

ifaw is transforming what it means to be a women ranger

“we live in a competitive world where men and women are doing the same work— why not as community wildlife rangers? “

Sharon Nankinyi

▶ Women community rangers supported by IFAW remained on duty for four months during the COVID-19 lockdown.



Women take a lead in protecting wildlife

Since 2012 IFAW has worked to secure wildlife space and mitigate threats to wildlife in community lands surrounding Amboseli National Park, a safari destination 216 kilometres southeast of Nairobi, Kenya.

Traditional gender roles often sideline women, who benefit little (if at all) from the natural resources of the park and surrounding areas, and are left out of decisions over conservation and management of community lands and property. This often leads to higher poverty levels amongst women.

Because of lower levels of economic empowerment, women tend to be in roles that require frequent interaction with the environment as they go about their daily lives, and regularly interact with the wildlife. They are also more likely to be involved in activities that result in environmental degradation such as tree cutting for firewood.

Maasai women are deeply connected to their communities and land, making them key proponents to local conservation efforts. They have insider knowledge and unique perspectives to offer male ranger units, but lack opportunities to get involved on a professional level.

Team Lioness

In February 2019, along with local community leaders, IFAW’s wildlife security team created Team Lioness: one of the first all-women ranger units in Kenya. Chosen based on leadership, academic achievements and integrity, the team of eight young Maasai women are defying constraining social norms and creating new opportunities for women.

“A few years back women were not doing this work [community wildlife ranger] now my community is proud of me because I am doing work not done before by women.”

Purity Lakara



150,000 hectares

area of community lands surrounding Amboseli National Park

20 km

average distance Team Lioness covers daily on foot patrols

84

Olgulului community wildlife rangers, including Team Lioness

- ◀ Elephants in Amboseli National Park in Kenya.
- ▶ A heartwarming moment as Ruth Sikeita reunites with her family and community.

▶ see how at [ifaw.org](https://www.ifaw.org)



#StopWildlifeCrime

Team Lioness are part of 84 community wildlife rangers, patrolling 150,000 hectares of community lands, with the aim to identify areas that could be targets for poaching and human wildlife conflict.

"Many girls and women wish to be like us because they can see the changes we have brought in our homes. My family lives in a better home now because of the job I have and they live better."

Purity Lakara

In April and May 2019, Team Lioness undertook a three-week Basic Field Ranger course. The course provided intense training in bushcraft, management of a wildlife crime scene for first responders, human-wildlife conflict indicators and mitigation and, procedures in mapping wildlife sightings and incidences using Global Position System (GPS).

They contribute valuable skills and perspectives particularly in community engagement through information gathering and de-escalation of community retaliatory attacks on wildlife.

The impact of COVID-19

Constantly at threat from armed poachers and, sometimes, dangerous wildlife, the pandemic has made the work of Team Lioness more treacherous than ever.



Due to the collapse of tourism, wildlife agencies around the region have had to cut back on their operations due to loss of revenue causing many areas to see an increase in poaching and illegal activity. In the absence of regular patrols to act as a deterrent, the risk of losing wildlife to poaching is real. As a preemptive measure, IFAW ensured that these community rangers stepped up their patrols in order to keep wildlife secure. In the initial phase of the pandemic, the rangers as essential workers were quarantined and separated from their families for almost five months.

"My heart is full as I am seeing my son and daughter for the first time in four months," said Ruth Sikeita (28) while holding her two-year-old, Bonham, with her nine-year old daughter, Priscilla, standing close to her mother. Family and friends at her home village of Olasiti had earlier turned out to give her a warm welcome home.

Team Lioness continues to remain on the frontlines, playing a critical role in the protection of Africa's wildlife.

During these challenging times, we can't forget about the wellbeing of animals around the world. Our rangers are working around the clock to ensure that parks and wildlife remain protected from the threat of poaching.