing strong emphasis on local leadership by training community champions to serve as conservation ambassadors in their villages. To promote conservation values, 20 youth art groups were engaged to deliver awareness through music and drama, while an e-marketing platform was launched to boost local product sales. A toll-free hotline was also introduced, facilitating swift responses to poaching and human-wildlife conflict.

The project promoted several sustainable livelihood options. Beekeeping was adopted by 366 households, offering triple benefits: income generation through the sale of bee products, enhanced food security, and reduced human-wildlife conflict as bees deter elephants. In addition, communities planted more than 1,900 organic fruit trees and 2,800 woodlot trees, contributing to food security, reforestation, and the creation of buffer zones along wildlife corridors.

Legal and policy frameworks were integrated into the project by working with communities to draft bylaws prohibiting poaching and the illegal trade of wildlife products. These bylaws were endorsed by district authorities and aligned with the Uganda Wildlife Act of 2019, contributing to a marked reduction in poaching incidents.



Photo credit: ©  
Environmental  
Governance Institute

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## KEY OUTCOMES

There was reduced poaching and wildlife crime in the MNFP. By empowering communities with alternative sources of income, the dependency on illegal activities like poaching declined. This was further reinforced by the introduction of community-enforced bylaws and improved collaboration with the Uganda Wildlife Authority.

Over 730 households benefited from training and support in sustainable livelihoods, with 366 households actively engaged in beekeeping and others involved in organic farming, fruit tree planting, and small-scale catering services. These activities helped provide economic resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic and diversified income streams. Many of the fruit trees were planted in degraded areas, including a 15 km stretch of the chimpanzee corridor in Kyabigambire sub-county, Hoima District. This helped restore critical habitat, especially in regions facing deforestation and human-wildlife conflict.

The beekeeping initiative notably improved household incomes and market access for 366 individuals, with some earning up to €450 per harvest. This success led to the replication of the model in Queen Elizabeth and Bwindi Impenetrable National Parks. The strategic use of beehives along park boundaries deterred elephants from raiding farms, while the toll-free line enabled rapid reporting and response to wildlife movements. This led to a decline in human-wildlife conflict and community retaliation.

Conservation awareness and behaviour change were further promoted through the creative involvement of 20 local youth art groups who used music and drama to deliver environmental messages. The use of innovative tools, including the launch of a toll-free hotline, enhanced conservation effectiveness by enabling rapid threat response and contributing to a noticeable reduction in human-wildlife conflict.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Engaging community members as local champions enabled the project to successfully raise awareness on conservation bylaws and promote sustainable practices at the grassroots level. These bylaws were aligned with the Uganda Wildlife Act and discouraged poaching and illegal trade while strengthening local governance around natural resource use.
- Enhancing community livelihoods through training in beekeeping, organic farming, and other income-generating activities along with improved market access helped reduce dependence on the exploitation of natural resources.
- Creative and inclusive outreach approaches, including the use of music, drama, and a toll-free hotline, which broadened awareness, especially among youth and hard-to-reach communities, and improved responsiveness to emerging threats.

### 3.4 Emergency action to address COVID-19 related threats to the survival of mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park

Implementation partner	Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH)
Target species	Mountain gorillas ( <i>Gorilla beringei beringei</i> ) <b>Endangered</b>
Project location	Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BNIP)

#### PROBLEM

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, BINP was home to 43% of the world's remaining mountain gorillas. During the pandemic, tourism collapsed, the park lost its primary revenue stream, and local communities lost jobs and income.

With increasing poverty, hunger, and desperation, some individuals turned to poaching, leading to tragic incidents including the killing of a silverback gorilla named Rafiki (CTPH, 2020). At the same time, the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission from humans to gorillas posed an existential threat. As gorillas were highly vulnerable to COVID-19, with no vaccines or treatments available.

#### APPROACH

One Health strategy was implemented that integrated public health, wildlife conservation, and community development to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 transmission to endangered mountain gorillas. This involved both preventive health interventions and sustainable livelihood support. Central to this was strengthening both wildlife and human health surveillance to prevent the transmission of diseases, particularly COVID-19, between people and endangered gorillas.





Additionally, to improve safety in gorilla tourism, the project revised standard operating procedures to incorporate COVID-19 prevention measures and distributed essential health supplies such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitizers to park staff and communities.

To reduce human-wildlife interactions and address food insecurity, 1,002 households received “Ready to Grow” garden packages with fast-maturing crops. The initiative also expanded alternative livelihood options by training 425 new farmers through the Gorilla Conservation Coffee programme, bringing the total network to 500 farmers and encouraging sustainable agricultural practices. At the same time, wildlife monitoring was enhanced by equipping the Uganda Wildlife Authority with additional surveillance tools, effectively doubling the region’s capacity to track and protect gorilla populations.

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## KEY OUTCOMES

The project achieved significant impact in safeguarding mountain gorillas and supporting surrounding communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, no gorillas tested positive for the virus this can be attributed to regular testing of people who interact with gorillas regularly, additionally 200 individuals monitored and new births recorded demonstrating an encouraging sign of population growth and effective habitat protection. At the community level, the distribution of “Ready-to-Grow” garden kits improved household food security, with 83% of recipients meeting their nutritional needs and reporting more diverse diets. Health safety was prioritised through routine screening, provision of PPE, and sanitation supplies for both park staff and community members, reducing the risk of zoonotic transmission. Additionally, revising Uganda’s great ape tourism protocols emphasising distancing, smaller group sizes, and stricter hygiene resulted in new standards adopted across 13 African countries, setting a continent-wide benchmark for great ape conservation and tourism safety.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Adoption of a holistic One Health approach that simultaneously addressed the health of people, wildlife, and ecosystems, resulting in more sustainable and integrated conservation outcomes.
- Implementation of strategic surveillance and testing, including comparative COVID-19 screening for both humans and gorillas, which set a new standard for great ape conservation globally.
- Promotion of food security and alternative livelihoods, such as home gardens and conservation-linked coffee farming, which reduced community dependence on forest resources and minimised poaching.
- The project influenced policy and regional practice by shaping and revising great ape tourism protocols in response to COVID-19. The updated standard operating procedures developed and implemented in Uganda including mandatory mask-wearing, physical distancing, and enhanced hygiene protocols were based on the One Health approach and became a model for other countries with great ape populations.

### 3.5 Protect wild chimpanzees, their habitat and nearby humans from direct and indirect threats generated by SARS-COV2

Implementation partner	Great Ape Conservation Project (Projet pour la Conservation des Grands Singes)
Target species	Chimpanzee ( <i>Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii</i> ) <b>Endangered</b>
Project location	Kibale National Park (KNP)

#### PROBLEM

In KNP, a population of about 100 chimpanzees in the Sebitoli sector found themselves at the crossroads of human encroachment and a global pandemic. COVID-19 brought not only the threat of a zoonotic spillover where humans could transmit the virus to great apes but also intensified human wildlife conflict, as well as economic, ecological, and health pressures.

#### APPROACH

To minimise the risk of disease transmission particularly COVID-19 the project implemented a One Health approach that included training 25 field staff and sensitising 100 local farmers and families on prevention protocols against COVID-19, with a focus on inclusivity through the use of pictogram-based materials for non-English-speaking communities. Personal protective equipment was distributed, while daily and weekly health tests for COVID-19 for staff and farmers ensured ongoing monitoring.

In parallel, the project sought to address human-wildlife conflict and habitat degradation through a combination of community engagement and environmental protection. Twenty trained “Chimp Guardians” were deployed to use non-lethal methods to deter crop-raiding wildlife, while 500 meters of new trenches were constructed and bee-fence sites maintained to safeguard farmlands. To reduce pollution and infection risks, environmental clean-up efforts were conducted by removing plastic bottles from chimpanzee habitats. To support sustainable livelihoods, 12 farmers were trained in organic and fair-trade tea farming, and machinery was installed for value-added processing. Strategic partnerships with French tea brands created a reliable market, with proceeds helping fund the Chimp Guardians—linking conservation success directly to community benefit.

#### KEY OUTCOMES

The project’s integrated One Health approach led to zero cases of COVID-19 infection among chimpanzees, demonstrating effective risk mitigation through targeted health training, regular testing, and the use of clear, inclusive communication materials. While the strategic installation of signposts and vehicle stickers, along with community sensitisation, significantly reduced risky human-chimpanzee interactions, further protecting both wildlife and people.

Community-based conservation was strengthened by training and employing 20 local Chimp Guardians who not only helped prevent crop-raiding incidents and injuries to chimpanzees but also formed the Chimps and Wildlife Friends association, enhancing community engagement.

Environmental health also improved through the removal of over 25,000 plastic bottles from chimpanzee habitats, reducing pollution and disease transmission risks in key conservation areas and biodiversity monitoring was enhanced, with camera traps documenting 48 vertebrate species including eight threatened species and a notable increase in snare removals thanks to intensified patrols.

The project's support for sustainable organic tea farming equipped 12 farmers with new skills and created direct market links with French tea brands, generating reliable income streams. Tea sales contributed directly to the funding of the Chimp Guardians, establishing a self-sustaining model that ties economic benefits to conservation results.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Health and sanitation interventions were implemented to meet the needs of remote and underserved communities, including the installation of latrines and handwashing stations, which strengthened disease prevention efforts.
- Community driven approach that established the Chimp Guardians to reduce human-wildlife conflict, safeguard local crops and promote co-existence.
- Integration of conservation with sustainable livelihoods, such as linking organic tea production to chimpanzee protection, generated long-term income opportunities and attracted international market interest.
- Effective wildlife health monitoring was achieved through a combination of camera traps and direct field observations, allowing for real-time assessment of chimpanzee well-being.



### 3.6 Emergency response to an upsurge in lion poaching due to COVID-19 in two critical hotspots in Uganda

Implementation partner	Uganda Conservation Foundation
Target species	African lion ( <i>Panther leo</i> ) <b>Vulnerable</b>
Project location	Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) and Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP)

#### PROBLEM

In Uganda's QENP and MNFP, two of the country's most important lion habitats, there was a critical conservation emergency triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis unfolded as tourism, which is a key revenue source for Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), came to a near halt due to pandemic-related restrictions.

This severely disrupted park operations, reducing ranger presence, patrols, and management capacity. Simultaneously, local communities faced increased poverty and food insecurity, leading to a sharp rise in poaching activities, including the targeting of lions as retaliation for livestock predation and other wildlife for bushmeat.

#### APPROACH

In response to escalating threats to wildlife, the organisation collaborated with UWA to launch an emergency initiative aimed at enhancing ranger operations, improving real-time lion monitoring, and disrupting poaching activities across key protected areas. The project significantly increased patrol coverage, enabling ranger teams to dismantle poaching camps



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Uganda Conservation  
Foundation

and arrest 22 individuals. To support these efforts, the initiative provided essential resources including vehicles, fuel, food, rations, and emergency field gear such as rucksacks, boots and veterinary kits.

A major technological advancement that was used was the EarthRanger system—a digital platform that enabled real-time tracking of lions and issued alerts when lions entered human settlements, allowing teams to safely guide them back to protected areas. Forty rangers were trained in the use of digital radios and smartphone-based tracking tools, and a closed user network was established. In QENP, six lions were fitted with GPS collars, and lion recognition files were developed for both parks. Additionally, staff members were trained in wildlife poisoning management, and satellite tracking of vultures was introduced to help identify and respond to poisoning hotspots.

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## KEY OUTCOMES

In QENP, the lion population showed signs of stabilisation, with encouraging sightings of new prides. In MFNP, no lion deaths were reported during the project period and aerial surveys indicated a recovery of prey species, suggesting a positive trajectory for long-term lion resurgence.

The initiative also identified previously overlooked areas as prime zones for lion recovery and expanded protection efforts to cover 95% of park areas beyond traditional tourism zones.

Operational capacity was strengthened through the establishment of fully integrated Joint Operations Command Centres, while ranger communication and mobility improved significantly. For the first time, all lion collars were centrally tracked, enhancing real-time monitoring and response. Additionally, the project provided economic relief by employing local scouts, injecting income into communities during a period of economic hardship.

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## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Focused protection in non-tourism zones allowed the project to concentrate efforts on overlooked, high-risk areas with strong potential for lion recovery.
- Deployment of integrated technology and rapid response systems, including EarthRanger, satellite collars, and digital radios, enabled round-the-clock wildlife monitoring and effective field patrols.
- Engagement of community-based scouts and use of locally sourced resources ensured that conservation efforts were inclusive, locally supported, and provided direct benefits to surrounding communities.

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM CONSERVATION ACTIONS IN UGANDA



To achieve lasting conservation outcomes, it is vital to empower local communities through continuous training and capacity development. Initiatives like the Lion Queens and Kings project and “Chimp Guardians” highlight the effectiveness of involving community members as proactive guardians of biodiversity.

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Conservation Foundation



By strengthening local organisations and providing ongoing technical and institutional support, their roles in conservation can be formalised and sustained beyond the duration of individual projects. At the same time, expanding nature-based livelihood opportunities that align with conservation goals—supported by improved market access and digital platforms—can help diversify income streams and ease pressure on natural ecosystems.

Investing in the expansion of digital monitoring tools across critical landscapes is also essential. These tools enable real-time wildlife tracking and swift responses to emerging threats. To maximise their impact, more rangers and local scouts should be trained in using these technologies, enhancing patrol effectiveness and decision-making.

Finally, reinforcing One Health strategies that integrate human, animal, and environmental health is crucial, especially in ecologically sensitive regions like Bwindi and Kibale. Ongoing disease surveillance and prevention measures are key to safeguarding both local communities and endangered species, particularly great apes.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SPECIES CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Future conservation efforts should prioritise empowering local communities through continuous training and capacity building to enhance community-led stewardship, and *foster greater commitment to sustainable practices*, to achieve sustainable long-term results. It is also crucial to formalise and strengthen local conservation organisations through technical and institutional support, enabling these groups to independently sustain and scale effective conservation outcomes.

Scaling up nature-based livelihood programs connected to market opportunities and digital platforms will diversify and sustainably increase community incomes, reducing dependence on natural resource exploitation and alleviating pressures on wildlife habitats.

Investing in digital monitoring technologies and infrastructure will significantly improve real-time wildlife tracking, threat detection, operational decision-making, and ranger patrol effectiveness. Concurrently, expanding training programs for rangers and community scouts in conservation technologies will build essential operational capacity and enhance field monitoring responsiveness to threats and human-wildlife conflict incidences.

Additionally, reinforcing and expanding One Health approaches, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions like Bwindi and Kibale, will integrate human, animal, and environmental health strategies, managing the spread of zoonotic diseases and protecting both wildlife and community health.

Lastly, conservation management efforts should broaden their focus to include non-tourism and under-protected landscapes, recognising their critical importance for ecosystem connectivity, species recovery, and overall biodiversity resilience.

❗ Conservation management efforts should broaden their focus to include non-tourism and under-protected landscapes, recognising their critical importance for ecosystem connectivity, species recovery, and overall biodiversity resilience.❗



# CONCLUSION

The conservation of Uganda's unique biodiversity including its critically endangered and iconic species continues to face significant challenges. The successful conservation projects implemented through the IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative clearly demonstrate that integrated approaches are key to achieving sustainable outcomes. Thanks to this support, achievements such as the reduction of illegal activities in Uganda's protected areas, progress in adopting one health approach, and the effective mitigation of human-wildlife conflict serve as strong examples of conservation in action.

These projects have shown that species conservation success requires a combination of habitat restoration, community engagement, technological innovation, and close government collaboration. Future efforts should continue to prioritise community-led models, enhance technological capabilities, strengthen enforcement and capacity-building measures, and promote resilience and adaptability in conservation strategies.

Looking ahead, sustaining and scaling up these initiatives will demand increased and diversified investment, partnership-driven innovative approaches, strong policy support and adaptive management to address both current 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 Uganda's biodiversity, securing a future for species through strategic planning and continued collaboration.

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