

TEN

GARDIANS





The 10 Guardians

Over the years, we brought you the 10 Women Series, followed by the 10 Morans Series. And now, we present the 10 Guardian Series—ten stories about wildlife guardians from across the NRT landscape!

From rangers to wildlife vets, rhino caregivers to elephant protectors, these are the brave men and women on the ground in community conservancies, protecting wildlife and securing their future.



Taking care of wildlife is something close to my heart. I am happy that my little contribution is alleviating wildlife suffering.



Dr. Stephen Chege
The Vet Saving Injured Wildlife

No day is the same for veterinarian Dr. Stephen Chege. Working across the northern Kenya landscape, 'Chege' as he is known, has had an extraordinary patient list: from elephants with gunshot wounds to lions with infections, and once a black rhino who needed life-saving eye surgery. Thanks to support from San Diego Zoo Global, Chege's area of operation now focuses predominantly on NRT member community conservancies, enabling him to respond to emergency wildlife incidents, support the translocation of endangered species, and carry out proactive wildlife disease surveillance and conservation work in communities, including domestic animal vaccination campaigns.

This is a far cry from his previous job in Abu Dhabi, where he worked as a zoo's senior veterinarian, attending to the medical needs of captive wildlife and upholding welfare standards.

"I returned home because of my passion for Kenyan wildlife. I want my work to have a positive impact on future generations," says Chege.

Working closely with the communities to identify and treat wildlife in trouble brings great satisfaction to Chege. He admits that he has had his fair share of heartbreak, however. Even though he has been a veterinarian for over twenty years, he still grieves when he sees wildlife die right in his hands. "Inevitably, there are animals whose condition is beyond my help, which is hard. Every day is a learning curve," he says. Like all vets, Chege often needs to make big decisions about a course of action for an animal in need—decisions that don't always have sure outcomes. His work comes with much pressure, and Chege has learnt to trust his instincts.

Recently, he was part of a mission to rescue an abandoned elephant calf who had lost a third of his trunk to a hyena attack. Since so much of his trunk was missing (and an elephant's trunk is its most important tool

for feeding, drinking, and exploring), was it humane to keep this little calf alive? There was much debate amongst the rescue party, but they decided to give the baby elephant a fighting chance. With Chege's guidance, the calf was provided with dedicated round-the-clock care—meeting his medical, emotional and nutritional needs. His wounds have healed well, he's taken to the milk bottle and now enjoys his playtime. "It is amazing how his wounds have healed. We don't know what his future holds so we take each day as it comes, hoping for the best," Chege elaborates.

As well as responding to incidents, Chege also works with communities to take proactive conservation measures, such as rabies and livestock disease vaccinations, that safeguard community livelihoods and wildlife. In Ishaqbini Hirola Community Conservancy, for example, Chege organized a campaign to vaccinate over 60,000 head of community cattle, sheep, and goats to prevent diseases that threatened livestock, and protect the critically endangered hirola antelope in the area, which are susceptible to the same illnesses.

"The positivity that came from the community during this exercise was tremendous and this is a massive win for hirola," says Chege.

Today, with the massive investment of his energy, skills and emotions, Chege is proud to be part of a grass-roots conservation movement that puts indigenous communities at the forefront of endangered species conservation.

"Taking care of wildlife is something close to my heart. I am happy that my little contribution is alleviating wildlife suffering." – Dr. Stephen Chege, NRT Veterinarian





I've been entrusted with the care of the rhinos by the (Sera) community. I feel honored to serve.



Lkilyio Lekanaya
The Rhino Guardian

It's not every day you hear about a conservation veteran who has dedicated practically his entire career to safeguarding an endangered member of the Big Five.

For Lkilyio Lekanaya, a senior ranger and monitoring specialist at Sera Rhino Sanctuary—East Africa's first and only community-owned black rhino sanctuary, reporting to work at 5 a.m. daily to begin his patrols is fulfilling.

"I love what I do. I wouldn't want any other job," Lekanaya says. He began his career as a ranger in Sera Community Conservancy, an NRT member conservancy. While at Sera, Lekanaya was offered the chance to participate in a one-and-a-half-month rhino monitoring training, which he undertook, increasing his knowledge. One fine day, while busy at work, Lekanaya received news that Sera Conservancy was recruiting rhino monitoring specialists for the Sanctuary. This was an opportunity to put what he had learnt into practice, and Lekanaya jumped at it. He applied for the role and was hired, bringing his expertise as a ranger with him.

Lekanaya now leads a team of rangers protecting black rhinos. He assigns each of them a rhino (and a calf, if it has one) to monitor regularly. Lekanaya and the rangers protect the rhinos, track their movements and ensure they have enough forage and water. One of the most unique and fascinating aspects of rhino monitoring is spotting and caring for expectant rhinos. Once the rhino's calving date has been determined, the designated ranger gives her special attention. Lekanaya and his team know all the rhinos under their care by name and appearance.

Why put his life on the line for rhinos? "I've been entrusted with the care of the rhinos by the (Sera) community. I feel honored to serve." Lekanaya responds. The black rhinos attract tourists to Sera Conservancy.

Tourism provides much-needed income to the community and directly benefits community members by creating job opportunities.

Within Sera Rhino Sanctuary, Lekanaya's Swahili moniker is 'Mzee wa Kifaru', loosely translating to 'The Rhino Guardian'. His colleagues joke that when he retires, the Sanctuary should celebrate him by giving him a black rhino calf to rear at his home.

Thanks to the valiant efforts of Lekanaya and his team, Sera Rhino Sanctuary's black rhinos have a bright future, and Sera Community Conservancy is pioneering the community-driven conservation of species on the verge of extinction in East Africa and possibly all of Africa.

The impact of the Sera Rhino Sanctuary is made possible by support from Fauna and Flora International (FFI), the San Diego Zoo Alliance (SDZA), World Wildlife Fund Kenya (WWF-Kenya), Save The Elephants (STE), Save The Rhino, Saruni, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), The Nature Conservancy, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Tusk Trust, Connected Conservation, the European Union (EU), Don Cotton, Beatrice W. Karanja, Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the French Facility for Global Environment (FFEM) and the Rainforest Trust.





Community members now understand the importance of protecting this species.



Emily Loldepe
The Beisa Oryx Guardian



"This is a man's job—do you think you can do it as a woman?"

Emily Loldepe vividly recalls these startling words directed at her by a tribesman in November 2018. At the time, she had just been appointed as the new Rangelands Coordinator of Nakuprat-Gotu Community Conservancy, home to the Borana and the Turkana, who historically are semi-nomadic pastoralists. It was the first time a woman had filled the position. But the skeptical remarks hurled at her never deterred Emily from actualizing her dream of serving her community through conservation.

As the Rangelands Coordinator, Emily oversees and manages the implementation of all rangelands-related activities in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy. She also invests a significant amount of time in organizing and attending grassroots-level awareness meetings, where she engages with community groups, such as charcoal burners, grazing committees, and camel herders, whose activities affect the health of the Conservancy's rangelands. But perhaps the most intriguing part of Emily's job is her involvement with the Beisa Oryx Project.

The Project, which is supported by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Save Our Species and co-funded by the European Union, was launched in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy in May 2021, to mobilize the local community to monitor and protect the beisa oryx, which is listed by IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species as 'endangered'.

An aerial survey conducted in Nakuprat-Gotu in 2021 revealed the Conservancy has hundreds of beisa oryx individuals. The Conservancy also hosts numerous wildlife, including Grévy's zebras, giraffes, ostriches, lions, elephants, and various bird species.

Emily regularly organizes awareness meetings to sensitize the community on the importance of co-existing harmoniously with the beisa oryxes roaming freely in the Conservancy. Ever since she was a child, she had admired the beisa oryx because of its unrivaled beauty and majesty. "Growing up, my friends and I would pretend to be wildlife. The boys would be lions, and the girls would be beisa oryxes. We would smear mud or ashes on our bodies to mimic the appearance of these two species. The boys would then chase us girls like a lion would an oryx. It was so much fun," she fondly recollects.

Emily has been spearheading awareness campaigns against logging and charcoal burning and educating the community on how these activities destroy the beisa oryx's habitat and increase the community's carbon footprint. "The excessive logging and burning of charcoal degrade wildlife habitats, and in the long run, strains the Conservancy's finances, as more funds are pumped into rehabilitating the degraded areas," she elaborates.

Emily also collaborates with the Conservancy's Grazing Committee and the village-based grazing committees, providing support to facilitate the development of grazing plans. A well-structured grazing system not only ensures that the community's livestock are well-fed throughout the year but also helps preserve forage for the beisa oryx, which recently have had to compete with livestock for pasture.

Previously, the traditional beliefs held by the communities in Nakuprat-Gotu combined with a lack of awareness posed a threat to the beisa oryx. "Some community members believed that if they placed a beisa oryx's skin or horns in their house, they would attract good luck," Emily explains. Regrettably, during that period many beisa oryxes were killed for their meat, skin, and horns. This practice is now non-existent, thanks to Emily's relentless sensitization efforts. "Community members now understand the importance of protecting this species. Nowadays, when beisa oryxes stray into people's homesteads, the issue is immediately reported to me, or the Conservancy's administration, for action," adds Emily.

Her work, however, has not been without its challenges. During some awareness meetings with charcoal burners, for instance, she experienced opposition from groups that make money selling charcoal. Emily's efforts have also been hampered by fear-inducing insecurity incidents in the region, such as cattle rustling and the subsequent retaliatory attacks. These incidents also endanger beisa oryxes, which get caught in the crossfire between armed combatants.

Emily's success in creating awareness about community-led beisa oryx conservation and her passion for her work has endeared her to community members. While she is committed to augmenting her efforts, she finds joy and encouragement in the progress made in breaking the gender stereotype in her community through conservation.

Many parents in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy are determined that their girls, who previously only stayed at home to assist with chores, should receive a good education and someday be like Emily. Emily has undoubtedly earned that badge of honor.

Disclaimer: This publication was developed with the financial support of the European Union through IUCN Save Our Species. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Northern Rangelands Trust and do not necessarily reflect the views of IUCN or the European Union.



It is not unusual to see Mohammed conducting patrols during his leisure time! As the Head of Security, he never leaves anything to chance.

Ahmed Maalim,
Ishaqbini Conservancy Manager



Mohammed Ismail

The Hirola Guardian

In Ijara's shrubby woodlands in Garissa County lives the hirola, a peculiar, rare antelope.

The hirola, which derives its name from the Somali word 'arawla' because of its light brown coat, is the world's most endangered antelope. It is often referred to as 'the four-eyed antelope', due to the two large pre-orbital glands located beneath its eyes that give it a distinct look. After nearly being wiped out by a rinderpest outbreak in the 1970s, its population recovery has been slow but steady. However, this does not perturb Mohammed Ismail, who has devoted himself to protecting some of the world's remaining hirola. Mohammed, has worked in the Ishaqbini Hirola Community Conservancy as a Senior Warden for over 12 years. He oversees and coordinates all security operations in the Conservancy and directs a team of young rangers in carrying out wildlife monitoring exercises and anti-poaching patrols within the Conservancy.

The Conservancy hosts about 25% of the world's hirola population. Mohammed supported his community in establishing the Ishaqbini Hirola Sanctuary in 2012 in an initiative aimed at bolstering hirola conservation efforts. At the time, extreme drought, predation, habitat loss, and poaching threatened the critically endangered hirola. The Sanctuary is also home to reticulated giraffes, buffaloes, lesser kudu, and other wildlife.

Mohammed's passion for conservation and diligence inspires many in the community, including Ahmed Maalim, the Conservancy Manager. "It is not unusual to see Mohammed conducting patrols during his leisure time! As the Head of Security, he never leaves anything to chance," says Maalim. "Mohammed is an outgoing person who eagerly shares his community's traditional wildlife beliefs with locals and visitors, endearing him to all. The young people in the community see him as a role model," adds Maalim.

Mohammed's job is not a walk in the park. His work entails regular patrols in the wild while battling the sweltering heat of an unforgiving sun. Every day while performing his duties he puts his life on the line

due to the Conservancy's proximity to the Kenya-Somalia border, the rendezvous point of the Al-Shabaab's infamous insurgents. Additionally, Mohammed has had close run-ins with poachers targeting the Ishaqbini community's wildlife, but none of these challenges deter him.

Mohammed and the Ishaqbini community regard themselves as the hirola's guardians. They have vowed to safeguard this unique species, and their collaborative efforts have paid off. In early 2021, the Ishaqbini Hirola Sanctuary had approximately 140 hirola individuals marking a 190% rise in hirola numbers since its establishment. In the same year, 64 hirola were rewilded into the Conservancy's expanse to ease population pressure in the Sanctuary. The Sanctuary's success is a source of encouragement for Mohammed and other selfless individuals in the community who are committed to conserving endangered wildlife.





I never thought I would see these animals, let alone care for them!



Charles Lekatai,
The Giraffe Guardian



Charles Lekatai's grandfather was the best storyteller in the village. He would regularly tell stories of bravery and adventure, history and fantasy, to a captive audience of his grandchildren and their friends.

But one tale captured the imagination of a young Charles. It depicted a strange, long-necked spotted animal that roamed the rangelands surrounding the village, feeding on trees and shrubs. The 'Baringo giraffe', it was called. But years of inter-tribal conflict and hunting for its skin, tail and meat had wiped it out, Charles was told. He would probably never see one. "That was the saddest story from my grandfather," he says, adding, "The way he described the animal made me wish I had seen it."

Charles is now a ranger commander at Ruko Community Conservancy. His team's top priorities include monitoring and protecting the Baringo giraffes that have lived at the Conservancy since 2012.

The return of the Rothschild's giraffe (also known as the 'Baringo' giraffe after Lake Baringo, where they once thrived) to Ruko Conservancy, epitomizes the unwavering commitment of the Il Chamus and Pokot-Ruko's indigenous communities—in using conservation as an instrument for peace and economic growth. Established to put an end to years of conflict, Ruko Community Conservancy was Baringo County's first NRT member.

Ruko's communities' success in promoting peace, good governance, and sustainable natural resources management was so great that in 2012 they partnered with NRT, Save Giraffes Now, the Kenya Wildlife Service, USAID, The Nature Conservancy, the Baringo County Government, and many others to reintroduce eight Baringo giraffes to the area, nearly 50 years since their disappearance. The eight were hailed as a symbol of peace and generated much-needed revenue for the communities.

Recently, the giraffes became marooned on an island in Lake Baringo after the lake's water level rose, cutting off their peninsula home from the mainland. Therefore, Ruko Conservancy constructed a Sanctuary on the

mainland to which the giraffes were translocated using a custom-built barge dubbed the 'GiRaft.' Charles and his team were the giraffes' guardians before the historic translocation. They brought in supplementary food and minerals (the island's browse was insufficient), sprayed the giraffes to keep parasites at bay, and provided regular updates to veterinary and conservation teams.

"I never thought I would see these animals, let alone care for them!" says Charles.

Years before he became a ranger, Charles' livestock were stolen in a revenge attack, which were common in the area at the time. He remained with no other means of supporting his family. His motivation for becoming a ranger was to promote peace while also earning a living.

Now he can provide for his family and pay for his children's education.

However, the job presents physical and emotional challenges, and he has experienced some heartbreaking moments while working as a giraffe guardian in the difficult terrain he operates. In 2013, two male giraffes died of natural causes, and in 2018, Charles arrived at his station to find that a calf whose birth had been the cause of great joy had died.

As a result of the supplementary feeding, the giraffes have grown accustomed to Charles and his team, who have earned their trust. "Every morning, I enjoy rubbing their fur. This allows me to examine whether they are healthy or not," explains Charles.

During his free time, Charles raises awareness about giraffe conservation amongst the communities and school-going children and facilitates community meetings and school trips to the island.

"When it's time for me to retire, I hope that my son or one of my relatives will take on the mantle because I don't want these giraffes to disappear again as they did during my grandfather's time," Charles concludes.





Ahmed Mohammed,
The Sea Turtle Guardian



I hope to lessen the threats these sea turtles face and prevent them from becoming extinct by raising awareness and protecting their nests.



For Ahmed Ali Mohammed, a ranger at Kiunga Community Conservancy, releasing baby sea turtles into the ocean is one of his happiest moments.

This journey begins when a nesting female turtle comes to the island at night, digs a nest in the warm sand with her back flippers, and lays her eggs—sometimes up to 100. She buries them, hoping that her babies will hatch in two months.

Unfortunately, as she slowly drags herself back to the ocean, predators, including crabs, porcupines, monitor lizards, and human beings, are already scrambling over her eggs, digging for a meal. This is where Ahmed's role as a sea turtle guardian comes into play. Every morning, he leads a team of dedicated rangers in patrolling the beaches to record and monitor these turtle nests, which they find by following turtle tracks in the sand.

If the nests are along the tideline, the rangers carefully translocate the eggs further up the beach to ensure they don't get washed away. They place the eggs in a new hole and cover them with a wire mesh to prevent predators from digging them out. They then add sand on top to allow the eggs to incubate. For daily monitoring, Ahmed and his team record the GPS coordinates of every nest they find or build.

"I hope to lessen the threats these sea turtles face and prevent them from becoming extinct by raising awareness and protecting their nests," says Ahmed, who is also the Kiunga Community Conservancy Warden. When the baby turtles hatch, Ahmed and his team are usually present to help them begin their new journey to the ocean safely and avoid becoming prey to hungry predators.

Why go to all this trouble? Kiunga Conservancy is an important breeding ground for green turtles which are some of the largest sea turtles and are classified as 'endangered' by the IUCN. Green turtles weigh between 70 and 180 kgs and can grow to 31-47 inches long. They are herbivores and migrate long distances to find food before returning to their breeding sites. Green turtles are threatened by hunting, egg harvesting, drowning in fishing gear, and the loss of their nesting sites.

In addition to guarding the nests, Ahmed leads the rescue and release missions of sea turtles entangled by hooks and fishing gear abandoned by fishers. He has assisted in releasing several sea turtles caught as bycatch.

Sea turtles are hunted for meat and oil, and some are killed for mythological and medicinal reasons. Ahmed and his team frequently raise awareness in community meetings about the illegal hunting of sea turtles or their nests, urging communities to protect this species to ensure its survival. Sea turtles play an important

role in the ocean ecosystem, helping to maintain healthy seagrass beds and coral reefs on which Kiunga's fisher communities rely.

"The Kiunga community understands the importance of a healthy marine environment. Women and youth in Mkokoni Village are participating in beach clean-up exercises to collect plastic, which if uncollected chokes these turtles and other sea creatures," says Ahmed. So far, Kiunga's community members have collected thousands of kilograms of plastic from the beaches and nearshore waters.

Kiunga's nesting beaches are flourishing because of Ahmed's efforts, with rangers currently recording up to three new nests per day. Five of the world's seven sea turtle species, including the green, loggerhead, hawksbill, olive ridley, and leatherback, have been sighted by the rangers during their daily patrols.





I'm like a mom to him. I know when he's hungry, sleepy, on edge, or ill.



Salome Lemalasia, The Rhino Caregiver



When Sera Community Conservancy offered Salome Lemalasia a position as a rhino calf caregiver, quite understandably, she was hesitant at first. The prospect of looking after a wild animal with a reputation for being hostile toward humans didn't appeal to her.

But Salome's fears were dispelled after she accepted the job offer and met Loijipu. The young black rhino was 18 months old at the time. Little Loijipu followed Salome around, reluctant to leave her side. Around her, he was himself, but around the other rhino keepers in the Conservancy, he was shy. Salome quickly realized that she held a responsibility towards the adorable little fellow as he had chosen her as his new mom.

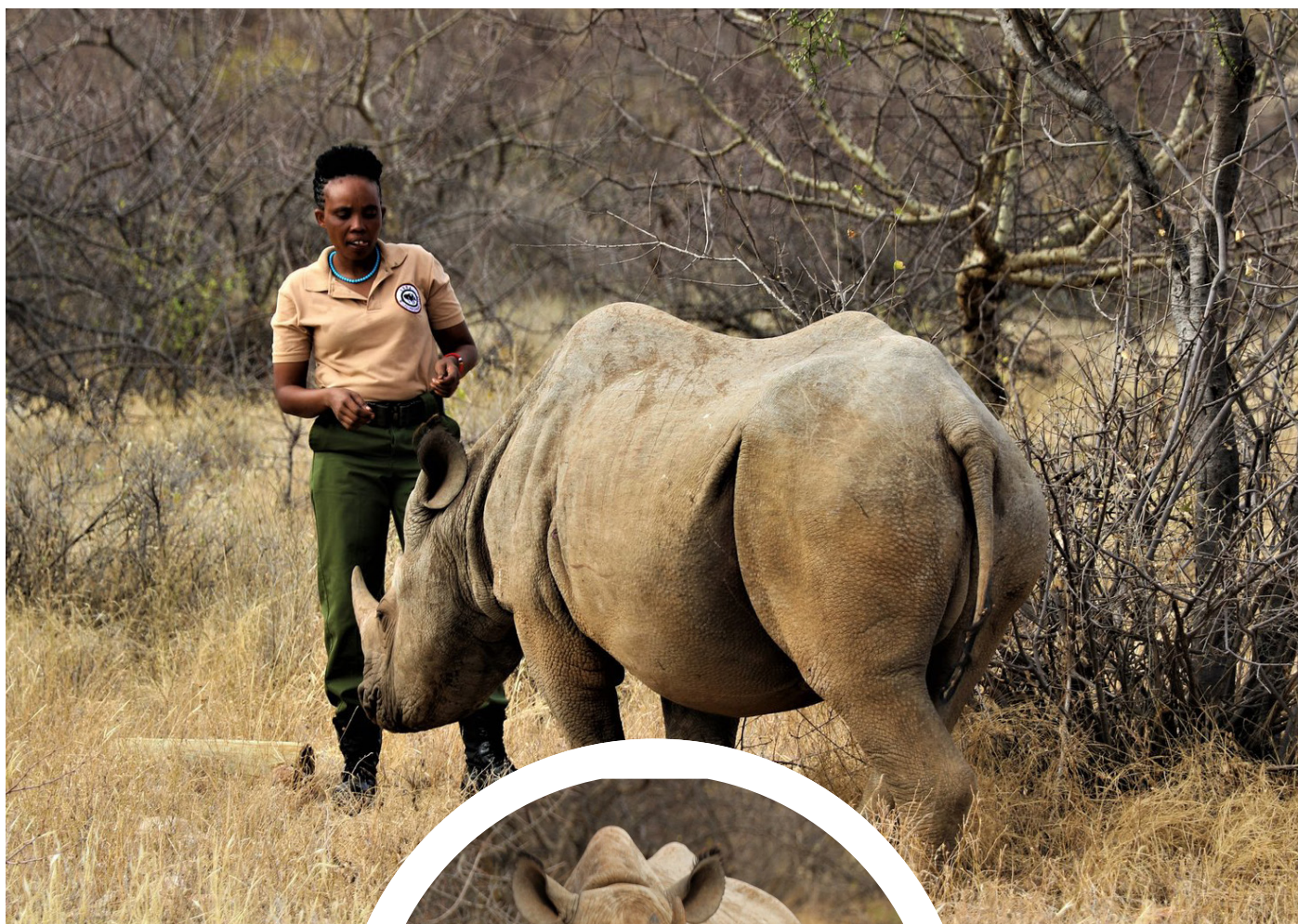
Loijipu's natural mother abandoned him 48 hours after his birth in February 2017, when a team of researchers went too close to the pair and frightened them. Sera Community Conservancy, where this incident occurred, entrusted Loijipu to the care of Reteti Elephant Sanctuary in Namunyak Community Conservancy until 2018, when he matured and was translocated back to Sera. Upon his arrival, Sera Community Conservancy members gave him a colorful welcome. Salome has taken care of him since his return to Sera, which is currently home to several black rhinos.

Salome and Loijipu have formed an inseparable bond. "I'm like a mom to him. I know when he's hungry, sleepy, on edge, or ill," says Salome. She has to stay close to him to monitor him daily. She also assists veterinarians in administering drugs to him when he is unwell. Interestingly, when Loijipu misbehaves, he is disciplined by his 'mom'. "Sometimes, when we have visitors, he becomes naughty and attempts to charge at them. I scold him, and he toes the line," Salome explains.

Loijipu, whose name means 'the one who follows' in Samburu, mainly stays in his fenced enclosure for his safety. Occasionally he is allowed to roam outside of it, usually in Salome's company.

Loijipu's wild instincts have now fully developed, particularly his sense of hearing and smell. He distinguishes Salome from other rangers and visitors using his olfactory senses. When the two are out in the wild together, he grunts and stamps his feet to warn Salome of approaching wildlife.

Salome's work isn't for the faint-hearted. During the day, she battles the Samburu rangelands' scorching heat, and at night, she wakes up several times to check on Loijipu. Add this to the ever-present danger of Loijipu venturing too far from his enclosure and being attacked by grown rhinos, and it's all enough to make anyone want to give up, but Salome doesn't. Her love for Loijipu keeps her going. She is a true heroine of community-led conservation.





From employment to education scholarships to community development projects, we have all witnessed the benefits of conservation.



Stephen Lenantoiye,
The Grevy's Zebra Guardian



It's been more than 19 years now, but the gunshot sound still lingers in Stephen Lenantoiye's mind. This was not a usual robbery incident, or a shootout between warriors during a cattle raid—both of which Stephen was accustomed to at that time.

These shots were aimed at five innocent Grevy's zebras grazing on the plains alongside Stephen's family's cattle.

He recalls not only the terrifying sound but also the sight of a foal fleeing for its life after its mother was killed. "I was gutted. Being young when it happened, I couldn't reprimand the perpetrator. I also didn't fully grasp the importance of wildlife conservation at the time," he explains.

That incident became etched in Stephen's memory, and when his community formed Westgate Community Conservancy, he knew he wanted to be a part of it.

After working his way up the ranks, Stephen now leads a team of conservancy rangers, who monitor Grevy's zebras during their daily patrols and collaborate with the Kenya Wildlife Service and local authorities to build peace and improve security for the wildlife and people of Westgate, which is home to many Grevy's zebras. A large part of his team's remit is to monitor the numbers and movements of Westgate's Grevy's zebra in collaboration with partners such as San Diego Zoo and the Grevy's Zebra Trust.

Stephen uses NRT's bespoke Conservancy Management and Monitoring System (CoMMS) to transmit the data he and his team collect while on patrol into a central database, enabling Westgate and partners to plan conservation measures.

Historically, Grevy's zebras were widespread across northern Kenya. But their numbers have declined due to poaching, habitat loss, civil unrest in the 1970s, and competition for pasture and water with both livestock and people. They are listed as endangered and in Kenya are found in Samburu, Isiolo, Marsabit, Laikipia, and Meru Counties.

The Grevy's zebras prefer to live and breed in the plains of Moti and Naibelibeli in Westgate, but now also use the patchwork of community conservancies to safely migrate up to Samburu National Reserve, sometimes crossing over to neighboring Isiolo County in search of pasture.

Stephen, who calls himself a Grevy's guardian, says that habitat loss, unplanned human settlement, and drought are significant threats to the species. Therefore, he raises awareness in the community about the importance of carefully managing the plains where the animals breed during the rainy season, preserving the zebras' habitat, and promoting sustainable pastoralism.

"Human populations in the region have increased, and people are randomly settling, occupying wildlife corridors and habitats where there were previously no settlements," Stephen shares.

Westgate Conservancy launched a rangelands management plan to ensure adequate forage for wildlife and livestock. Through this plan, its communities work together to clear invasive plant species on their land, re-seed bare land with grass seeds, and plan sustainable grazing practices.

"The rangelands management plan along with good security is benefitting the Grevy's zebra," Stephen says. "During the rainy season, a group of more than 300 gather in the plains and within the core conservation areas," he proudly adds.

When the nearby Ewaso Nyiro River runs dry, Stephen leads his ranger team in digging shallow wells in the riverbed to help wildlife find water.

"From employment to education scholarships to community development projects, we have all witnessed the benefits of conservation. Now that I know the importance of preserving wildlife, I have a duty to educate my community on the need to protect these animals," Stephen concludes.





By educating our communities on the importance of mangroves, they help restore, conserve and protect them.



Sophia Abdalla,
The Mangrove Guardian



Fishing is the primary source of income for communities in Kenya's coastal region. Mangrove forests provide critical habitats for the marine life that drives this economy, preventing erosion, filtering pollutants and stabilizing the coastline ecosystem.

Across the world, thousands of acres of mangroves have been cut down to pave way for farming and harvesting of timber and charcoal, threatening fishing livelihoods.

Sophia Abdalla, a ranger from Pate Marine Community Conservancy (PMCC), an NRT member community conservancy in Lamu on Kenya's north coast, is all too familiar with this reality.

She grew up observing how the gradual logging of mangrove trees whittled away her family's income. Sophia, now a ranger radio operator, protects mangroves from loggers and usually works with a team of rangers to raise awareness in her community about the importance of preserving the Conservancy's mangrove forests.

Extensive logging and over-harvesting of mangroves for fuel wood and timber production have left part of Pate Island's shoreline degraded and unstable.

Lamu remains the most densely forested stretch of Kenya's coast, but regrettably, nearly 40% of its mangrove areas are now degraded. This has resulted in local communities, led by women, conducting campaigns to restore and conserve the mikoko (Swahili for mangroves) in and around Pate since these trees are the keystone of the coastal ecosystem, providing breeding grounds for fish and protecting the shoreline.

"By educating our communities on the importance of mangroves, they help restore, conserve and protect them," says Sophia.

Sophia and her colleagues conduct mangrove monitoring twice weekly and work with women volunteers to remove debris and plant new seedlings in degraded areas in several villages including Mtangawanda, Pate, Faza, Kizingitini, Siyu, and Andao.

So far, the communities have restored several hectares of forest cover by planting thousands of mangrove trees in partnership with NRT, the Kenya Forest Service (KFS), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute, and the Lamu County Government, with the goal of restoring 35,000 hectares in five years. These efforts have increased community members' income from fishing (as mangroves help preserve marine habitats), reduced logging, and generated community and partner support for mangrove conservation.





If my team and I succeed in protecting the pangolin and ensuring its existence, future generations will be able to see it and not merely learn about it as some sort of mythical creature.



Jackson Poghismo,
The Pangolin Guardian



Believed to be the world's most trafficked mammal, the pangolin accounts for up to 20% of all illegal wildlife trading.

Tens of thousands of pangolins are killed every year for their scales—which are used in traditional Chinese medicine—and their meat, which is a delicacy in China and Vietnam.

Jackson Poghismo, a native of Ketiam Village in West Pokot County, grew up in a community where spotting a pangolin meant either reporting the sighting to the village elders or killing the animal. Jackson only saw the pangolin in a new light after joining NRT and undergoing NRT's ranger training.

"When I was recruited as a conservancy ranger, I was taught much about the pangolin. My fellow rangers and I realized the animal's value, and that if properly cared for, it could draw tourists to our Conservancy, benefiting the community," he explains.

Jackson now leads pangolin conservation in Pellow Community Conservancy, West Pokot County. Pangolins were said to have disappeared in Pellow, until two recent sightings revealed that a small population may still exist.

The first sighting occurred in late 2019 when Pellow's scouts were tipped off on a man from outside the Conservancy who had captured a pangolin and was looking for a potential buyer. The scouts launched an undercover mission to rescue the pangolin. Working with the Kenya Wildlife Service team based in the nearby Nasalot National Reserve, they successfully recovered the pangolin and set it free.

The second sighting was reported by a livestock herder, who came across a pangolin at night while searching for his lost cow.

The two sightings inspired Pellow Community Conservancy to take species-specific conservation measures. As a result, with NRT's support, Jackson and the other Conservancy rangers studied pangolins' movements and feeding habits and are now well-versed in them.

"If my team and I succeed in protecting the pangolin and ensuring its existence, future generations will be able to see it and not merely learn about it as some sort of mythical creature," says Jackson, determined to save this vulnerable mammal.

Four of the world's eight pangolin species are found in Asia, while four are found in Africa: the Temminck's Ground pangolin, giant pangolin, white-bellied pangolin, and black-bellied pangolin. The Temminck's Ground pangolin, the only pangolin species found in eastern and southern Africa, has become severely endangered in recent decades due to poaching and trafficking for its meat and scales.

There is widespread support among Pellow Community Conservancy members for a wildlife sanctuary to protect pangolins. The community hopes this will attract tourists and scientists, providing a much-needed source of revenue for the Conservancy.



Our Partners

The outstanding work of these real-life heroes and heroines is supported by NRT's many valuable partners, principally the European Union (EU), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Agence Française de Développement (AFD), and The Nature Conservancy.



TEN

G **ARDIANS**

www.nrt-kenya.org
