

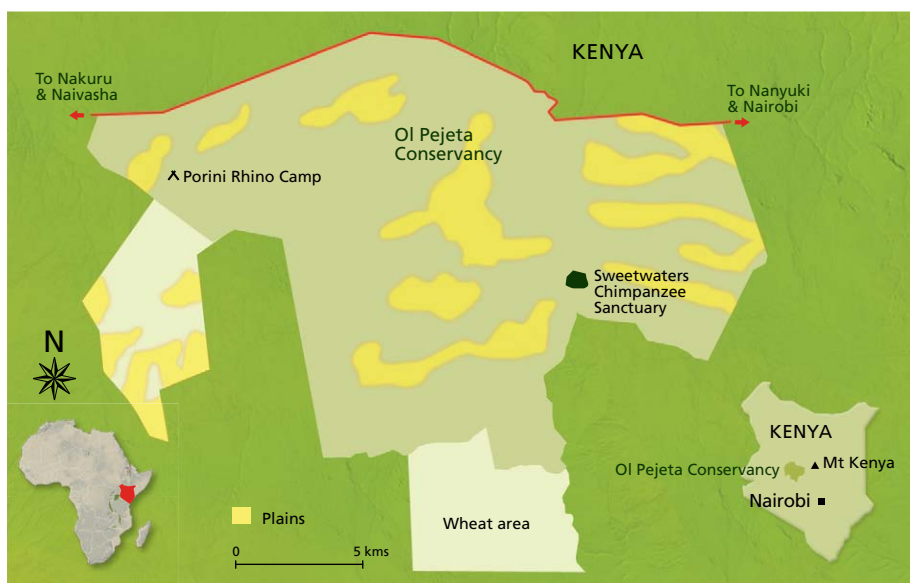
MEET THE NEIGHBOURS

Oi Pejeta Conservancy is the only place in the world where you'll find northern white rhinos in the wild. Just four survive outside of zoos and they all live here. The conservancy is also East Africa's largest protected area for black rhinos and its Sweetwaters Sanctuary is the only place in Kenya where you can see chimpanzees. But aren't those beef cattle wandering across the grassy plains? And are those really wheatfields? **Tim Jackson** investigates this unique sanctuary. ▶

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM JACKSON

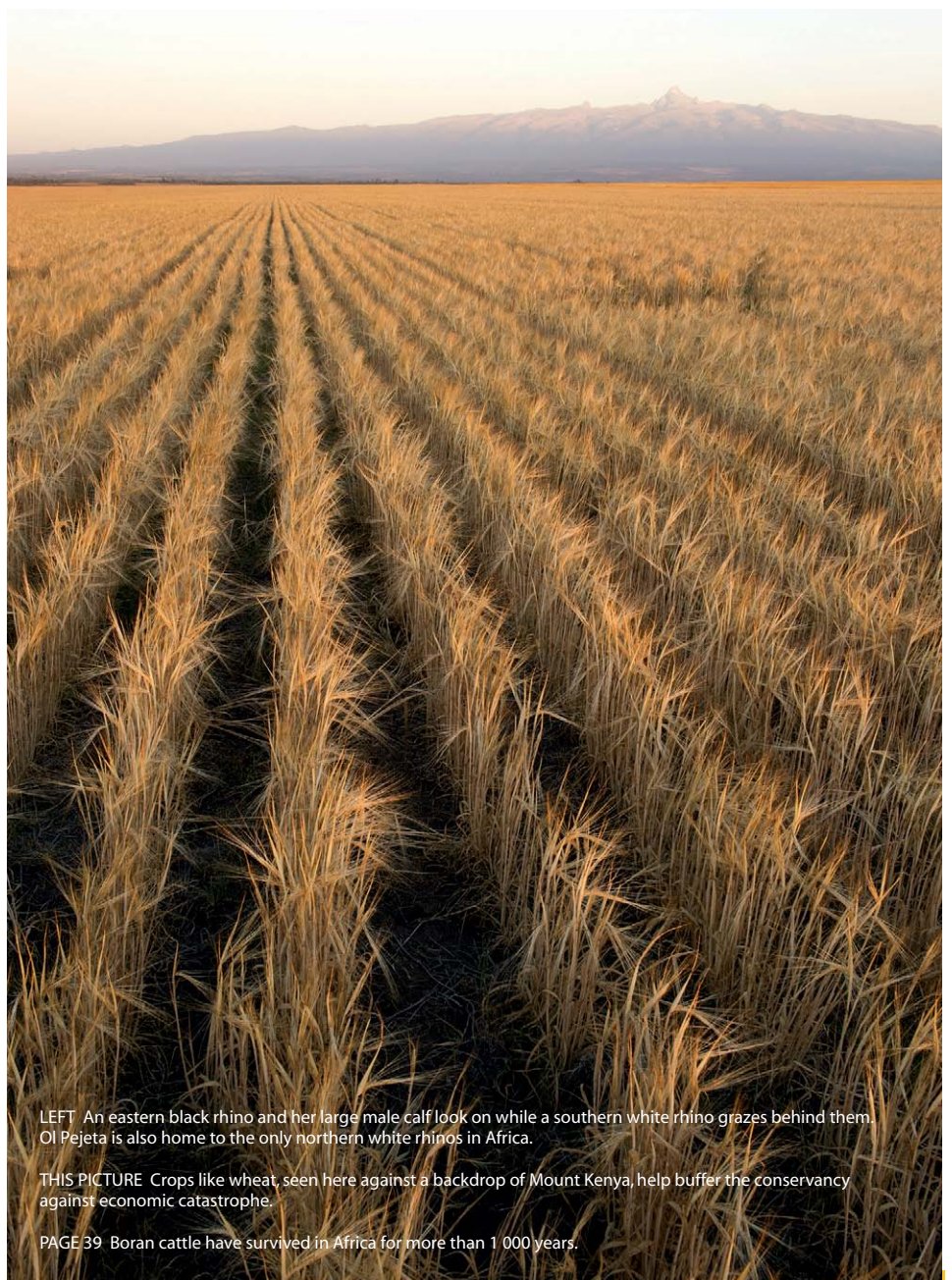






Cattle? Wheat? Isn't Ol Pejeta supposed to be a wildlife conservancy? Well it is, but it's far more than that, and we need to turn the clock back to find out how this sanctuary on Kenya's Laikipia Plateau came to be what it is today.

Going back to the colonial era, when the country formed part of the British Empire, the plateau was considered good for raising cattle and little else. Rainfall was generally too low for arable farming, and wildlife was of little value to landowners. From 1949, the land now occupied by Ol Pejeta was used as a cattle ranch, and was later expanded from 230 to 360 square kilometres. Over time, the returns from livestock diminished and elephants, which used the property as a



LEFT An eastern black rhino and her large male calf look on while a southern white rhino grazes behind them. Ol Pejeta is also home to the only northern white rhinos in Africa.

THIS PICTURE Crops like wheat, seen here against a backdrop of Mount Kenya, help buffer the conservancy against economic catastrophe.

PAGE 39 Boran cattle have survived in Africa for more than 1 000 years.

staging post as they moved from the north to nearby Mount Kenya and the Aberdare Mountains, began to settle on the conservancy. They destroyed the cattle fencing, which became impossible to maintain cost-effectively. The owners at the time began to adjust their approach to the land and the animals, and to their conservation strategy.

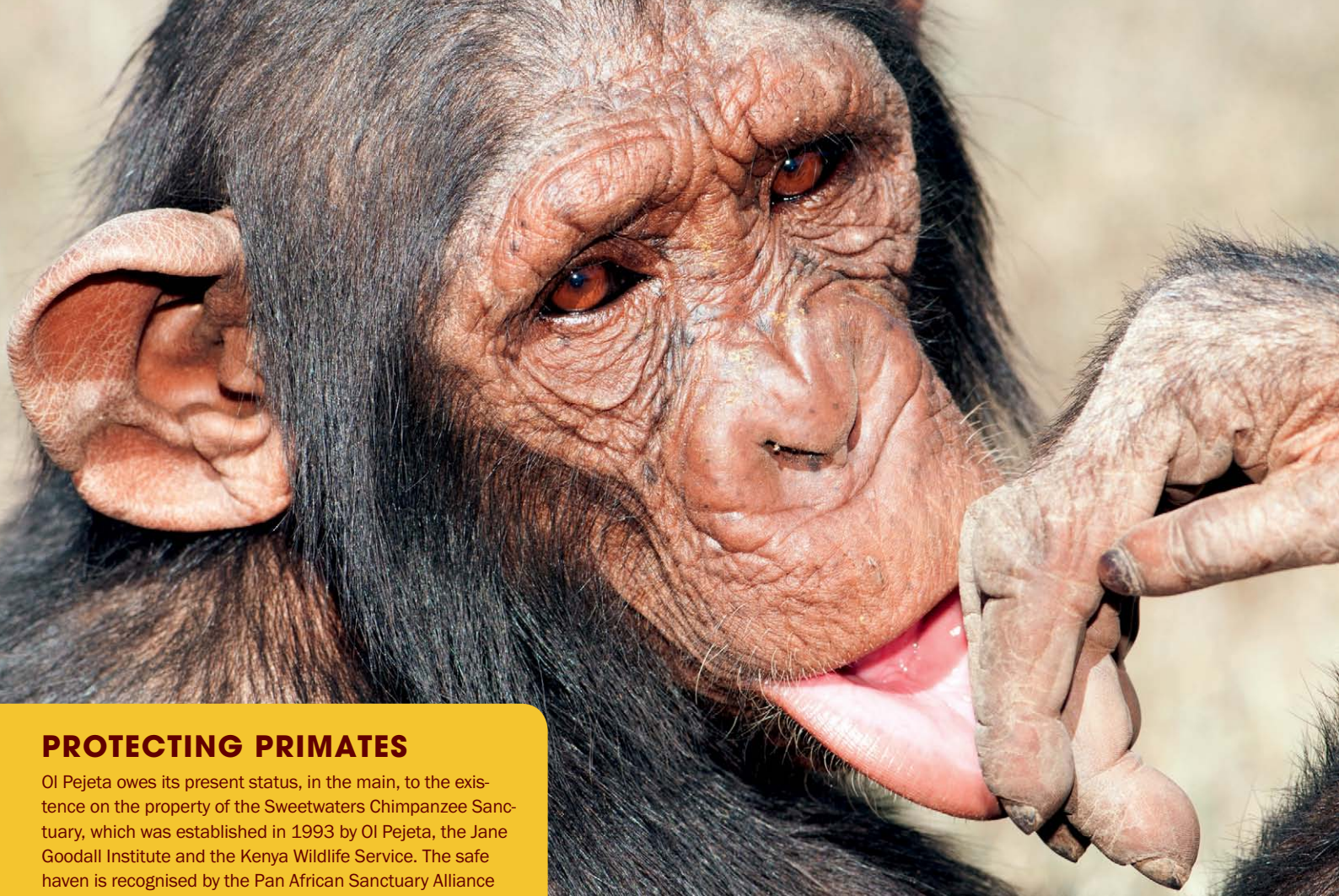
In 1988, Lonrho Africa Holdings opened the 110-square-kilometre Sweetwaters Game Reserve on the ranch, primarily as a sanctuary for the endangered eastern black rhino. Some 16 years later, the ranch passed into the ownership of a consortium that included Fauna & Flora International. The barriers between the farming and the wildlife areas were torn down and Sweetwaters was expanded to encompass the entire property, creating ►

THE CATTLE EFFECT

Giles Prettejohn is Ol Pejeta's livestock manager. 'When we opened up Sweetwaters to cattle,' he tells me, 'we were hardly making ends meet. So we introduced a new kraal system.' The kraals are made of metal, which cost more than traditional enclosures but don't require the bush to be cut every time they are moved. 'We only use the kraals in one place for two to four weeks before moving them, so the cattle don't cause too much tramping or build-up of dung,' he explains. The system seems to protect the local pure-bred Boran cattle (right) farmed here.

The grasslands have improved too. During Sweetwaters' 20-year cattle-free period, the area became a rough, rank grassland; when it was re-opened, the vegetation showed a marked improvement.





PROTECTING PRIMATES

OI Pejeta owes its present status, in the main, to the existence on the property of the Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary, which was established in 1993 by OI Pejeta, the Jane Goodall Institute and the Kenya Wildlife Service. The safe haven is recognised by the Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (www.pasaprimates.org) as one of 18 such institutions in 12 African countries that currently care for 800-plus chimpanzees. It also caught the attention of the Arcus Foundation, a global initiative focused on the conservation and care of the great apes (www.arcusfoundation.org). The foundation donated funds to protect both the chimp and greater sanctuaries by creating a nationally owned and managed conservancy. Today, OI Pejeta has been transferred from Fauna & Flora International to a Kenyan non-profit entity under a long-term management agreement.

'OI Pejeta is a model for integrating conservation aims with locally appropriate and economically viable land-use that benefits local people and national interests,' says Annette Lanjouw, senior director of Arcus's Great Apes Program. 'The chimp sanctuary is an essential component of the success of the conservancy, and is an invaluable part of a network of sanctuaries providing care for chimpanzee victims of hunting and habitat destruction across Africa.'

George Paul, the senior supervisor and veterinarian at the sanctuary, explains: 'Most of the chimps here (above) were less than one year old when we got them, and were being trafficked or kept as pets in Central Africa, mainly in Burundi and the Congo.' The biggest danger the animals face is the bushmeat trade.

The rescued primates (there are currently 41) will spend the next 40-plus years of their lives at Sweetwaters, so caring for them is a major commitment. The Arcus Foundation is funding a new enclosure, and the chimp carers, supervisors Joseph Maiyo and David Mundia, have been with their charges more or less since the sanctuary was founded.

the largest rhino sanctuary in East Africa – OI Pejeta Conservancy. The livestock lives alongside the wildlife, and is used as an ecological tool to manage the rangelands.

Richard Vigne, the current CEO of OI Pejeta, speaks about his vision for the sanctuary. 'The key point,' he says, 'is that we see conservation primarily as a social project and not something that should exclude people and human activity. The days of fortress conservation, in other words, have gone. If we are to make more land available for biodiversity to thrive, then it will have to happen in the presence of humans. That is why the integrated system of farming livestock with wildlife is so important. It enhances land productivity through, for example, employment and, most importantly, reduces the costs traditionally involved in wildlife "conservation". Valuable land no longer needs to be set aside for wildlife.'

Beef and wildlife aren't OI Pejeta's only enterprises: arable farming has also been introduced, in keeping

with the management principles. The southern sector of the sanctuary is wetter than elsewhere and, in the 1990s, a game fence was erected to cordon off the area for wheat farming. 'We established it to try to increase our profit margins per hectare,' explains Vigne. 'It's very marginal as a wheat-growing area, so we use Australian techniques. The plants need only 100 millimetres of rain to yield a crop.'

The conservancy costs around US\$6-million per annum to run. About 70 per cent of that amount is covered by tourism, 20 per cent by cattle and 10 per cent by everything else. But those figures can change dramatically, depending on Kenya's fluctuating political and climatic conditions.

'In 2008, for instance, with the unrest that marked the country's elections, there were few tourists,' Vigne elaborates. 'That year, the wheat and the beef kept OI Pejeta going.' Diversification is the name of the game. If the tourism contribution falls below 70 per cent, increased agricultural output is the solution.

RIGHT An elephant at the bridge over the Ewaso N'giro River, which formerly served as a natural barrier between Sweetwaters and the rest of Ol Pejeta.

PORINI RHINO CAMP

Tim Jackson's visit to Ol Pejeta was hosted by Porini Rhino Camp (below), which lies in a secluded valley on the banks of a seasonal river in the Ol Pejeta Conservancy. An intimate, award-winning bush camp with a low carbon footprint, Porini Rhino has a clear focus on conservation, providing benefits to the local communities and giving guests an authentic safari experience.

The camp's six spacious guest tents are comfortably furnished with en-suite bathrooms and solar-powered lighting. You can go lion-tracking, see the Big Five, take a game drive, walk with a Maasai warrior and visit the chimps at their sanctuary.

To find out more or make a reservation, tel. +254 (0)20 712 3129/712 2504/712 1851 or cell +254 (0)72 250 9200/+254 (0)73 533 9209; e-mail info@porini.com or visit the website www.porini.com



The Mount Kenya Wildlife Estate has recently been launched within the reserve to secure further annual operational costs.

Kenya's former Minister of Tourism, Najib Balala, predicts that 2012 will also be a tough year for tourism. He bases this warning on the knock-on effect of the euro-zone crisis coupled with travel alerts issued by foreign governments over the threat from Somali militants. Ol Pejeta's unusual approach to wildlife conservation could, it seems, see the conservancy faring better than its neighbours in the face of such adversity.

AG



IN BLACK & WHITE

In recent months, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) sponsored a young soccer team at Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The team was named the Northern White Rhinos to commemorate the northern subspecies of white rhino, the last-known representatives of which once occurred here in the wild. (Recent reports, alas unconfirmed, indicate that a few may be hanging on in South Sudan.) Just four known semi-wild individuals remain in high-security enclosures in Ol Pejeta. Their presence is down to a collaborative effort between FFI, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Back to Africa and Dvůr Králové Zoo in the Czech Republic that, in December 2009, resulted in the last four breeding northern white rhinos being translocated from the zoo to the conservancy.

The northern whites (below) have since paired off and it's hoped that they will breed. To encourage the males, whose amorous intentions seem a bit jaded after their time in captivity, several southern white females have been introduced. The larger of the two males, Sudan, shares his range with six southern females; the second male, Suni, has recently been introduced to two southern whites. (For more information about the northern white rhino and its fate, see the April 2010 issue of the magazine and the April 2012 Rhino Special Issue.)



Northern white rhinos are not Ol Pejeta's only claim to wildlife fame. The conservancy is also home to some 87 black rhinos, making it the largest black rhino sanctuary in East Africa. While the species as a whole is Critically Endangered, there are fewer of the East African subspecies *Diceros bicornis michaeli* than there are of *D. b. minor* and *D. b. bicornis*, which occur further south. The West African black rhino *D. b. longipes* was declared extinct last year.

Ol Pejeta owes this success in part to the translocation into the property of 27 black rhinos in 2007, a joint collaboration with the KWS and Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. Since then the rhinos have bred very successfully and surplus animals are now used to restock other areas. In fact, the population's annual growth rate has reached eight per cent, exceeding the projected rate by two per cent. Even so, Ol Pejeta cannot relax. Despite the conservancy's elaborate security system, several rhinos fell victim to poachers in 2011. At the time of writing in March, there had been no deaths in 2012.