



Wanjiku Kinuthi • The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy

# Saving the Rhino in Kenya

The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is an award-winning 61,000 acre wildlife sanctuary and engine for community-centric conservation in northern Kenya. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site that features on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Green List of successful protected areas.

Now globally acknowledged for its success, Lewa's foundation as a conservation organisation was cemented by the partnerships formed in its infancy. One of these partners who believed in Lewa's vision then and has continued to offer invaluable support is the American Association of Zoo Keepers and its affiliate Bowling for Rhinos. Fondly referred to simply as BFR on Lewa, the Conservancy is proud to have been the first recipient of this initiative that provides zoo keepers of the world with an avenue to raise funds and awareness for rhino and habitat conservation. By supporting Lewa, AAZK through BFR has directly played a vital role in facilitating the Conservancy's success. Twenty-five years later since BFR's initial engagement, Lewa has tremendously expanded its programmes and achieved numerous conservation milestones.

The rhino is both Lewa's flagship and umbrella species meaning that a host of other resident species, some equally endangered, directly benefit from the Conservancy's habitat protection and ecosystem management. This includes the elephant, Grevy's zebra, lion, cheetah and the African wild dog.

In 1990 when BFR first extended their support, there were only a handful of rhinos on Lewa. Today, the Conservancy is home to 11% of Kenya's indigenous black rhino population as well as 14% of the country's southern white rhinos. Additionally, Lewa has moved over 20

rhinos to establish new sanctuaries and restock previously inhabited areas such as Meru National Park and Ol Pejeta Conservancy. In an unprecedented move, last year Lewa and its western neighbour Borana removed the fence separating the two properties to form 93,000 acres of prime black rhino habitat, the largest in the country.

The threat from poaching continues to exert pressure on all properties holding rhino across Africa and Lewa's success in

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protecting its population can be attributed to its hardworking security team. BFR has over the years directly supported Lewa's anti-poaching units, the tracker dog team, aerial surveillance, rangers' salaries, vehicle running costs and operations at the radio communication centre. The Lewa-Borana landscape was one of the few areas to not lose rhinos to poachers last year in Kenya.

Lewa has also used its conservation success to establish a relationship with its neighbouring communities through development initiatives in education, healthcare, water projects, women's micro-credit, creation of employment

opportunities and infrastructure development. Today, these initiatives benefit close to 50,000 people.

As the pioneer private endangered species sanctuary in Kenya, Lewa's tested and perfected methods in rhino conservation have made it the model to emulate in protected area management. Today, the Northern Rangelands Trust, born out of Lewa's desire to support community conservancies in northern Kenya, is the umbrella body to 27 of these entities, all adopting Lewa's working framework. The Conservancy extends its technical and managerial support to these community conservancies in recognition that they hold the key to creating a sustainable and harmonised landscape for both human beings and wildlife to thrive.

Lewa's current mandate now lies in catalysing the increase of land in northern Kenya under conservation management. This includes expansion of the rhino's range to new and secure habitats in order to give the species greater space to breed. In conjunction with the Kenya Wildlife Service and the Northern Rangelands Trust, Lewa is planning to translocate rhinos to Sera Community Conservancy in northern Kenya this year. This will be the first time that communities will be responsible for the protection and security of a rhino population in Kenya, a tremendous achievement for Lewa and Sera.

The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is only able to achieve all these through the generous support of long-term partners such as BFR. With their help, we have been able to record tremendous accomplishments, and with their continued investment, we will be able to carry on with our mission and ambitious initiatives. 

