

YOUR HELPING HAND

If you've been looking for a worthwhile reason to go on safari, this is it

For the last 50 years, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has been monitoring populations of some 5500 species around the world to inform their *Living Planet* reports. Their latest overview of the natural health of our planet, published in October, makes for sobering reading.

Globally, the populations of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish and amphibians included in WWF's survey have declined on average by a deeply concerning 73 per cent since the survey started. Africa, described as a unique region due to its "significant numbers of large mammals and incredibly rich biodiversity" hasn't fared well — its populations have diminished by 76 per cent, the second highest figure after that of Latin America and the Caribbean, with a

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staggering 95 per cent decline.

Habitat loss, primarily from agriculture, is the dominant culprit worldwide, with overexploitation, invasive species and disease, climate change and pollution also playing a part. The report highlights

serious areas of concern that are reaching a global tipping point, including the mass die-off of coral reefs, the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, and the melting of Antarctic ice sheets.

For all these alarming figures, the situation is not hopeless, thought it is urgent. The analysis is unequivocal in saying that the next five years are critical to stop what it calls "the downhill slope of runaway tipping points", calling on governments to step up and embrace a "transformation of our food, energy and finance systems."

The good news is that the report confirms that conservation efforts have in fact helped to stabilise or increase many species' populations and that more, and better,

conservation activity is needed.

Tourism is a significant source of funding for projects across Africa, helping also to safeguard habitats and create employment. So, now is the time to get planning your next trip — you will be doing your bit to help!

WWF (2024) LIVING PLANET REPORT 2024 – A SYSTEM IN PERIL. WWF, SWITZERLAND. FOR MORE ON HOW YOUR SAFARI HELPS, READ TRAVEL AFRICA ISSUE 90.



Beneficial. Tourism has driven a revival in mountain gorilla numbers in Uganda and Rwanda

FOREVER FREE

2024 sees Born Free, the renowned conservation and animal welfare charity, celebrating its 40th anniversary. Sue Watt spoke to co-founder Will Travers about its successes and challenges... and the future

Q What changes have you seen in conservation over 40 years?

The situation has become more acute: in 1984, the world's human population stood at 4.8 billion; today it is over 8.1 billion. The consequence is massively increased pressure on natural habitat and the viability of wild species, accentuated by practices such as the international trade in wildlife products.

Despite this, there have been successes. Born Free aims to reduce human-wildlife conflict, promote sustainable,

non-lethal resource use, protect ecosystems and encourage coexistence. We helped persuade the international community to ban the legal ivory trade in 1989. We've engaged in landscape level conservation with communities to protect natural habitats in Kenya and Cameroon, home to a multitude of species and humans.

Q What are the greatest challenges facing African conservation?

With Africa's human population set to reach 2.5 billion by 2050,

there will be intense pressure on nature's life support systems, made worse by global warming and extreme weather conditions.

Africa's conservation successes so far have been achieved by a remarkable confluence of efforts from communities, governments, NGOs and others. Whether that alliance can mitigate future events remains to be seen.

Born Free's focus will be on the landscapes in which we work, such as Kenya with our human-wildlife conflict mitigation strategies and helping establish Village Savings and Loans Associations to economically empower communities, relieving pressure on wild resources. And I hope that, with other partners, we will take on the rehabilitation of Kora National Park. It's part of Meru Conservation Area where the lion man, George Adamson (of the *Born Free* film), is buried.

Q What advice would you offer readers when planning their travels?

We know people will still travel, which helps to increase cultural understanding. So, we need to consider:

1. The environmental footprint of the places we stay and their use of natural resources.
2. Whether those places give back to communities, to environmental

protection, species conservation and wild animal welfare.

3. If the companies we book with, and the airlines, demonstrate a clear commitment to best practice and engage with communities to drive sustainability.

Q What have been Born Free's three greatest achievements in Africa?

- Choosing just three is challenging, but:
1. Helping to end the legal international ivory trade.
 2. Involvement in landscape-level compassionate conservation in Cameroon and Kenya, engaging and empowering local communities and bringing additional benefits.
 3. Establishing wildlife rescue centres and sanctuaries, such as those at Shamwari in South Africa, and Ensessa Kotteh in Ethiopia. Every life matters.

Q What are you most proud of in Born Free's work?

Our values are tenacity, courage, determination and compassion. Our motto, exemplified by my late father, Bill Travers, and my mother, Dame Virginia McKenna, is 'never give up, never give in'. There is no greater honour than to have led this extraordinary organisation and its amazing people for four decades, for the animals.

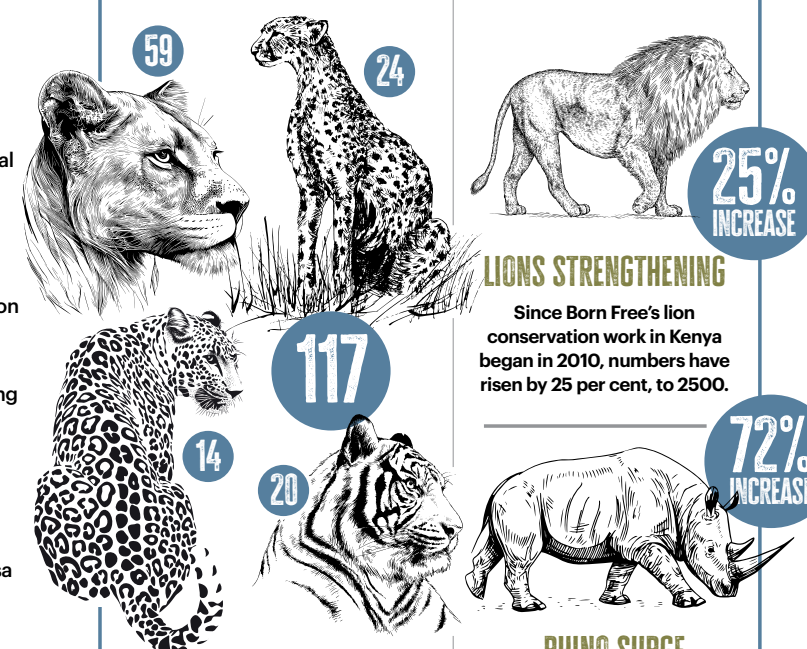


PROTECTING ELEPHANTS

Since helping to secure an end to the international ivory trade in 1989, Born Free has helped Kenya's elephant population more than double, to 36,000.

STOPPING SUFFERING

A UK campaign saw an end to captive dolphin exploitation in 1993, then wild animal circuses in 2020.



BIG CAT RESCUE

117 big cats (59 lions, 20 tigers, 14 leopards, 24 cheetahs) have been rescued from zoos, circuses and the illegal pet trade.

RHINO SURGE

Numbers of rhinos in Kenya have increased by 72 per cent to 1811 (938 black, 873 white), since Born Free started its rhino programme in 2014.

TIGERS ON THE UP

Born Free began a tiger conservation focus in 2004. Since then, numbers have more than doubled, to some 3682 animals.

MORE THAN DOUBLED

40 YEARS OF WILD ACTION

