

Conservation Success Story: Rhino Count Is Up



CRAIG R. SHIDLEY

Thanks to concerted conservation efforts, Africa's rhinoceros population continues to increase. There are now an estimated 14,770 rhinos in Africa, up from 13,109 rhinos in 1999.

In recent decades, rhinos have been hunted to the point of near extinction. Since 1970, the world rhino population declined by 90 percent. The

only two species found today in Africa are the white or square-lipped rhino and the black rhino.

The encouraging progress in rhino conservation was announced by The World Conservation Union's African Rhino Specialist Group, at its biannual meeting in Malilangwe, Zimbabwe. The group reported increases

in both white and black rhino populations over the past two years:

Sub-species	1999 count	2001 count
White	10,405	11,670
Black	2,704	3,100
Total	13,109	14,770

Poachers Target Rhinos, Elephants

Africa's rhinos and elephants always face the threat of being poached.

"Reports reaching us from sites in various countries describe many poaching incidents, especially of rhinos and elephants," says AWF Chief Scientist Dr. Philip Muruthi of Nairobi, Kenya.

Black rhinos have been hunted down by poachers who prize the rhinos' rare and valuable horns.

By the mid-1980s, the rhino was near extinction. AWF and other conservationists determined that the only way to secure the species' future was to ensure strict protection by means of intensive-protection zones or in rhino sanctuaries. In 1988, we helped construct the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary in Kenya's Tsavo West National Park. Today, the sanctuary's 49 rhinos live in approximately 27 square miles, protected by an electric fence.

Despite these successes, the poaching danger lurks. In late 2001, poachers killed six endangered eastern black rhinos in Tsavo East National Park, where reintroduced rhinos have been roaming free from the confines of fences.

"With support from AWF, Kenya Wildlife Service has instituted drastic measures—including providing support for armed patrols—to ensure that the rhinos' sanctuary and free-release area in Tsavo East National Park are protected," says Muruthi. In addition, AWF is providing park guards with training, and helping with security and various recurring needs, like repairs to the sanctuary's infrastructure.

Elephants also have suffered from poaching in the past year. In Longido, near the northern border of Tanzania, as well as in the Kilimanjaro and Maasai-Steppe Heartlands, approximately 40 elephants have been illegally slaughtered in the last 12 months—mostly by poachers searching for the elephants' ivory tusks. Recently seven elephants were killed in Charera safari area on the Zimbabwe side of the Zambezi Heartland. In addition, poaching of ungulates also appears to be particularly rampant in Lower Zambezi National Park, due to understaffing and lack of funding, according to Dora Kamwoneshe, coordinator of the Zambezi Heartland.

The incidents recall poacher activity in the 1980s when Kenya lost most of its elephants, according to the Kenya Wildlife Service. In the Tsavo ecosystem alone, the elephant population was reduced from more than 25,000 to fewer than 5,000. During the last 10 years, poaching in the Tsavo area has been infrequent, and the elephant population has increased to about 9,000, according to an aerial census taken earlier this year.

"These incidents suggest that the ivory markets are active—and that poachers are actively feeding the illegal trade in ivory," said Muruthi.

Elephants are among the highest priority conservation targets in many of AWF's Heartlands, and only through effective monitoring of these animals can we hope to reduce threats such as poaching. ○

In addition to updating the rhino counts, participants also discussed encouraging reports of re-establishing rhino populations in former rhino ranges in Botswana, Uganda and Zambia. All of these rhino reintroduction plans are being supported by both government and the private sector, which is considered critical for success.

The African Wildlife Foundation has been at the forefront of rhinoceros conservation for several decades. AWF has supported anti-poaching efforts and banning trade in rhino horns. But because the value of these endangered animals is so great and the threats to their survival so intense, more drastic protection measure have been necessary, as exemplified by our work in Kenya's Tsavo East and Tsavo West national parks, where rhinos have been reintroduced.

AWF has been credited with helping save Africa's rhinos. "These animals are alive because of support from several groups, especially AWF," says Richard Kech, former officer-in-charge of Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary in Tsavo West National Park.

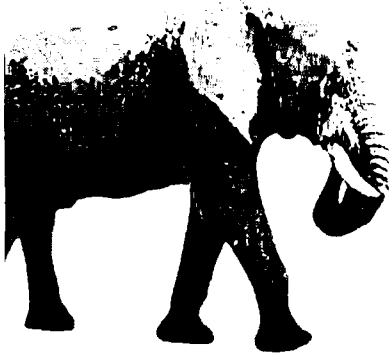
Chief Scientist Dr. Philip Muruthi greeted the increase in Africa's rhino numbers with optimism, but cautioned that "threats to rhinos are still profound, and we must not relax our efforts to save this 'essence of Africa.'" AWF currently supports rhino conservation in Kenya and Tanzania, and in the past has supported populations in Namibia and South Africa. ○

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Alfred Kikoti: Expanding AWF's Elephant Conservation Work Into West Kilimanjaro

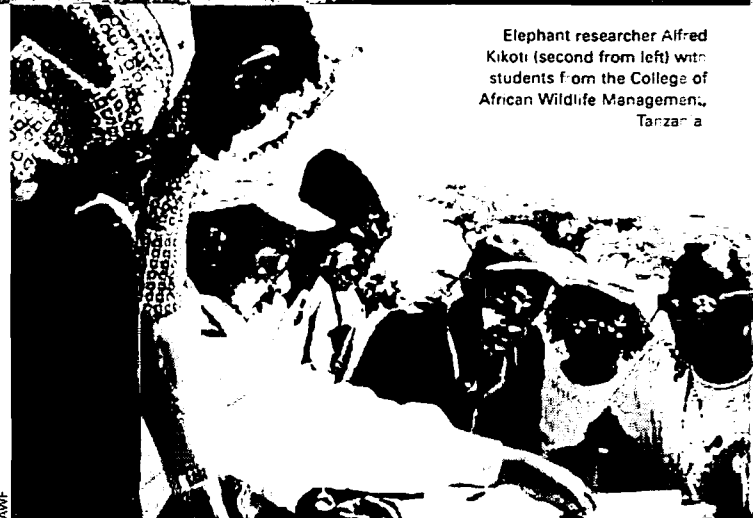


IGCP's Lanjouw Wins National Geographic/ Buffett Conservation Award

The African Wildlife Foundation's involvement in elephant research began more than 40 years ago at Amboseli National Park in the Kilimanjaro Heartland. But research efforts concerning these cross-border elephant populations had always concentrated on the Kenya side, with not much activity on the Tanzania side.

Within the transboundary Kilimanjaro Heartland, elephant conservation efforts cannot stop at the international border if AWF and its partners are to successfully safeguard these migratory mammals. To address this crucial issue, AWF expanded its elephant research program in West Kilimanjaro in 2000 and engaged Alfred Kikoti to undertake the work.

For several decades, AWF supported groundbreaking elephant research in the Amboseli ecosystem through the Amboseli Elephant Research Project, founded



Elephant researcher Alfred Kikoti (second from left) with students from the College of African Wildlife Management, Tanzania

and directed by Dr. Cynthia Moss. Now an independent nongovernmental organization, AERP continues to study elephants on the Kenyan side of the Kilimanjaro

Heartland. AWF shares information with AERP and collaborates with them regularly.

To complement AERP's research and to help paint a landscape-level picture of this wide-

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Dr. Annette Lanjouw, director of the AWF-sponsored International Gorilla Conservation Program (IGCP) since 1995, has been selected to receive the first National Geographic Society/Bufett Award for Leadership in African Conservation. She will be honored at a presentation ceremony November 25 in Washington, D.C.

Lanjouw is an internationally recognized primatologist and leading authority on the mountain gorilla. Her work and life's passion is offering technical support across the region and being an effective



Annette Lanjouw

spokesperson, drawing attention to the gorilla's plight and raising funds to ensure its survival. It is estimated that only 668 of these magnificent creatures still exist in two small islands of forest in Central Africa's Virunga-Bwindi region—making this species one of the rarest of the great apes.

AWF supports IGCP with Fauna and Flora International and the World Wide Fund for Nature in an effort to ensure that the mountain gorillas and their forest habitat in Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo survive.

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