

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT

Wildlife Corridors: A Path to Coexistence

Connecting habitats to reduce human-wildlife conflict in Laikipia and beyond.



STORY BY
FELIX PATTON

TOP RIGHT

Human settlements built on elephant migratory routes create conflict.

BELOW LEFT

Wildlife, like buffalo, unable to find suitable food may starve to death.

BOTTOM

The boundary of a wildlife corridor which connects two areas of natural habitat with wooden poles to prevent rhinos leaving an especially secure sector.

Barely a day goes by when an East African newspaper does not have a report on a Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC) in which someone's livestock or crop has been destroyed by a wild animal. There follows an outcry that more should be done to control the wildlife.

The conflict has occurred mainly because wildlife, in search of food or water, has strayed into human settlements that have developed on land formerly the territory of the wildlife. In these circumstances, it is better to call it Wildlife-Human Conflict (WHC).

Even small changes in wildlife's preferred habitats can lead to the need for the animals



PHOTOS BY FELIX PATTON

to migrate to better conditions. Larger mammal populations, especially elephants, have, over decades, depended on dispersal areas and migratory routes outside of national parks and reserve-protected areas for their survival. However, many of these have been blocked by human encroachment or may soon become blocked if no action is taken.

Conflicts will be inevitable as the ever-rising human population encroaches more and more on traditional wildlife areas. The effects of climate change have further exacerbated these. More frequent and damaging droughts and floods have led to the loss of the vegetation wildlife feeds on, not least grassland, which is also sought after by pastoralists. Additionally, reduced precipitation has led to dried-up and less



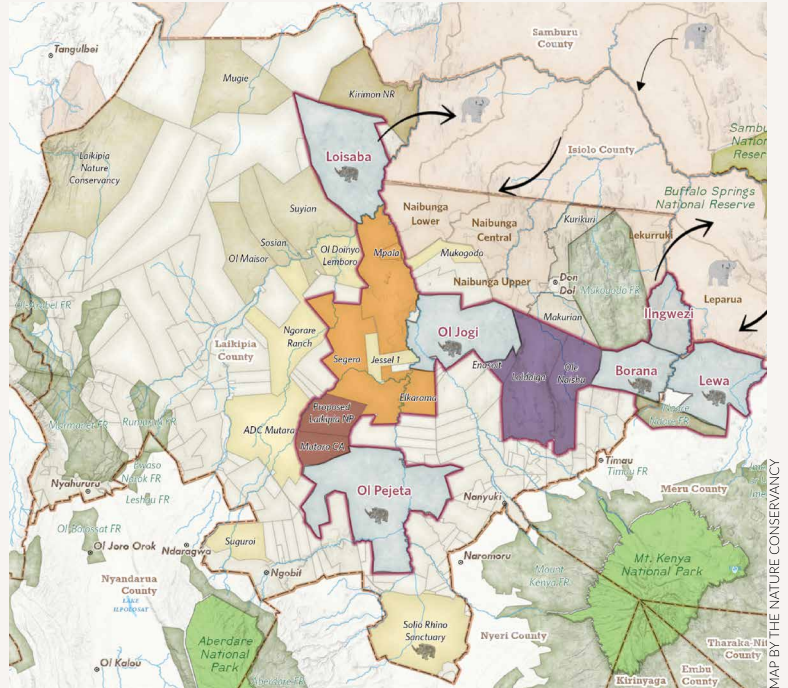


PHOTO BY FELIX PATTON

frequent water sources, so with the need of all animals, both human and wildlife, for water to survive, the result has been more conflicts.

Laikipia County, in central Kenya, lies on the equator, in the shadow of Mount Kenya to the east and is dominated by the Laikipia plateau. Glaciers on the mountain feed tributaries to the Ewaso Ng'iro River, which flows northeast through the county. The county is also subject to two main precipitation periods—the long rains in April/May and the short rains in October/November.

Laikipia is blessed with a wide range of habitats, including montane forests, acacia woodland, open savannah, grassland, and riverine. The combination of varied habitats and adequate water is home to an extensive array of wildlife, including elephants, rhinos, Grevy's and plains zebras, giraffes, and buffalo.



MAP BY THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

However, as recently experienced throughout East Africa, droughts and floods have had adverse consequences on the availability of suitable food resources and clean water for wildlife and livestock. This has forced them to travel more, creating greater opportunities for conflict.

Conservationists in Laikipia have formulated a plan that basically uses wildlife corridors to link a series of fenced conservancies. This enables wildlife to move between them to find the resources they need and keeps them from straying into human settlements.

Laikipia is a haven for around half of the country's critically endangered black rhinos.

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The Mount Kenya glaciers feed many water sources essential to Laikipia wildlife.

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A map of Laikipia conservancies and ranches that could become connected to form a single wildlife-secure area.

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Elephant herds need to be able to move freely across the landscape.



PHOTO BY THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

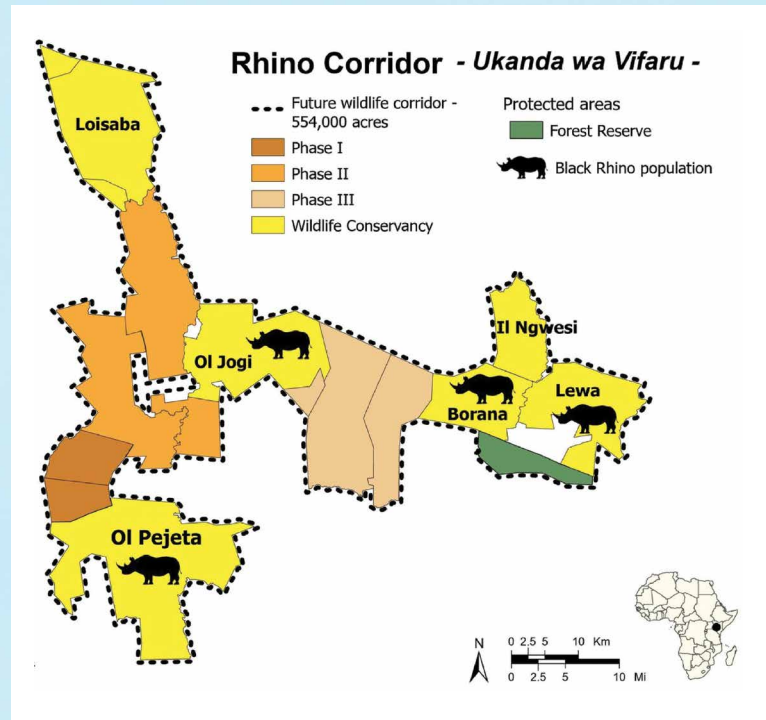


PHOTO BY FELIX PATTON

These are held in fully fenced, privately owned conservancies, most established in the late 1980s and '90s. Good management and high-level security have resulted in many populations exceeding their conservancy's carrying capacity, adversely affecting their breeding performance. In some cases, there has been over-browsing of the rhinos' most nutritious feed species, affecting the rhinos and other browsing species, such as giraffes.

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) published the Recovery and Action Plan for the Black Rhino in Kenya (2022-2026), which set a Vision of 2,000 black rhinos by 2037. To meet this target, more secure land for rhino conservation was clearly needed.

Ol Pejeta Conservancy found one answer: acquiring access to land with suitable habitat in Mutara, which was adjacent to the conservancy, with plans to upgrade the fence



MAP BY WILD LANDSCAPES INTERNATIONAL

and security appropriately. The two areas are connected by corridors, which, at present, allow wildlife, including elephants but not yet rhinos, to travel back and forth.

Wildlife corridors are connections across the landscape that link up areas of habitat, generally native vegetation, that are critical for maintaining ecological processes, including enabling the movement of animals and the continuation of viable populations.

Another answer was to upgrade existing conservancies with appropriate habitats to meet the standards required to hold a critically endangered species. However, upgrading requires significant finance, which only a few were able to raise. After several years of development, the first new black rhino area was Loisaba Conservancy, with 21 rhinos brought in in January 2024.

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The security needed for the critically endangered black rhino benefits the protection of other wildlife.

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Map showing the extent of a potential mega-sanctuary for Laikipia's black rhinos.

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Corridors offer two-way travel for species with different needs at different times.

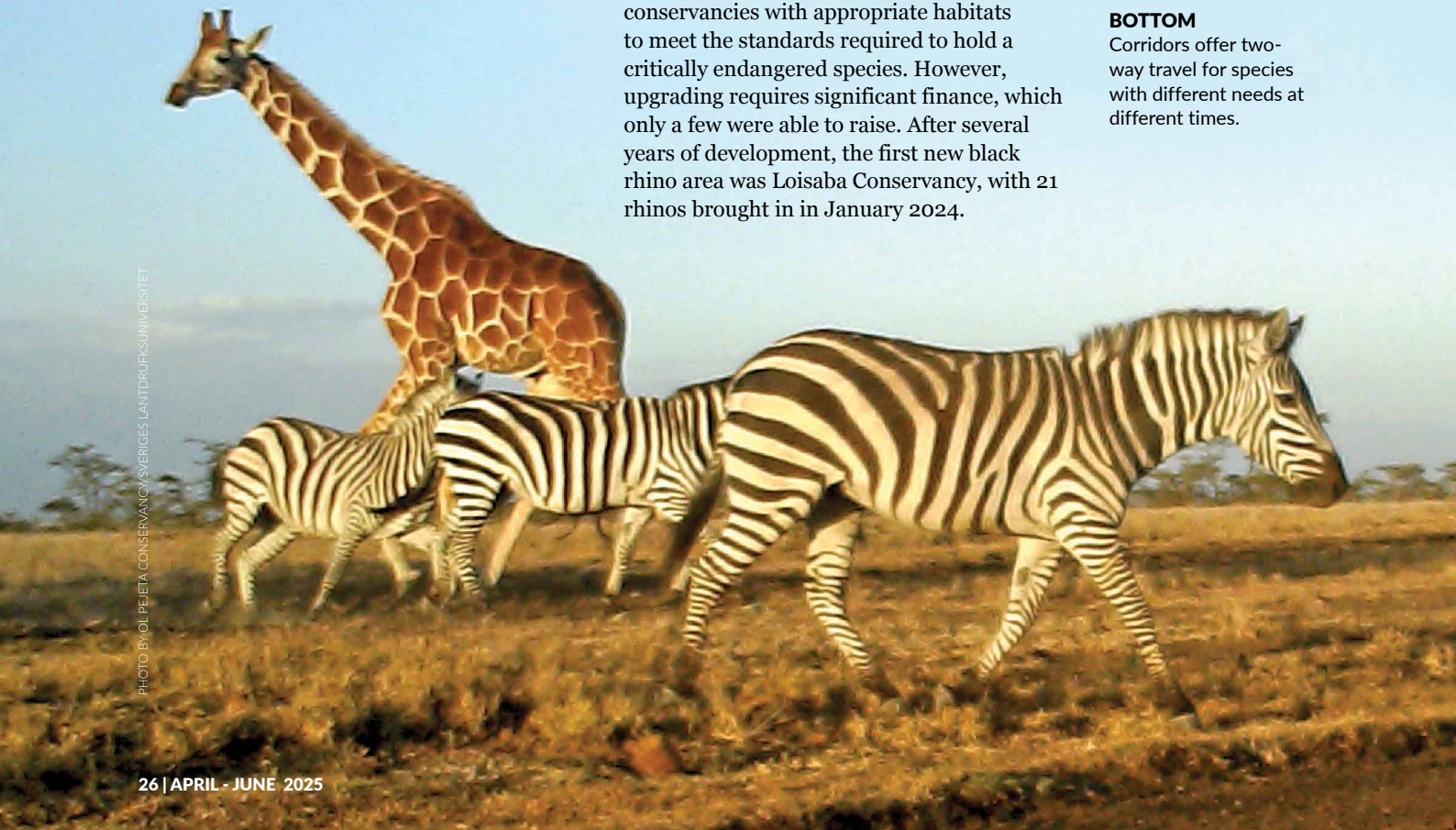


PHOTO BY OL PEJETA CONSERVANCY/SVERIGES LANTDRUKSUNIVERSITET



PHOTO BY FELIX PATTON

A comprehensive strategy for the longer term was required. The Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries (APLRS), a membership association that represents private and community landowners in Kenya who are custodians of rhinos on behalf of the state and under the direction of the KWS, was in a good position to take the lead.

Following a series of consultative meetings, APLRS produced the Kenya Rhino Range Expansion (KRRE) Strategy, which was published in January 2024. It was believed that, by using rhinos as a flagship species and taking account of the stringent criteria required to be awarded the status of a rhino sanctuary, the approach would “address the threats to Laikipia’s shrinking habitat, climate change, and socioeconomic security.”

Twenty-six candidate conservation areas were identified as potentially developing into ‘rhino-ready sites.’ Each was analysed to determine what it would need to do to meet the stringent requirements to receive and

protect rhinos, and a four-phased investment approach was developed through 2041.

While the short-term focus is on creating new rhino facilities, both private and community-owned, the long-term view sees the removal of fences between the sanctuaries and the creation of corridors. The final outcome is one large fenced rhino sanctuary throughout Laikipia covering at least 840,000 acres.

The resultant expanded range for rhinos and other wildlife, restored biodiversity, and protected habitats would create employment opportunities and support local economies. Investing in local products and promoting ecotourism possibilities would add further advantages to surrounding communities.

As to initial progress, Segera Conservancy will obtain at least 20 rhinos in 2025. As one of the most central conservancies in Kenya, Segera shares migratory corridors and boundaries with other important areas of wildlife. In phase 1 of the KRRE strategy, neighbours El Karama and Laikipia National

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Corridors enable wildlife to reach otherwise inaccessible areas such as eland found in the bush beneath Mount Kenya. Wildlife corridors are vital for preserving Kenya’s rich biodiversity and ensuring the survival of its iconic species. By protecting these pathways, we can help maintain healthy ecosystems and support the coexistence of wildlife and human communities.

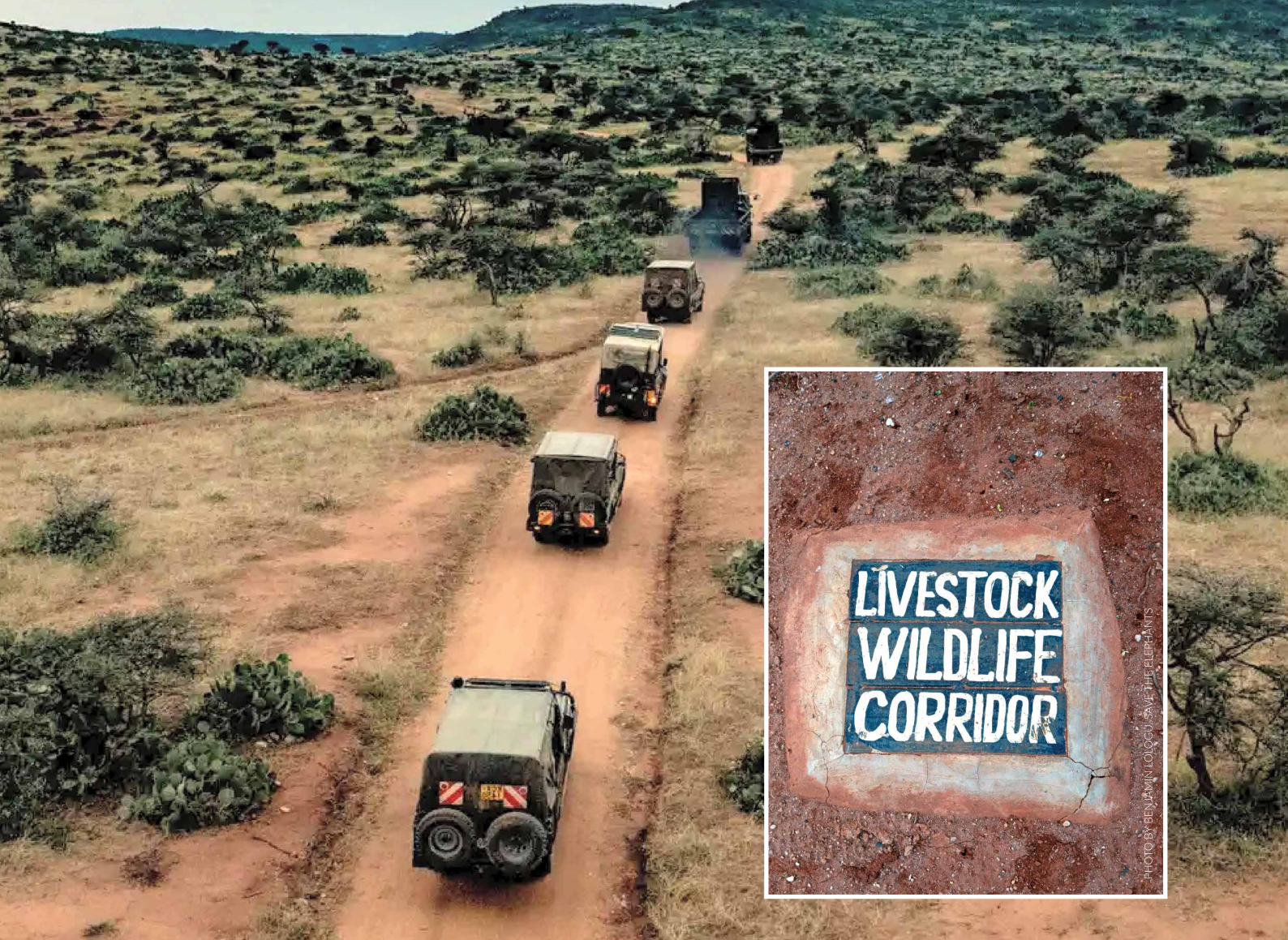


PHOTO BY AMI VITALE

As each rhino sanctuary becomes operational and each rhino corridor is completed and connected, there will surely be a significant reduction in Human-Wildlife Conflict.

Park, when brought to rhino readiness, would be linked to Segera. Eventually, the combined 70,000 acres area would be connected to the existing rhino sanctuary of Ol Jogi Wildlife Conservancy to create a 130,000-acre mega-sanctuary.

The APLRS is working with the Laikipia Conservancies Association (LCA) to move the strategy forward. Established in 2019, the LCA members are from both community and private conservancies. Their combined goal is to bring together conservancies in Laikipia to ensure landscape connectivity and amplify their individual impact.

Prior to their specific role with the KRRE, the LCA was already working on its 10-year objective of Landscape Connectivity by opening wildlife corridors and dispersal areas

to fortify elephant conservation—elephants are one of the leading causes of human/wildlife conflict.

As each rhino sanctuary becomes operational and each rhino corridor is completed and connected, there will surely be a significant reduction in Human-Wildlife Conflict. However, there is another conflict that needs to be addressed – that of the conflict with pastoralists. When traditional grasslands for livestock become scarce, often due to overgrazing, the pastoralists move into areas where the grass has been better managed. In the neighbouring county of Isiolo, dual-purpose corridors are being developed to allow livestock and wild animals, mainly elephants, to travel in the same area demarcated by marked pillars.

The organisation Save the Elephants (STE), using over 20 years of radio tracking data from almost 200 elephants, has identified the major migratory routes used and which are threatened by human activity. With co-finance from the Swiss-based Wyss Academy for Nature, STE has a programme to protect certain corridors, especially those around the town of Oldonyiro.

The Wyss Academy for Nature and the county government of Isiolo have partnered to

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Moving black rhinos from overstocked sanctuaries to newly secured areas, such as that of Loisaba Conservancy, will greatly benefit the conservation of the species.

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Wildlife corridors often use marked pillars (or beacons) as visual and physical indicators to guide animals, alert humans, and demarcate critical pathways. These pillars play a key role in maintaining corridor functionality and reducing human-wildlife conflict.



PHOTO BY MMCWS

implement thoughtful planning for elephant corridors in the town. Save the Elephants has eight corridors around 300 metres in diameter where wildlife can roam undisturbed and where no building can be allowed.

An example of their use is the seasonal migration of elephants within the Laikipia-Samburu-Isiolo ecosystem, where some 80 elephants move from Laikipia into Isiolo using the corridor next to the shopping centre of Oldonyiro town.

Giving thought to the needs of wildlife that existed before humans came into their ranges and giving them the space to carry out their natural processes will clearly reduce the opportunity for conflict to arise. The provision and maintenance of corridors, particularly those involving historically important migratory routes, is essential in supporting and keeping wildlife and human populations safe.

*The Kenya Rhino Range Expansion Strategy can be found at: https://fliphtml5.com/ucpux/lsw0/THE_KENYA_RHINO_RANGE_EXPANSION_STRATEGY/ ●

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TOP LEFT

A giraffe that died having got caught in a human erected fence.

BELOW LEFT

The tip of a spear embedded in an elephant harassed by humans.

BOTTOM

Migratory species like elephants rely heavily on wildlife corridors to move between habitats in search of food, water, and mates. These corridors are not only vital for the survival of elephants but also for maintaining ecological balance and reducing human-wildlife conflict. By creating and preserving these pathways, we can ensure that both elephants and humans can coexist harmoniously.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN MATTHEWS



PHOTO BY SAVE THE ELEPHANTS