



Elephants



YOUR FIELD REPORT
SPRING 2023





As elephants roam over long distances to feed, they actively (but unwittingly) manage their habitat. Their actions help regenerate and restore forests

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Hello!

Welcome to your latest elephant update



Samson Lenjirr,
elephant coordinator,
WWF-Kenya

In the 32 years I've worked in conservation, I've seen a lot of changes in the Mara. The healthy ecosystems and abundant wildlife populations I see around me today

are largely thanks to the guardianship of the local Maasai people. In many areas, they're collaborating with tourism partners – and WWF – to manage this landscape more sustainably and use their traditional knowledge to amplify the impact of our conservation efforts. Setting aside their land for community conservancies is one way they help wildlife – and the wildlife helps them. Turn over to find out how conservancies work.

Mpaka wakati ujao

(This means 'until next time' in Swahili!)

MEET THE ADOPTION TEAM

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FIELD NOTES

COMMUNITY
CONSERVANCIES YOU
SUPPORT

STRONGER TOGETHER

Community
conservancies
protect wildlife
and help people



You're supporting community-led conservation in the Maasai Mara, so that local people can remain the stewards of wildlife for generations to come

Endless plains, abundant wildlife and breathtaking vistas – Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve is one of nature's masterpieces. The Maasai people have been its guardians for generations, grazing their animals alongside the wildlife.

Recently, pressures on the landscape have increased. The changing climate has made rainfall unpredictable, and long periods of drought have reduced grazing for livestock and wildlife, and led

to poor crop yields for farmers. As more land is fenced for agriculture, age-old wildlife migration routes are encroached upon, pushing people and animals closer together and increasing the risk of conflict.

To tackle these issues, we're supporting community-managed conservancies around the Maasai Mara. A conservancy is when local landowners combine their plots of land and work together to manage them in a sustainable way. By working with tourism operators, the community receives investment to develop or improve



Welcoming wildlife in
Siana conservancy



Managing livestock
to improve habitats

facilities in the conservancy, and other support, such as healthcare, education or advice on better grazing management. Decisions are taken collectively, and the development of ecotourism creates employment for the whole community, providing reliable, alternative sources of income.

In return, the local community set aside their land for wildlife, reduce grazing levels to prevent habitat degradation, remove fences and participate in conservation efforts such as preventing poaching. The results are remarkable. As the vegetation recovers, it attracts wildlife followed by rising numbers of tourists.

In 20 years, the number of conservancies in the Mara landscape has risen to 15, covering over 140,000 hectares – almost the same size as the Maasai Mara reserve's core protected area. We support the Mara Siana conservancy, which forms a critical link between the Mara reserve and other protected wildlife areas. We also work in the Oloisukut conservancy, which was created to buffer crops to the north of the Mara, where tensions with migrating elephants had escalated. Managed by the landowners, and supported by WWF, the conservancy now provides a safe haven and corridor for elephants to move freely between neighbouring conservancies.

Recognising that communities are the most important stewards of natural resources is critical to conservation success. Together, we can ensure a future where people and wildlife coexist and thrive.

Samson

WHO HAVE WE SPOTTED?



POLARIS

Polaris was seen browsing peacefully with another bull. He didn't seem to mind when our vehicle approached him – he's cool and confident!



INDY

Indy is the matriarch of her family herd. We last spotted her in Olaro conservancy, but we know she's also been roaming around Siana and Nkinehi conservancies.



CHELSEA

Recognisable by her uneven tusks and V-shaped notch on her right ear, Chelsea was seen feeding peacefully on acacia in a herd of six elephants.

David is a sociable
bull who makes good
use of community
conservancy lands



ECOSYSTEM ENGINEERS

For millions of years, elephants and their ancestors have been animal landscapers, playing a vital role in shaping habitats

The planet's biggest land mammals are inclined to put their considerable weight to good use, although their actions can look destructive. Their gargantuan appetites come with an uncompromisingly direct route to food. They crash heavy-footed through a forest, ripping down branches, barging over whole trees and eating huge amounts.

Yet these natural landscapers are essential in sustaining the habitats they occupy. If elephant numbers dwindle or they even disappear from an area, it has a devastating effect on a huge range of other wildlife. Their loss may even lead to local extinctions.

Plant a seed

So inefficient is an elephant's digestion that it must spend almost all of its waking hours eating. Elephants are megaherbivores – plant-eating mammals weighing over 1,000kg as adults. As such, they need to eat up to 150kg of food every day – equal to the contents of 360 tins of baked beans – and their diet is very varied, ranging from grasses, leaves and fruit to shrubs, bark and roots. However,

around half that food passes through their bodies undigested, resulting in dung that has the consistency of potting compost.

Elephant dung is therefore rich in viable seeds of many plants, including grasses and trees. As elephants roam and deposit dung, they act as seed scatterers. A forest study in the Ivory Coast found that 21 out of 71 plant species were adapted to having their seeds dispersed by elephants. One estimate suggests that at least a third of tree species in central African forests rely on elephants to spread their seeds.

Dig a pond

In dry conditions, elephants dig. They need to drink up to 225 litres of water each day, sometimes sucking up the whole amount in fewer than five minutes at a water hole. But when water is scarce, unlike other animals, an elephant has the tools to make a hollow in baked earth to find water, raking with its trunk or using its tusks as pick-axes. ▶

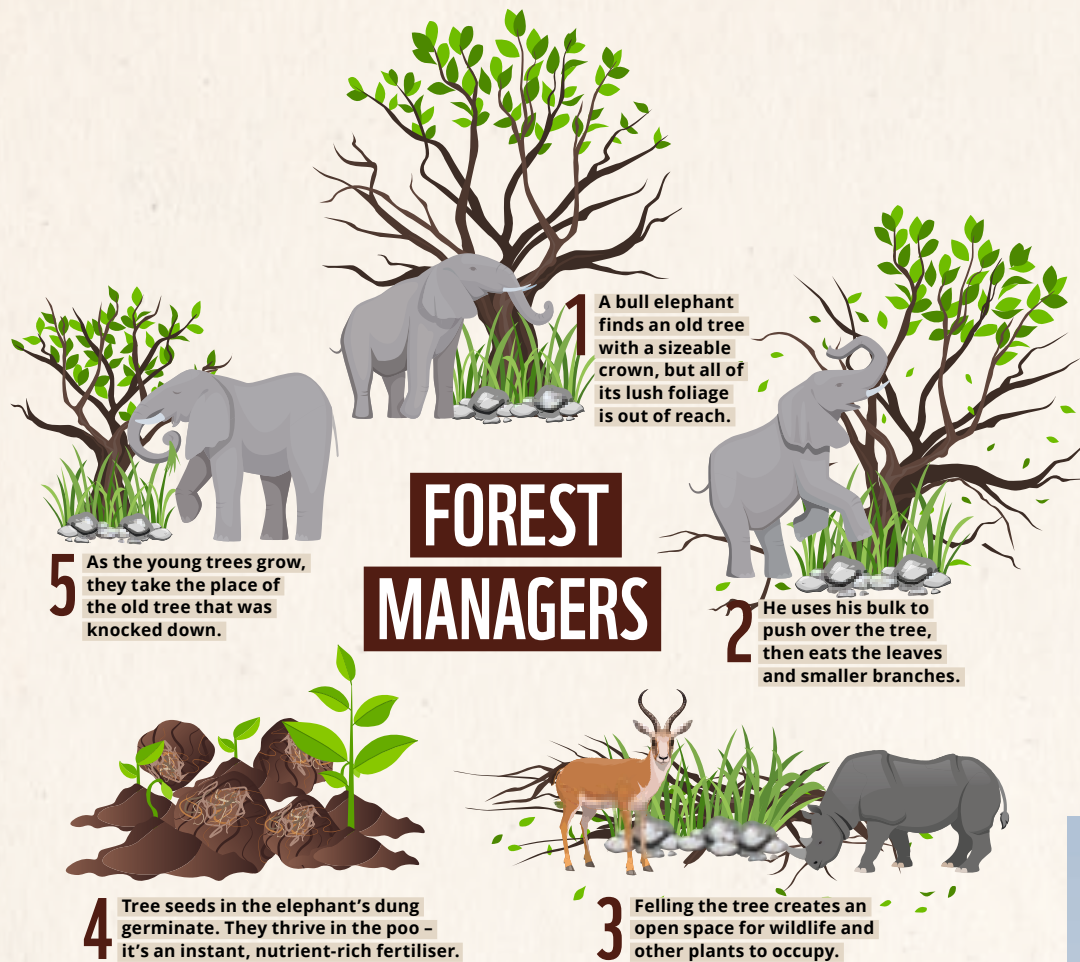
Elephants eat roots, grasses, fruit, bark and leafy branches. An adult elephant can consume up to 150kg of food in a day



A FROG'S FRIENDS

In Myanmar, Asian elephant footprints serve as important nurseries for frog tadpoles when water is scarce during the dry season. When multiple tracks combine to form a trench, they create an attractive breeding ground for females to lay their eggs. Elephant-footprint pools also provide a refuge for adult frogs and help link fragmented habitats.





FOREST MANAGERS

Other thirsty creatures benefit from elephant excavations, both in the savannah and wooded ecosystems. In closed forest, an elephant's deep footprint in soft ground may fill with water, and that pond can become a micro-habitat for frogs, dragonflies and other species.

Recycle a tree

When drought comes, elephants must change their diet, including eating the otherwise less palatable parts of trees. They'll strip a tree of its bark, smaller branches and twigs, and eat the lot.

One study in the Kalahari woodlands of southern Africa found that elephants ate more woody vegetation than all of the other large herbivores put together. And their wood-based dung recycles nutrients quickly, encouraging more plant growth in the woodland. If a bark-stripping elephant inadvertently kills a tree, that has a positive effect too, as it opens up opportunities for hole-nesting birds.

Make a path

How do medium-sized animals find their way through dense forest? Elephants

act as their pathfinders, ploughing through the vegetation, opening up routes that others can follow. But their role is much greater than simply creating forest veins and arteries. Their own requirements to survive, combined with sheer power, turn them into large-scale landscapers.

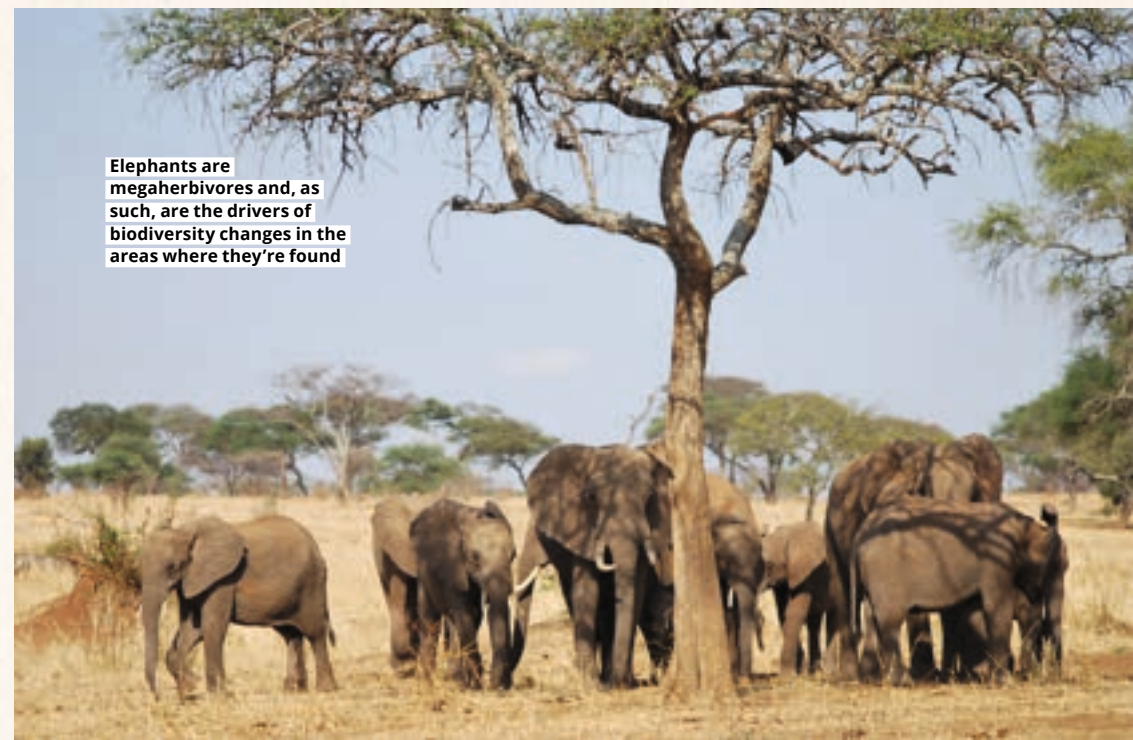
A dictionary will define savannah as 'a grassy plain with few trees'. Were it not for elephants clearing the bushy scrub

DID YOU KNOW?

When elephant-like species died out about 12,000 years ago, the loss of these seed-dispersing giants led to the extinction of several tree species.

that would otherwise dominate, this habitat would not have the balance of plain and tree cover that allows browsing animals (such as giraffes) and grazing animals (such as zebras and wildebeest) to thrive.

In tropical forests, elephants are nature's foresters. In bringing down trees, they create gaps and clearings in the canopy, resulting in a rich patchwork of different-aged trees. ■



Elephants are megaherbivores and, as such, are the drivers of biodiversity changes in the areas where they're found

FEELING THE HEAT

We're facing a climate emergency –
but it's not too late to reverse the damage

From floods and forest fires to record-breaking heatwaves, the impacts of climate change are already here – and they're only going

to get worse. Global temperatures are rising faster than at any point in human history. We need to do everything we possibly can to stop this, urgently, or the consequences will be even more devastating: food shortages; floods and storms becoming more severe and more frequent; tens of millions of people being forced from their homes because of heat, drought and rising sea levels; mass extinctions; natural wonders lost for ever.

We know the cause: burning fossil fuels such as oil, coal and gas releases carbon dioxide, which traps heat in the atmosphere. Destroying forests and other carbon-rich habitats adds to the problem.

But we know the solutions too. Cut greenhouse gas emissions drastically. Switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources such as wind and solar.

Use less energy, and use it more efficiently. Stop destroying natural ecosystems and start restoring them instead. With your support, we're calling on world leaders to make these changes.

The UK has promised to reduce its emissions and reach net zero by 2050, but we must act now. It's vital that UK governments take a lead on the big things – like ramping up renewables, insulating draughty homes, supporting climate-friendly farming, and improving transport systems so we rely less on cars. But changes in our own lifestyles can make a

difference too, from driving and flying less to eating a more plant-based diet.

Most of all, we need to treat climate change like the emergency it is – before it's too late.

**DO ONE
THING!**

Ditch the car
Transport is
the UK's biggest
source of
emissions. Walk,
scoot, cycle,
car-share or use
public transport
whenever you can.

Switching to clean energy is essential
to shift the world to a low-carbon
economy and stop pollution

**FIND OUT
MORE**



Download our My Footprint
app to find more ways to
help nature every day
www.org.uk/myfootprint

Find out
about the other
species you can help
with an adoption at
[wwf.org.uk/
adopt](http://wwf.org.uk/adopt)

JAGUARS

Thanks to our adopters, we've been supporting local communities in the Brazilian Amazon to find ways to coexist with jaguars. We brought local people together for a workshop to share ideas and tried-and-tested techniques to minimise attacks on livestock. Since the participants have followed the advice, they've reported no further conflicts with the big cats. Now they can help others by spreading the word.



ADOPTION ACTION

Thanks to adopters like you, we're protecting wildlife around the world. Here are some of the great things we've achieved together

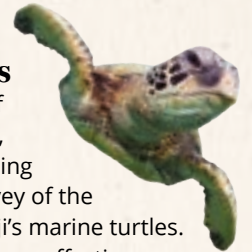
Rhinos

Thanks to our rhino adopters, we've helped build a new watch tower in Ruma National Park in western Kenya. The tower will enable rangers to see rhinos more easily in the park's thick vegetation and tall grass, and improve monitoring efforts to keep them safe. Rangers can also keep a lookout for any illegal or suspicious activity, and spot signs of bushfires as soon as they start, so that blazes can be tackled quickly.



Marine turtles

With the support of our turtle adopters, we've been continuing our three-year survey of the nesting habits of Fiji's marine turtles. Nesting surveys are an effective way to gauge the health of the population, and by counting the nests and eggs we find, and recording their locations and the condition of their nesting beaches, we will be better able to answer vital questions about these ancient mariners – and the threats they face.



Polar bears

Our adopters have been helping keep polar bears and people safe in Canada. In the town of Churchill, polar bears that get dangerously close to homes in their search for food are taken to a holding facility where they stay until the sea ice freezes and they can be safely released. Thanks to satellite ear tags funded by adopters, we're now able to track where relocated bears go so we can better help them.



Mountain gorillas

We've been celebrating some of the newest arrivals in Volcanoes National Park at Kwigita Izina – Rwanda's annual gorilla-naming ceremony. Twenty mountain gorillas have been born in the park since the last ceremony. New births are always a cause for celebration, but they're particularly precious among an endangered population. This growth is possible thanks to adopters like you.





IN YOUR SUMMER

Field report

Following ancient
migration routes

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For a future where people and nature thrive | [wwf.org.uk](https://www.wwf.org.uk)

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FSC logo

As well as helping to safeguard elephants, you support our other vital work to help protect our beautiful planet and its wildlife. Thank you.

All information correct at time of printing (February 2023)