Room to Roam:
making room for elephants to roam, live and thrive

Photo: Paolo Torchio / © IFAW

A bird catches a ride on an elephant in Amboseli National Park, Kenya.

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Photo: Paolo Torchio / © IFAW

Jimmiel on-site in Lemomo Hill, Kenya.

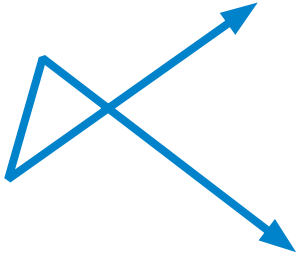
"By transforming our approach to conservation we can protect African elephants, develop healthy, resilient ecosystems to support communities and ensure animals and people can truly thrive together. Room to Roam can transform conservation and strengthen the chance of survival for African elephants."

— Jimmiel Mandima, Deputy Vice President, Conservation

have you "herd" the good news?

Room to Roam is an exciting, transformative project that is guided by robust and science-informed principles from over 20 years of research. It stems from the intense need to protect the endangered African Elephant and to better understand what drives elephant populations to decline, stabilize or increase. And though a declining population is dire and worrisome in its own right, that drop in numbers can also lead to a concerning shift in population numbers for dozens of other species. The survival of the iconic, charismatic elephant is paramount to the survival of the ecosystem as a whole.

In July 2022, IFAW, along with Malawi's Department of National Parks and Wildlife and African Parks, took a massive step in combatting this issue by **translocating 263 elephants from Liwonde National Park to Kasungu National Park.**



You helped make this possible.

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An elephant herd roaming the savannah of northern Botswana.

The move consisted of entire herds and families, bringing new matriarchs and smaller elephants into Kasungu in an effort to bolster the population. Prior to the translocation, Kasungu's elephant population was only around 50 animals. Bringing in these new elephants, and having a balance of males and females, will help establish viable populations and maintain healthy habitats for the rest of the wildlife and communities living in and near Kasungu.

In addition to repopulating viable lands with healthy herds, IFAW and community rangers patrol these areas, staying ever vigilant for any potential harm to the elephants. Over the last decade, poaching has significantly decreased in areas being patrolled. In Kenya, poaching has dropped nearly 80% in the Tsavo National Park landscape and is now virtually nonexistent in Amboseli National Park. The biggest obstacle we now face is making sure there is enough space for the flourishing herds and the supporters of the local communities who live amongst them, to coexist safely and successfully.

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A herd of elephants grazing along a river bank in the Chobe Game Reserve, Botswana. Water sources are scarce which lead to more frequent interactions between humans and wildlife that can be potentially dangerous.

Photo: Sabrina Zhang / © IFAW

A Daotangqing villager and IFAW staff carry some of the beehives provided to the village by IFAW.

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Baby African elephants use their trunks to drink water next to their older family members at a watering hole in the IFAW protected Hwange National Park, Matabeleland North Province, Zimbabwe.

reducing human-wildlife conflict

Animals and people thriving together—that statement is the main heartstring of our mission. Unfortunately, with only a finite amount of space on this planet and a growing population, the frequency of humans and wildlife interacting with one another is increasing, which can be dangerous. As the needed landscape where animals roam expands, so must our solutions to ensure that both elephants and the people living near these areas are kept safe.

In August we announced the need to hire, train and equip a Rapid Response Ranger Team. You answered that call and thanks to your generosity, we developed Human-Wildlife Conflict Rapid Response Units on the frontlines in Malawi, an area of potential conflict.

We're also hoping to introduce environmentally friendly deterrents to keep the elephants away from villages. Two years ago, IFAW introduced 100 beehives to households living on the borders of a reserve in Xishuangbanna, China. As just one bee sting will keep an elephant away from the hive and that same elephant will teach their family and friends to stay away, this method proved to be an effective way of keeping the endangered Asian elephants safe and inside the reserve. The implementation of this approach will work in conjunction with those already established to prevent dangerous interactions between humans and wildlife.

Photo: Julia Gunther / © IFAW

Elephants feed on water hyacinth in Liwonde National Park, Malawi.

Water is Life for animals

Another imperative way to prevent potentially dangerous interactions between humans and elephants is to reduce the competition for the resources that are both critical and scarce. Every living creature needs water to survive, so what happens when the availability of water decreases? The rise in Africa's population and an increase in climate change-induced droughts means a higher frequency of contact between animals and people (mainly women and children) collecting water at streams and riverbeds. These encounters are unsafe, increasing the potential for conflict including the transmission of zoonotic diseases, poisoning of wild animals, human attacks, injuries and deaths.

Last fall, we identified the three most important next steps to focus on: create and revive large natural watering holes, help repair one of the twenty critical watering stations and purchase and install solar-powered water pumps. And thanks to your support, we've been able to start implementing these ambitious, but vital, goals.

In Zimbabwe alone, we've drilled nine new boreholes and solarized one existing in local communities, ranger stations and campgrounds—improving access to clean water, enhancing hygiene and sanitation and redirecting costs towards other wildlife services. In Hwange National Park, the Nyamandhlovu Pan is a critical watering hole for wildlife and hadn't been revived for 20 years. Because of the revitalisation to the watering hole, the water volume capacity of the Pan has increased by the equivalent of about five Olympic sized swimming pools, with the seasonal rains filling it to capacity.

By providing accessible water sources for elephants, we are able to ensure the survival of wildlife and protect both people and animals while bolstering the economy of the local communities.

Farmer Lawrence prepares the field before watering his mustard seed plants, Chikolongo, Malawi.

Photo: Julia Gunther / © IFAW

it takes a village

The important tie between access to fresh water and sustaining life is an obvious one, but there are many other valuable outcomes for the local communities as well. With the scooping and refilling of the Nyamandhlovu Pan, it is now a bustling watering hole that has seen a return in wildlife, making it a key spot for tourism and benefitting the residents of the Hwange and Tsholotsho Districts greatly. Clean water has also meant the production of nutritional gardens filled with vegetables. These gardens not only provide income for households, they act as outreach and community awareness centres that promote the idea of coexistence with wildlife.

In Malawi, IFAW has partnered with the Chikolongo Livelihood Project and Imani Development to build a water pump near the edge of Liwonde National Park. The pump and two community taps provide clean water to 1,420 people in the Chikolongo community. When communities have access to piped water, wildlife is left to utilise the natural rivers and ponds, reducing human-wildlife conflict. This allows women and children additional time to participate in community development meetings.

IFAW has also repaired and rebuilt sections of an electrified boundary fence between the community and Liwonde National Park. The fence has stopped animals in search of water from destroying villagers' crops. Deaths from human-wildlife conflict in Liwonde has dropped from an average of three per month to none in the last seven years.

where we Roam from here

Room to Roam has already had a remarkable impact on the animals and people who live in these habitable lands, but there is still so much to be done. Every development is another life saved, another child who will get to experience the joy of growing up and seeing elephants. We can't wait to share the many future successes with you. Thank you so much for helping us with this life-changing project.

Photo: Julika Riegler / © IFAW

A herd of elephants walking across a secure clearing in Amboseli National Park, Kenya at sunset.

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