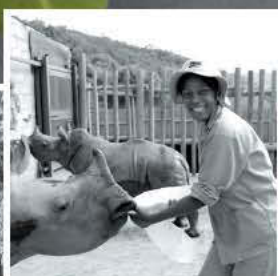
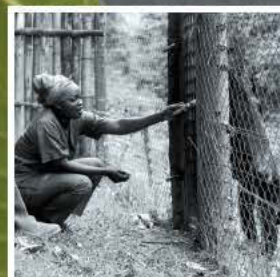
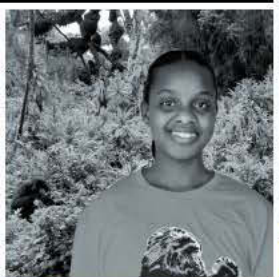


THE PERFECT

WORLD MAGAZINE



special edition

WOMEN WHO ARE CHANGING THE WORLD

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PHOTO: LEON HABERKORN

LEADER

WELCOME to our special edition – Women who are Changing the World – paying tribute to women in wildlife conservation. Meet the guardians of biodiversity and hear their stories. These amazing women, who wake up and show up to save endangered wildlife, every day.



RAGNHILD JACOBSSON
CEO & Co-founder, The Perfect World Foundation

THE PERFECT WORLD MAGAZINE is the non-profit organisation The Perfect World Foundation's printed media. Its editorial content focuses on spreading knowledge and awareness about wildlife conservation. It tells stories about the people who fight to conserve endangered species and contains facts about wild animals' situation and the threats they face. The magazine is also a platform for telling our story, to let you know how you can support our work to aid wildlife conservation and be part of our mission – to save the world.

THE POWER OF TELLING STORIES. Women are the story keepers of the world. Their stories shift our perspective and shape our next generation. Stories that share insight, form compassion, and are the voice for those who have none.



In this special edition we give voice to devoted and resilient women in wildlife conservation.

MARIE KJELLSDOTTER
Chief Editor, The Perfect World Magazine



The Perfect World Foundation is a non-profit organization working with wildlife and nature in crisis, around the world. By increasing knowledge and spreading awareness, our aim is to create courage and preconditions for change, one step at a time. Our clear mission is to save the world.

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COVER PHOTO: (Wangari Maathai) Patrick Wallet



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YVONNE VELA I AM A CONSERVATIONIST

Yvonne is lead surrogate mother in the bonobo nursery at a wildlife sanctuary in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Key to the survival and rehabilitation of an orphaned bonobo arriving at the sanctuary is the care and love from their human surrogate mother.

PHOTO: LISA MURRAY

Yvonne Vela is half Angolan and half Congolese. She grew up in Angola and lived there with her family until they fled the Angolan civil war, and she went back to Congo to study. Since secondary school she had a passion for science, and decided to focus her studies on biochemistry. But sometimes life changes your plans, and Yvonne started a job teaching at the Swiss School in Kinshasa.

"I was there to educate children, show them how to live, how to sort themselves out and give them passion," Yvonne explains.

At the Swiss School she met Claudine André, the founder of Lola ya Bonobo, a sanctuary for the endangered bonobos, only found in Congo. The biggest threat to the Congolese bonobo is illegal bushmeat hunting, leaving bonobos orphaned and easy prey for illegal trafficking. Claudine saw Yvonne's kindness and dedication to her human students, and one month later she asked Yvonne to join her and the work at the sanctuary, as kindness and love is the core components in a bonobo baby's rehabilitation.

"I was destined to return to work in biology, and now here I am at the bonobo sanctuary," says Yvonne.

Yvonne's special touch with the baby bonobos is evident in the

way she encourages them to vocalize, laughs, tickles, hugs, and plays with them, drawing out the new babies and making them feel part of the bonobo family.

"I love the bonobos! We are all here for the bonobos, but I also like to work with a dynamic group. When I'm working with a team, I always tell everyone to be dynamic, courageous, and alert. That's what I like. It's very important to me," says Yvonne and continues.

"I've learned a lot working with the animals. Bonobos are unique and very special in comparison to gorillas and chimpanzees. Bonobo babies' behaviour is amazingly similar to human children," says Yvonne, who is a single mother of two daughters herself.

Today, Yvonne has 18 years of experience of fostering, rehabilitating and nurturing orphaned bonobos. She is the most experienced surrogate mother at the sanctuary. Many bonobo babies, once frightened and traumatized, now have a happy life thanks to her dedication and love for them. Some have even been returned to the wild.

"Why wouldn't I call myself a conservationist? I'm saving the species. I'm here for them. I must call myself a conservationist," concludes Yvonne with great pride. ■

LINA ADOLPHINE NTURUBIKA

FIRST FEMALE VETERINARIAN

Lina grew up in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, a region with a history of rebel attacks. Her father, a human rights activist, was murdered when she was just ten years old. But he imparted a love of primates to her and her dream of becoming a wildlife veterinarian was born.

PHOTO: LWIRO PRIMATES REHABILITATION CENTER

Lina Adolphine Nturubika is the first female veterinarian in eastern Congo-Kinshasa. And she hopes her example inspires young women in her community to follow her lead.

“I have loved primates since I was a kid. And I have witnessed the suffering of primates’ trafficking with my own eyes. Ever since, I have wanted to dedicate my life to conservation and animal welfare,” Lina says.

But the road to becoming a wildlife veterinarian wasn’t always an easy one. The veterinary university was far from her village and the family’s financial resources were limited, so she started to study medicine. But, four years later, when a new veterinary college opened up closer by, Lina committed to fulfilling her dream.

“I had the opportunity to learn about the work that Dian Fossey and Jane Goodall did for the primates. They showed me that my dream was possible to achieve as a woman too. They gave me the strength I needed to believe in myself,” says Lina.

Today, Lina works as a wildlife veterinarian at Lwiro Primates Rehabilitation Center in the South Kivu province of Congo. And her days might include everything from health checks on

a chimpanzee, research on the latest techniques for animal care, to working with the caregivers to administer medications to the animals. Since chimps are highly social animals, making sure that the different groups are working well is another task on her list.

On her daily rounds at the center, she is called the “chimp mama”, a name she is proud of. Lina says there is no place she’d rather be than with the animals and making sure they have what they need to thrive.

Lina has also received a grant from Gorilla Doctors to complete a Wildlife Veterinarian Master at the Makerere University in Uganda. So, when she’s not attending to the chimpanzees, she is preparing her final thesis, looking at the important topic of how viruses impact primates.

When asked what her hope is for the future of conservation in her country, she thinks for a moment, and answers:

“My dream is that in the future generation there will be plenty of women working in conservation. I believe the conservation of the nature and the animals in the Congo will require women in high decision taking positions.” ■





NOMSA & FELICIA

WE PROTECT OUR HERITAGE

Nomsa and Felicia are Field Rangers with an antipoaching unit at a rhino sanctuary in South Africa. Born and raised in small, rural villages they both recall that their love for nature and wildlife was nurtured in childhood.

PHOTO: CARE FOR WILD RHINO SANCTUARY

“I was raised with a love of animals and nature. I had a cat and a dog who I loved very much. I was always taught to be humble and respectful of all living creatures,” says Felicia.

As part of Care for Wild’s training and employment programme within local communities and through their partnership with Investec, Nomsa and Felicia were recruited and trained to become Assistant Field Rangers.

“We trained for fourteen days after which, we started working on a small reserve. Shortly after, we were called back for a tough selection process to become fully qualified Field Rangers,” Nomsa tells.

The seven weeks Field Ranger course would test and train Nomsa and Felicia in multiple disciplines.

“We were fourteen men and only six women. There was no special treatment, I had to prove myself in physical and mental endurance. And had to do 40 push ups, 40 sit ups, pull ups, 2.4 km run and 10 km walk. It took a lot of self-encouragement, remembering the bigger picture,” Felicia explains, and Nomsa continues.

“We were trained in wildlife monitoring, patrolling, radio communication, self-defence, firearm management and tracking. I learnt a lot about myself and self-discipline.” Nomsa and Felicia excelled in their course with Nomsa receiving

two highly coveted awards ‘Best Student Overall’ and ‘Best Student in Field Craft.’

“I was extremely proud, my family too. My sister cried. I think I have really inspired her,” says Nomsa.

Now working at the Rhino Sanctuary, the women spend their days and nights on the reserve, protecting the adult orphaned rhinos who have completed their rehabilitation and have entered the rewilding programme.

“Our job is to monitor and protect the rhinos. We use technology to record their behaviour, what they eat and how they interact with each other. It is important for the bigger picture of conservation,” Felicia declares.

“It is so important to protect our heritage. I want my children to experience nature, the grasses, the mountains, the rivers, the wildlife. I want them to share what we have,” Nomsa says.

When Felicia and Nomsa is asked if they have something specific to say to other women. Their inspirational message is.

“If you are a woman, you need to be positive all the time, you need to believe in yourself, that you can make it. We told ourselves this over and over again and we made it. If you are reading this, know that you can make it too.” ■

YAMAT LENGAI

BLAZING A TRAIL FOR WOMEN IN CONSERVATION

Yamat educates about the importance of lions as well as the dire threats facing the species. Being the only female conservationist from her community she strongly believes women have many good ideas about environmental protection and can bring their effort and knowledge to the field.

PHOTO: AFRICAN PEOPLE & WILDLIFE / HANS COSMAS NGOTEYA

As a young girl growing up near Tanzania’s Tarangire National Park, Yamat Lengai both hated and feared lions. In a rural landscape where people and wildlife coexist in close proximity, lions sometimes steal valuable cows, goats, and sheep from local herders as an easy meal. “Lions used to come to our homestead at night and attack our livestock,” says Yamat. “At the time, people would seek out lions and kill them in revenge.”

Today, Yamat reveres lions and the immense value they possess. “When I began working with African People & Wildlife (APW), I started learning about the environmental and economic importance of wildlife to our country. When I was young, my community didn’t have this knowledge.”

Through her role as a monitoring and evaluation officer at APW, Yamat educates her fellow community members about the importance of lions as well as the dire threats facing the species. She also measures the organization’s programmatic impact and oversees the construction and maintenance of Living Walls – nature-friendly corrals that protect livestock, uplift livelihoods, conserve lions, and benefit the landscape. “Compared to previous years, people’s attitudes have changed toward wildlife due the benefits they receive from conservation,” says Yamat, and continues. “Through education and other opportunities, I have been able to help youth, women, and the elderly to bring development to our community.”

As the mother of a young son, Yamat is committed to making sure

future generations in Tanzania will see and benefit from lions. “I know when my son grows up, he will love lions because I will teach him,” Yamat says.

She also strongly supports girls’ education and promotes women’s involvement in conservation. She is a member of the Maasai ethnic group, a patriarchal society where women typically adhere to traditional roles as homemakers and caregivers. The only female conservationist from her community, Yamat is blazing a trail for others and shifting local perceptions about the role African women can play as leaders and decision-makers.

When Yamat started working with APW, many in her community thought she would not be able to cope as the only woman working with men, but she proved them wrong. “The men were so respectful, and that surprised me as I didn’t think they would be that way. We worked well together then and still do today. Now, I am a role model for others.”

Yamat believes men’s attitudes about women working outside of their homes are shifting. “Women are now engaging in different projects such as beekeeping and selling beadwork, and the whole community benefits from that,” she says and concludes. “Women have many good ideas about environmental protection and can bring their effort and knowledge to the field. Conservation is not just for men, it’s for everyone. I believe the future is going to be a good one for women in conservation. I feel very positive about it.” ■



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THULILE

48 BOTTLES OF MILK — EVERY DAY

Thulile is guardian of an endangered species. She gives her love and devotes her time as caregiver for six orphaned baby rhinos to be part of returning them to the wild.

PHOTO: CARE FOR WILD RHINO SANCTUARY

Thulile is a rhino caregiver at Care for Wild Rhino Sanctuary in South Africa. The sanctuary is the world’s largest orphan rhino sanctuary specialising in the rescue, rehabilitation, rewilding, re-release and ongoing protection of black and white rhinos effected by the poaching crisis.

She currently cares for six orphaned baby rhinos and says that her love and respect for animals started when she was very young and her dog Junior was her best friend. Now, she has her hands full raising and rehabilitating an endangered species.

“It’s a full-time job that requires round the clock dedication. Baby rhino Anchor’s mother died of natural causes, but Yster, Ranger, Cotton, Tom and Fred where orphaned when their mothers were killed by poachers. Fred is the youngest, only eight months old, and Anchor was only four days old when he came here,” Thulile says. Caring for young rhino calves requires a lot of hard work, and

it takes passion and commitment. When the orphans arrive at the sanctuary they are scared and traumatised and sometimes injured. The caregivers have to earn their trust.

“The babies are fed every two hours when they come in. Right now, they are fed four times a day. Their first feed is it 7am and their last feed is it 7pm. They each drink four litres of milk at each feed. This means I make 48 bottles of milk a day,” explains Thulile.

The orphans that Thulile cares for will enter a rewilding and re-release programme, when they are old enough but until then she makes sure that they are well taken care of.

“I look after baby rhinos. I feed them clean their enclosures, make sure they are healthy and growing and happy. Every day I am inspired by the people around me that I work with as we try hard to save rhinos from extinction,” Thulile concludes. ■





WANGARI MAATHAI

THE POWER OF ONE

Wangari was born in 1940, the third of six children, in a traditional mud hut with no electricity or running water. She went on to enable many people to shape their future lives. During her life she recruited hundreds of thousands of people who planted more than 40 million trees. And in 2004, Wangari Maathai was the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

PHOTO: MICHELINE PELLETIER

Wangari Maathai espoused the idea of the Power of One – that every one of us can make a difference and collectively, we are a force.

Wangari founded the Green Belt Movement, that began as a project of the National Council of Women of Kenya, of which she was a member. Women had been coming to the council complaining of deteriorating environmental conditions in their rural regions. With streams drying up, and poor harvests, women had to walk further and further away in search of firewood.

Wangari saw the solution clearly. Through the Green Belt Movement, she mobilized thousands of women and men to plant tens of millions of trees throughout Kenya. Her approach was practical, holistic, and deeply ecological: the tree roots bound the soil, halting erosion and retained groundwater following rains. This in turn replenished streams, and the trees provide food, fodder, and fuel – maintaining the livelihoods of communities.

“It’s the little things citizens do. That’s what will make the difference. My little thing is planting trees.” – Wangari Maathai.

Within a few years, Wangari realized that the illegal and corrupt privatization of public land necessitated a more systematic and comprehensive approach to conservation. These activities brought her into direct conflict with the Kenyan government. She was harassed, threatened, beaten, and jailed. Nevertheless, Wangari and the Green Belt Movement persevered, earning

national and global recognition for her transformative work. Working tirelessly as a member of parliament and an assistant minister for the environment, she fought for women’s rights, democratic space, multipartyism, against corruption, land grabbing, and misogyny.

From 2004 to her untimely death in 2011, Wangari continued travelling the world campaigning for change. She urged action be taken on climate change, environmental justice, the protection of forests, good governance, participatory democracy, and women’s rights within Kenya. She touched the hearts of rural women, heads of state, people of every faith, in her community and across continents alike.

Wangari Maathai’s legacy is exemplary of how one person can be a force for change. She did so much more than create environmental and educational systems to empower women through grassroots means.

She touched countless lives – in Kenya, across Africa, and around the world. She embodied values and characteristics that they wanted in themselves: to aspire to an idea bigger than individual needs and to make a difference regardless of their situation or resources.

In 2020, Professor Maathai was presented The Perfect World Foundation Award in honour of her legacy, accepted by her daughter Wanjira Mathai. ■

SUZY KWETUENDA

THERE IS NO WAY TO STOP

Growing up Suzy wanted to become a doctor. But she fell in love with bonobos, and working with humans’ closest relative became a close second to her childhood dream. Twice, she helped lead the only successful releases of bonobos back into the wild.

PHOTO: LEON HABERKORN

Suzy Kwetuenda was born in eastern Congo but came to Kinshasa at a young age when her family was forced to flee the violence of the civil war. Growing up she dreamt of becoming a doctor, and as a student at Kinshasa University, she studied biology and ecology. And she fell in love with bonobos.

“I first came to the bonobo sanctuary as an intern, after my studies. I fell in love with bonobos because I understood they are really close to us humans. Most people don’t care because they don’t have the knowledge,” Suzy says.

After a year of volunteering and observing the bonobos at the sanctuary, she was hired as a research assistant by a team of scientists visiting the sanctuary. Suzy worked with Dr Brian Hare on cognitive behavioural research for three years.

Today, Suzy is Coordinator of Bonobo Wellness at the Lola ya Bonobo Sanctuary. And she manages all aspects of the bonobos’ life, from nutrition to intragroup social conflicts.

In order to understand the complex social relationships among bonobos, she tries to maintain a connection to all of the bonobo groups at the sanctuary. She knows the bonobos on an individual level and remains attentive to changes in group behaviour.

“When you meet bonobos for the first time – they are fantastic,

they are amazing! They are really close to us, and they are very smart,” Suzy says.

In 2009, Suzy helped lead the first successful release of bonobos back into the wild. Bonobos are threatened because of illegal hunting and deforestation. Restoring wild populations is an important part of bonobo conservation.

“I was so pleased to see that the bonobos quickly learned to take care of themselves in the wild. They made nests, foraged for food, and kept the same social groups they had at the sanctuary,” explains Suzy and adds, “The bonobos are happy to be back in the wild!”

While Suzy’s early ambition was to be a human doctor, she is contented in a rewarding career overseeing the health of humans’ closest relatives.

“I’m work with our closest cousin, so I’m not so far from my childhood dream after all. Now I have the opportunity to work hard for conservation. I love it, and I feel like I’m working with my family,” says Suzy.

“Every day is a new challenge. There’s no way to stop. And I’m one of the women working for conservation. So, I can say that, and I think it’s something very good.” ■



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In South Africa a rhino is killed for its horn every 22 hours. Your donation contributes to our work to support wildlife conservation projects around the world. Projects that tirelessly dedicate all hours of the day to care, guard and save endangered species, such as the rhino.

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MOREANGELS MBIZAH

LION PROTECTOR

The death of Cecil the lion, at the hands of a trophy hunter, opened up people's eyes to the importance and challenges facing lion conservation. Moreangels dedicated her time to field studies of Cecil, despite great personal challenges. She had to overcome many obstacles including racial and gender discrimination, being a black woman in a field dominated by white people and a few black men.

PHOTO: RYAN LASH

Growing up in a small town in Zimbabwe, all Moreangels Mbizah wanted to do when she grew up was to be a psychologist and help people, especially children. That was her dream, but little did she know that the universe had other plans for her. “A few lectures on wildlife ecology during my Master’s Program changed my life forever. I became fascinated learning about wildlife and that sparked my interest to learn more and find out how I could get involved,” says Moreangels.

This spark made her join the African Wildlife Conservation Fund (AWCF) to carry out her research project on African wild dogs in Save Valley Conservancy. “That first time stepping in the wild and seeing wildlife for the first time filled me with awe and an unexplained connection to nature. That’s how my conservation career began and that’s how I discovered my passion of protecting wildlife.”

Moreangels journey to conservation has however not been an easy one, she had to overcome many obstacles including racial and gender discrimination, being a black woman in a field dominated by white people and a few black men. “I also faced challenges in my personal life trying to balance relationships and family with my career. I sometimes had to make hard choices, and there were moments when I thought of giving up my career,” Moreangels explains.

Being a field conservationist involves being away from family and loved ones for long periods of time, and that can be really stressful and challenging.

“However, I am grateful for all the obstacles and challenges I have faced over the years because they modelled me into a better person and made me realise my purpose in life which I realised was aligned to my work. I found strength and purpose from my brokenness,” says Moreangels and continues. “Some of my best memories are from my time in Hwange National Park doing my research on lions. My days were spent tracking GPS collared lions to gain insights into their behaviour and social structures”.

She would also spend some days counting animal spoor to assess abundance and distribution of wildlife, and do a lot of walking and using GPS technology to assess the prey species and diet of lions. “One of my study species was Cecil the lion, a beautiful lion with a big mane and loved by tourists and visitors to Hwange. His death at the hands of a trophy hunter sparked outrage across the world. And the positive thing to come out of this tragedy is that many people across the world became aware of the challenges facing lion conservation and many learnt more about lions during that period,” tells Moreangels.

In 2018, Gabby Salazar and Clare Fieseler supported by National Geographic produced a short film – One woman’s remarkable journey to protect lions – about Moreangels’ journey as a scientist in Africa working to protect lions and the obstacles she has faced along the way. This film inspired many people across the world and from all walks of life. Some people reached out to her after watching the film and through the film she was also able to connect to other opportunities.

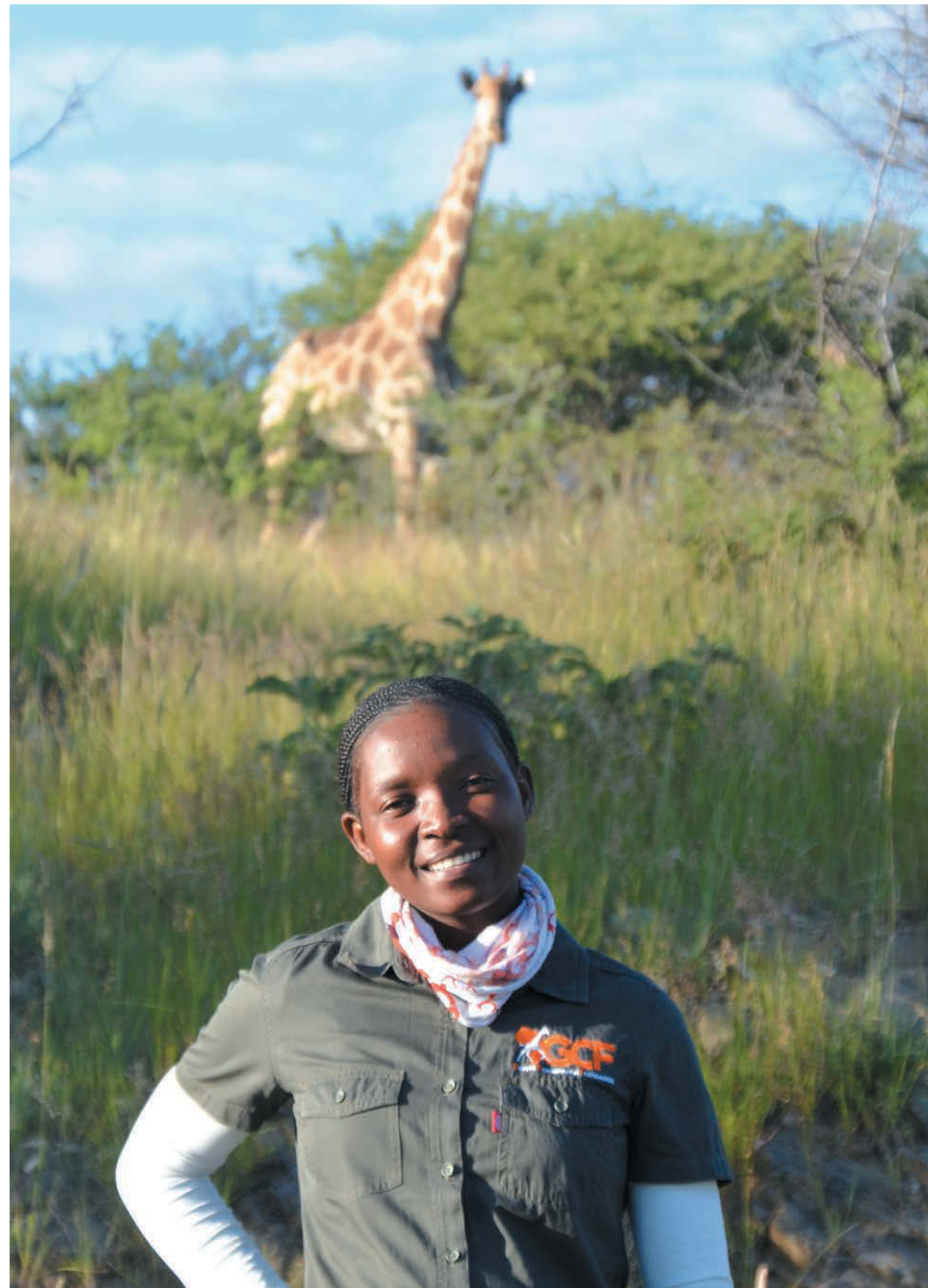


In 2019 she was selected for a TED fellowship and gave a TED Talk in Vancouver, Canada – How community led conservation can save wildlife. “This was one of the proudest moments in my, standing on the grandest stage in the world and talking about a topic I’m most passionate about. My talk has so far been viewed by nearly 1.9 million people, and many people are beginning to realise the important role that local communities can play in conservation.”

After her DPhil at the University of Oxford in the UK, she returned to Zimbabwe in 2018 and formed the conservation organization Wildlife Conservation Action, with the aim of building the capacity of local communities to protect and coexist with

wildlife and also benefit from doing so. The organization focuses on four main themes which are 1) Human-wildlife coexistence, 2) Community development, 3) Habitat and wildlife conservation, and 4) Education, training and capacity building. And has projects in two locations that focus on these themes, one in Nyaminyami communal lands around Matusadona National Park, and another project in Shangani ranch.

“My dream is to see all local communities that live alongside wildlife becoming part of efforts to conserve their natural resource and starting to benefit from doing so, because these communities face many threats and incur costs to their lives and livelihoods from living alongside wildlife,” says Moreangels. ■



NAEMI ANTONIUS

WHAT YOU KNOW YOU CAN CARE FOR

Naemi is using her passion for nature and the environment to educate and shape Namibia's next generation of well informed and inspired nature conservationists and environmental guardians.

PHOTO: GIRAFFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Naemi Antonius grew up in a remote village in northern Namibia, close to the border of Angola. In high school was the first time environmental education was available to her. And by joining an environmental club at school, she started to understand the beauty of nature and the importance of conserving it. In the club the students talked about Namibia's wildlife and different environmental issues that Namibian communities are facing, but they also did field trips.

"We visited different conservation areas, and for the first time in my life I saw wild animals and wild plant species. I clearly remember a trip to Waterberg Plateau Park in central Namibia where the staff took us on a nature walk to the top of the plateau, teaching us about the plants along the trail. I just loved learning all about the different plants. This was when my passion for plants was born," says Naemi.

After completing high school, Naemi chose to pursue a career in the environmental field and completed a bachelor's degree in Nature Conservation.

"I wanted to understand how things in our environment are connected and how I could contribute to the preservation of our natural resources," she states.

During a six-month internship Naemi got involved in environmental education hands on while working with school children and youth from different communities. She loved sharing her passion for the environment with the children.

Later, Naemi joined the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) as an environmental education intern and was part of the launch

of their Khomas Environmental Education Programme (KEEP). GCF is dedicated to protecting and securing a future for giraffe in the wild but has also realized that they need buy-in from young Africans, to pursue this goal. After starting as an intern, Naemi gradually made her way up to leading the small Environmental Education team.

Naemi is now taking primary school groups on daytrips into the field. Most of the children come from government schools in Namibia's capital Windhoek, and most of them have never visited a national park, or ever seen a wild animal.

"No two classes are quite the same, but most of the children are excited to be out of the classroom and out in nature instead. They love seeing giraffe footprints or giraffe poo... so you cannot even imagine their reaction when they spot a giraffe in the distance," says Naemi.

KEEP is a field-based, hands-on, and fun programme that allows the school children to learn by doing, from seeing nature in action and applying skills and knowledge they have previously learnt in the classroom.

"The excursions are a very special day for the students and for me. This is my one opportunity to make children passionate about their environment and show them how beautiful their country is. I just love seeing their smiles and happy faces – and we always have lots of fun," Naemi says and continues.

"It's incredibly rewarding. I really hope that I can contribute and inspire to an environmentally literate next generation, who will take all necessary actions to look after our beautiful Namibia." ■

OUR VITAL
GARDENERS OF
THE RAINFOREST

Mountain gorillas are beautiful, family oriented and resilient animals. They are the environmental engineers of the critically important rainforests for our future. We need them... bur they need us. Poaching and habitat destruction have pushed their populations to the brink of extinction in recent decades.

BY MARIE KJELSDOTTER PHOTO: DIAN FOSSEY GORILLA FUND / JORDI GALBANY

Mountain gorillas live on top of six volcanoes, split between the countries of Rwanda, Congo, and Uganda. And there are two separate and distinct populations – the Virunga population in Rwanda, Congo and Uganda, with 604 gorillas and the Bwindi population of 450 individuals in Uganda, sum up the just over 1,000 mountain gorillas remaining on Earth.

CONSERVATION CAN NOT BE FIXED OVER NIGHT

The challenges in gorilla conservation are enormous and requires a long-term effort of investing in boots on the ground in the forest every day, 365 days a year. Stretching over decades, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund trackers’ and anti-poaching teams’ daily protection from, among other things, poaching have helped save the critically endangered mountain gorillas from extinction, and stabilized their tiny population in Rwanda.

ONE OF THE GREATEST THREATS

A great threat to mountain gorillas is that they are a small population. The small population size means that any natural disaster or pandemic could have a very significant impact. Any time you have a small population the greater the risk to go extinct. Especially with gorillas, as they take a long time to mature and only reproduce every four years. That means that recovery of the population is a very long process.

THE WHYS OF GORILLA CONSERVATION

Foremost, they need us – there are over a million species at risk of extinction right now and gorillas are one of the most at risk species. All four gorilla subspecies are considered endangered or critically endangered (the highest level of endangerment). There are only around 1,000 mountain gorillas left in the world and the population of Cross River gorillas is down to 300 individuals.

We need them – gorillas live in the Congo Basin, the second largest standing rainforest and combined with the Amazon rainforest they are literally the lungs of our planet, and our best natural defence against climate change. We humans need these forests to stay healthy and you can think of the gorillas as one of the many gardeners of these forests. Gorillas help keep the forest healthy... they eat fruit and when they poop disperse seeds, they build nests by breaking tree branches which opens up gaps to let sunlight in. Gorillas are kind of the environmental engineers of these critically important forests for our future.

They share our humanity – gorillas share 98% of our DNA and are one of our closest living relatives. They share our humanity. Just like us they have friends, they have enemies, they have personalities, they mourn the loss of a family member, they are intelligent, and they care for others.





PHOTO: JORDI GALBANY

THE THREAT OF POACHING

Today, direct poaching of mountain gorillas is not a significant threat (for the other subspecies it remains one of the top threats). But direct poaching has cost the lives of mountain gorillas in the past, when people wanted a gorilla hand or a gorilla head as a souvenir, and baby gorillas where in demand. To catch a baby the mother had to be killed, as gorillas defend their infants the same way as we defend ours.

Indirect poaching on the other hand, such as illegal activities including setting up snares to entrap antelopes and small game animals, are a threat as the gorillas accidently can get caught in the snares causing injuries and even death.

That’s why always having trackers and anti-poaching teams out in the forest, removing snares, is an important part of gorilla conservation. The on-the-ground teams also observe the gorilla families to make sure they are healthy, that everyone is there, if anyone has had a baby or if anyone has left. If a gorilla is missing and it is suspicious, such as a youngster that is not expected to leave, patrols will be organized to look for them.

FASHA CROSSING THE RIVER

Trackers from the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund in Rwanda on patrol in the forest one day noticed that four-year-old Fasha was missing, and of course she shouldn’t be. So, the trackers went to search for her and observed that the family have had a run-in in a patch of snares.

Finding a lost young gorilla in that dense of a forest is extremely difficult. But continuing to tack the trails they found Fasha separated from her family with a snare around her foot, and a veterinarian could be called in to help remove it.

Her foot was badly injured just from being caught in the snare for a short while (hence the importance of trackers being out in the forest every day.)

Weeks later her family was spotted by Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund researchers, crossing a river. Fasha was nervous to cross. Her sister on the other side encouraged her, holding out her hand and when she crossed embraced her in a big hug while their whole family, who was waiting for them, watched. ■



PHOTO: JORDI GALBANY

KHENSANI NGOBENI

MORE PEOPLE SHOULD EXPERIENCE ELEPHANTS

When Khensani started to work as a carer at an elephant orphanage, she had never seen an elephant up close. Today, she takes care of orphaned elephant calves with knowledge, respect and great love.

PHOTO: HERD ELEPHANT ORPHANAGE

“I didn’t grow up with animals, not even a dog and so when I first started working with elephant calves, I was scared. It was my first time seeing elephants close to me. I had only ever seen them on television or in magazines”, says Khensani.

Khensani Ngobeni is from Acornhoek, in South Africa. A township close to HERD elephant orphanage in the Limpopo province, where she works as an elephant carer. At 23 years old, she is the youngest carer in the team.

“My role in conservation is to work as a baby elephant carer and it is my dream to make sure that the orphans survive, that they eat well and are happy. The elephants have taught me a lot, like how to slow down in life because I’m normally always on the move, but with elephants you can’t always do things quickly. You need to sit, to be still and patient, to watch and listen to them. I am also very present when I’m with the elephants and not concerned with other things like chatting on my cell phone.”

“I finished my Matric in 2017 and then did computer studies in 2018,” Khensani says. “Afterwards I planned to do a gap year, but someone I knew suggested working with elephants in need and I took the opportunity immediately. And I’m so glad that I did.”

Since albino orphan Khanyisa’s arrival at the elephant orphanage, after being seriously injured by a snare, Khensani has dedicated herself to the care of the calf. Initially, Khanyisa’s health went through some dips but having Khensani’s warm spirit there to

keep the elephant calm and secure has been invaluable.

“During my shift, I spend a lot of time with Khanyisa, feeding her, playing with her, accompanying her on walks, and talking to her... starting with asking her how she slept the night before. My favourite part of the job is exercising with the orphans.

“I learnt everything on the job and through training, but it was hard when I started because I didn’t have the experience, but now I really understand the orphans and have fitted well into the routines and ways of the elephants.” says Khensani.

“When I first came to HERD and saw the big elephants – the older orphans and rescued herd – I was so scared. I prayed as we headed into the bush to meet them, because it was my first time to see a big elephant. I just hoped that they wouldn’t hurt me, but when I got there, they welcomed me. Now I feel safe when I am around the herd, because they are used to me and know they can trust me, and they help to protect us carers. In the bush, if there are lions nearby, they will chase the lions away. I was surprised the first time I saw this, because I thought that the lions would kill the elephants. But the elephants are bigger and help keep us safe in the wild,” says Khensani and concludes.

“I believe that more people from my community and those around us at HERD should experience elephants here and see how they behave around people. I think they will learn a lot about how special and important elephants are.” ■





MIMIE BAYADILA

I'M PROUD OF MY WORK

Bonobo Veterinary Nurse Mimie's dream is to see the bonobos living in peace and fully protected in the equatorial forest, their natural habitat.

PHOTO: LEON HABERKORN

Mimie Bayadila is a Veterinary Nurse. As a child, she was fascinated by doctors in their white coats, and she dreamt of becoming a nurse. Her father served as a consultant at Lola ya Bonobo, which gave her the opportunity to visit the great ape sanctuary outside of Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. "I was very impressed by the medical care in the nursery, which immediately reminded me of being in a paediatric ward," Mimie says.

Her chance to join the bonobo veterinary care team came later, when Lola ya Bonobo sanctuary posted an advertisement seeking a nurse to help with the bonobo orphans. And she got the job. Her training began with learning how the surrogate mothers work with traumatized bonobos to restore not only their health but also their will to live.

"I passed my test first as a surrogate mother where I had to save three orphans who were being rehabilitated," says Mimie. "I am very proud of this!"

The orphans come to Lola ya Bonobo after wildlife law enforcement officers confiscate them from traffickers trying to sell them as pets. Although hunting bonobos is forbidden by law in Congo, poaching is one of the main reasons bonobos are an endangered species. These peaceful apes are also threatened due to deforestation.

After working at Lola ya Bonobo sanctuary for 10 years, Mimie now has a daily routine. She begins by checking the medical treatments in progress for different bonobos, whether for dehydration, intestinal parasites, or other ailments common among the new arrivals. Then she walks around the three large, forested enclosures where adult bonobos and their families live in semi-wild groups.

"I observe the mother-child relationships in the bonobos, as well as the ano-vulval swelling that indicates the menstrual calendar in mature females. This is for birth control. I share all my observations with the wildlife veterinarians."

Mimie finds satisfaction and joy caring for bonobos. She likes seeing them happy and thriving. But like any job in health care, being a bonobo nurse has tough parts, too. It is hard for her when she must participate in an autopsy or assist the veterinarians with health emergencies.

Her dream for bonobos is to see them living in peace and fully protected in the equatorial forest, their natural habitat.

"Bonobos are in danger of extinction. Without human support they will disappear. When survivors of poaching come to the bonobo sanctuary, it's like an alarm going off. I hope people all over the world will support us in our ultimate goal, which is to reintroduce the bonobos to the forest." ■

PELAGIE MUTUYIMANA

GUARDIAN OF MOUNTAIN GORILLAS

When Pelagie started her job as a gorilla tracker in Rwanda, she was one of only two female trackers. She is following her dream of observing and protecting gorillas every day, and her work contributes to invaluable research.

PHOTO: DIAN FOSSEY GORILLA FUND

“When I saw a gorilla face to face for the first time, I was very happy, because it’s something I’d wished to see since I was a child,” says Pelagie Mutuyimana.

Growing up, she heard stories about mountain gorillas. The people in her hometown, in the southern part of Rwanda, often said that gorillas were just like humans.

“They said that when the babies in the group screamed, the father would come to see what had happened—just like a human when a child cries at home,” she explains.

In secondary school, Pelagie always chose the courses related to animals and conservation. And when it came time to attend college, she naturally chose to study wildlife management at the Integrated Polytechnic Regional College Kitabi.

“My role model is Dian Fossey,” she says. “She cared so much about protecting gorillas. So it was a dream come true when I was hired as a tracker by the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.”

As one of only a few female trackers, Pelagie is an important role model herself. “We need to see more African women in conservation,” she says. “In Rwanda, we only have female conservationists from other parts of the world as our role models, because we

don’t have enough African women in conservation.” She acknowledges that it isn’t an easy road for African females to follow.

“At first, I was discouraged by people who thought I was not capable of working in a remote area. When I started my job, I was one of only two female trackers. But I learned not to worry about what people said or thought. I am following my dream, and I am showing them what a woman can do.”

Pelagie now spends her days in the forest, following families of gorillas to monitor their health, or searching for and dismantling snares that could otherwise harm the gorillas.

“That’s our biggest conservation challenge,” she explains and continues. “People are not always aware of the importance of saving mountain gorillas. They enter the habitat to set snares for bush buck, duiker, buffalo, and the gorillas get caught instead.”

In her role as a tracker, she helps spread awareness of the plight of this beautiful animal.

“I love my job,” she says. “I get to observe gorillas every day. And I am happy to know that I am contributing to gorilla research and protection so that gorillas will still be here for future generations to study and protect.” ■



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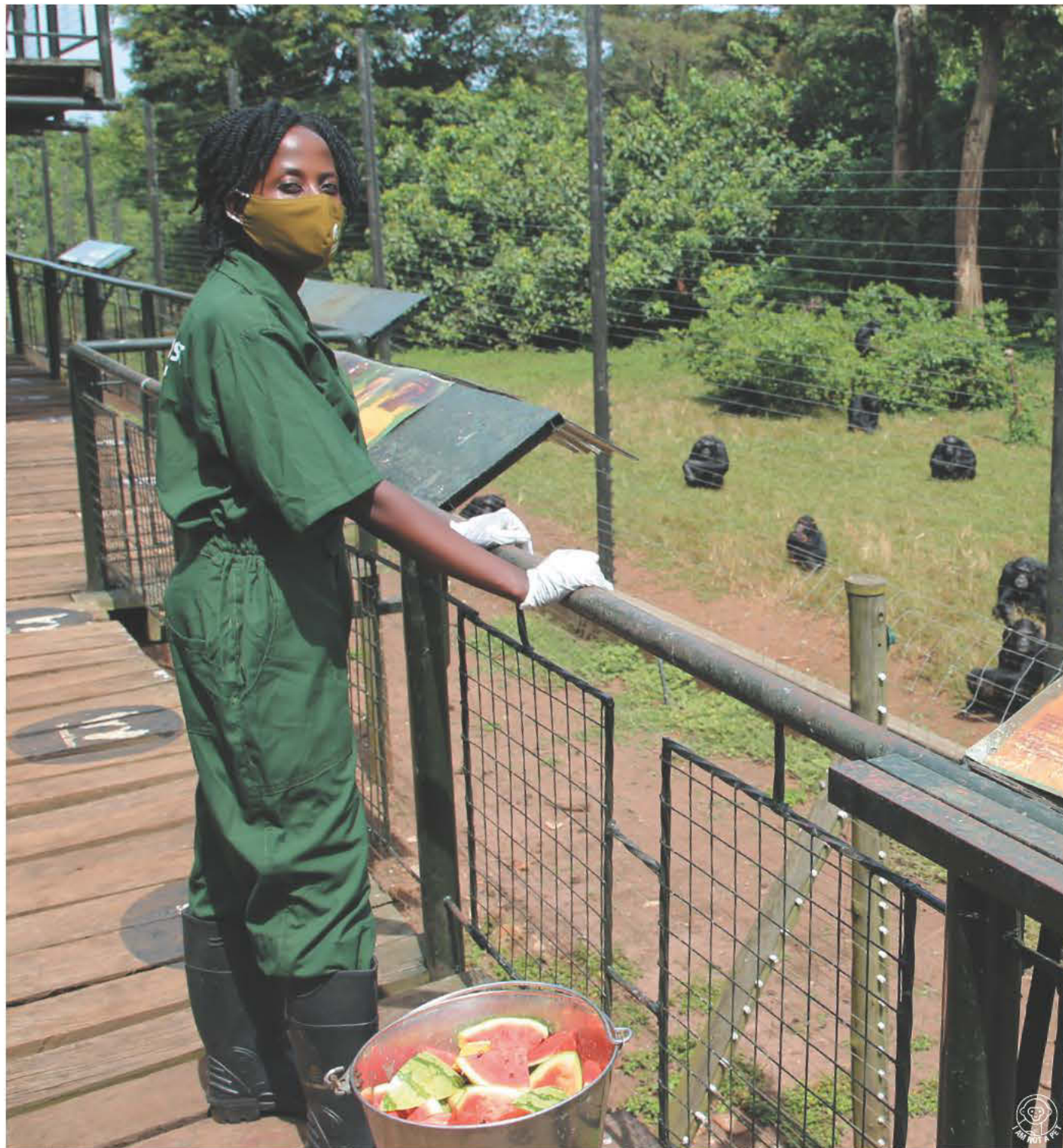
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DOROTHY BASEMERA THEIR EXISTENCE DEPENDS ON OUR ACTIONS

Dorothy's desire to get involved in chimpanzee conservation work was sparked by a guided tour at a chimpanzee sanctuary in Uganda. Today, she is part of the conservation team.

PHOTO: NGAMBA ISLAND CHIMPANZEE SANCTUARY

Dorothy Basemera began working as an animal caregiver volunteer and are now part of the chimpanzee conservation team at the Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary, in Uganda.

"Coming here was a choice driven by the fascinating stories that were shared by the guide during my first visit to the sanctuary, as a younger student," says Dorothy.

After university she came back to Ngamba Island as an intern, learning the fundamentals of animal care and came to have a special love for the sanctuary's chimpanzees, an endangered species.

The sanctuary works to sustainably conserve chimpanzees in their natural habitats, but also provide captive care to those who cannot survive in the wild.

Today, Dorothy's work at the sanctuary is quite diversified, but she is never far from the chimpanzees. And her days start early.

"At 6:30 we have a team meeting to discuss the day's activities. After that the next little while is all about the chimpanzees when

I prepare their food, feed them and, then help clean the chimpanzee facility," Dorothy explains and continues:

"Once all these chores are done, I switch gears and take care of the other side of my responsibilities. Most of the time I start off by answering emails and check the progress of fundraising campaigns that are underway, and I might also make check-in calls to donors."

A crucial part of Dorothy's work, except of course from caring for the animals, is to make sure that the sanctuary has sufficient funds to take care of and provide for the chimpanzees.

Also important to her is to make sure that the guests that come to visit the sanctuary have a great experience at Ngamba Island, visiting her beloved chimpanzees.

"Conservation has been rewarding, and all the more so while speaking for our closest relatives, the chimps, whose existence is dependent on our actions as humans. I believe in life-long learning. I aspire to be a conservation activist," Dorothy concludes. ■

MARTHA HAUKONGO

MY DESIRE TO INSPIRE

Martha was 11 years old the first time she saw wild animals in her home country Namibia. Today, she is involved in environmental education of the next generation of Namibians, by taking them out in nature.

PHOTO: GIRAFFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Martha Haukongo grew up in Omuloka, a small village in northern Namibia. Like many Namibian children she didn't have the privilege of going on holidays to wildlife reserves or national parks. The first time she saw wild animals was on a school trip to Etosha National Park, when she was 11 years old.

“It was an exciting and unforgettable experience for me, and it was this excursion that made me decide what I wanted to do when I grow up,” says Martha.

After high school Martha pursued a bachelor's degree in Natural Resource Management and Nature Conservation, in Windhoek.

“My desire to make a difference in the world, and to be a part of the solution drove me to pursue a career in conservation,” Martha explains and continues.

“I studied nature conservation because I wanted to be involved in conserving our natural resources. Nature provides us with so many important things that are essential for humans and our survival on this planet. It does not matter if we have studied nature conservation or not, it is important that we all contribute to making this world a better place.”

After completing her degree, Martha joined the Giraffe Conservation Foundation's (GCF) environmental education team, and it was here she discovered her real calling: sharing her passion for nature with the next generation of Namibians. The Khomas Environmental Education Programme (KEEP) aims to reconnect children with nature and equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to tackle environmental issues and make informed decisions in the future.

“As we educate the children, I realize that we are making a difference in their lives because we are changing their behaviours which will ultimately improve their living conditions. Working with young kids can be exhausting at times, however, it is also incredibly fun and rewarding,” Martha says.

The programme runs field classes at a nature reserve close to the capital. The children can join the 3.5 km nature hike and learn all about the plants, wildlife, animal tracks, and poo that they encounter.

“For most of the kids, this is their first time to explore nature and their first opportunity to see wild animals. I love seeing how excited they get as they start to identify different animals based on their tracks or poo, or when they spot them in the park for the first time. When we are lucky, we see animals like giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, or springbok. It reminds me of my first wildlife experience and how it has changed by life,” Martha says and continues.

“In the end, all the hard work is worth it because the students leave the park excited to share everything they have seen and learned with their friends, teachers and family!”

GCF is the only organization in the world that concentrates solely on the conservation and management of giraffe in the wild throughout Africa. Martha explains: “Our organization is doing a wonderful job securing a sustainable future for all giraffe populations in the wild, not only with our giraffe conservation programmes but also by prioritizing education of young Namibians. I hope that the children we meet will develop a passion for protecting their environment and grow up to become dedicated conservationist just like us.” ■





MARIE FIDELE TUYISENGE

BOTANIST SAVING GORILLAS

Marie Fidele's curiosity about plants as a child now benefits the conservation of mountain gorillas and their habitat in the Rwandan rainforest.

PHOTO: DIAN FOSSEY GORILLA FUND

"I grew up with curiosity about plants – how they grow, how they look," says Marie Fidele Tuyisenge.

That curiosity propelled her into a job as a biodiversity research assistant at the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund in Rwanda.

While the Fossey Fund is famous for their work protecting endangered gorillas, they also study the gorilla habitat itself, including the plants, insects and other animals that share the habitat, in order to better protect the gorillas themselves.

"Volcanoes National Park, where the Rwandan mountain gorillas live, is a high-altitude tropical forest," says Marie Fidele. "It contains a high diversity of plant species and is home to many animals – not just mountain gorillas, but golden monkeys, buffalo, elephants and more."

Marie Fidele is part of a team that studies the native plants that have been propagated in the Fossey Fund's nursery at their Ellen Campus, hoping to learn more about the ecosystem of the nearby Volcanoes National Park, home to more than half of the world's remaining mountain gorillas.

"We started a biodiversity survey as we began working to reforest a former agricultural plot on which our new Ellen Campus is located, and we will continue to monitor the plants over time."

Marie Fidele was born in Muhanga district, a city in the southern province of Rwanda. Her parents and three siblings live there still. She says her appreciation for nature started when she

was young.

"I grew up with the aspiration to pursue scientific studies, especially in the natural sciences, so that I could contribute to the conservation of the environment," says Marie Fidele.

As a biology student at the University of Rwanda, she had the opportunity to participate in a field visit to the Volcanoes National Park with researchers from the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, and she knew that's where she was meant to be. After that visit, she was invited to work on her bachelor's thesis at the Fossey Fund's Karisoke Research Center; upon graduation, she joined the Fossey Fund as a professional intern.

"The field visit directed my interest toward conservation, and I decided to specialize in botany, building an extensive knowledge of the plant species endemic to my country and this region."

Her favourite plant is the Hagenia tree. "It plays a large role in the ecology of the forest, providing shelter to different animals and even plants," she explains. "It's a keystone plant species in the Volcanoes National Park, and gorillas and other animals use it for shelter because of its size."

While her focus is on plants, she is proud to be doing her part to protect the endangered mountain gorillas of her homeland.

"Gorillas are incredible animals, and they need our help to protect them from going extinct. As a botanist and biodiversity research assistant, I want to make a better home for them to survive by protecting their habitat." ■



A NEW FAMILY RAISING A BABY ELEPHANT

Acceptance and belonging, support and love, these are values that are vitally important in elephant social structures and go a long way in helping the calves who have experienced the great trauma of snares, poaching, and abandonment to heal and have a second chance at life as nature intended.

Come along to HERD elephant orphanage in South Africa and get a glimpse of a day beside a baby elephant orphan, as numerous hands and trunks take on the role of raising a calf and giving it a second chance at life in a herd.

BY TAMLIN WIGHTMAN PHOTO: HERD ELEPHANT ORPHANAGE

Mornings come early in the wilderness. The sky is still dark as we wake to prepare for the day ahead. Already our night shift carers have been working through the night. Working... What does work look like in the wee hours under the starry skies at our little elephant orphanage in the wild, you wonder? Well, it could be one of our dedicated carers sitting outside or on a stretcher next to the orphan, little albino calf Khanyisa, while she and her companion sheep, Lammie and Nungu alternate between sleeping, eating, playing, sleeping, eating, playing, through the night.

The carer keeps a close eye and ear on them, ready to attend to the call of a rumble or baaaa (from Lammie). They monitor everything: writing down the elephant's every urine or dung passing, feeding the calf milk at different intervals, and keeping it safe from outsiders, here in our Big 5 reserve.

Elephants are restless sleepers, not at all like humans who sleep straight through. Khanyisa who is just two years old, will wake for her milk bottles several times through the night, which our

carers prepare, feed and clean constantly. She also munches on branches, sweet potato and bana grass in the nursery during the night, right beside her woolly friends.

On hot nights, the door is open, and Khanyisa can roam about or sleep outside in her small private garden. On cold nights, it is vital for fragile baby elephants to keep their body temperatures up and so inside they stay, with a fleece or wool blanket wrapped around them, providing the warmth a mother elephant would provide in the wild.

Constantly, through our care of baby elephants, the role is to be a mother to the orphan, to step in and help replace what was taken away.

Khanyisa (meaning light or sunshine in Shona) was found abandoned by her herd in the wild. Her mother and herd were nowhere to be seen. It's unknown whether she was abandoned before or after being caught in the snare, which she dislodged and was found trapped in. The wire caught around her neck caused

severe lacerations to her cheeks, head and ear. Following her successful rehabilitation, young Khanyisa is now being integrated into the Jabulani elephant herd.

Our carers, for those very important first months, and still now, as Khanyisa walks in the wild with her new herd, became her family, providing milk, security, teaching, warmth, stimulation. Her needs, as with all baby elephants, are diverse, nuanced, and numerous. Raising a baby elephant is completely different to raising other animals, as elephants are incredibly complex and sensitive.

Khanyisa’s milk formula needs continual tweaking as she grows – just as her mother’s milk would have naturally changed, in that truly amazing way of nature intuitively knowing what is needed. As she has grown, and started eating vegetation more and more, our carers provide Khanyisa with a range of branches, grasses, leaves, vegetables and fruits, solid food that helps to supplement her milk intake.

After waking and getting her morning milk bottles, she may have a weigh-in on our livestock scale, or head straight to grazing outside in the grass with Lammie and Nungu, before following one of our carers to the herd. The carer carries a backpack, which holds milk bottles for the day in the bush and a hot water bottle to keep it warm.

This is always such a precious scene, like a child heading off to school, as Khanyisa leaves her home to run to the elephants waiting for her. Once united, trunks embracing one another, smell detection on overdrive, the herd head off, carers beside them to protect them through the day.

It took a slow and vital process of integration to get to this stage where Khanyisa happily speeds off among the big gentle giant feet, with her favourite playmate, little elephant Timisa, another orphan accepted into the herd, and adoptive mother, Lundi.

She has been fully accepted now and our role is simply to get her bigger and stronger, with frequent milk feedings, so that she can spend full nights with the herd who have taken her in as one of their own.

Together the elephants spend the day foraging from the lush greenery, fruits, branches, and bark across the bush, swimming in the waterhole, sparring and playing, mud wallowing, sand bathing, walking, bonding... with our carers making sure all is well along the way, from around 6 am to 6 pm. During the day, our team bring in a new batch of milk bottles for Khanyisa and take the empty bottles back to the orphanage for cleaning and refilling. The calf’s time in the bush with the elephants is invaluable, it’s when she learns all the vital tricks and talents of her species. It’s not only the adoptive mother who helps, but rather several allomothers too – elephant “aunts” who fill in for the mother from time to time, helping, instinctively, to care for the calf who has become the apple of the herd’s eye, the most important centre of attention.

It has been beautiful to watch Khanyisa mimicking her elders – when they dig for bulbs, she will watch and then try it herself, until finding her own bulb. There have been so many moments of learning and copying over the months between Khanyisa and her herd – as she’s soaked in every new experience: elephants throwing sand over their bodies and rolling about in the mud, vital activities that help protect the skin from insects and the sun’s harsh rays. She has learnt what to eat, how to eat, gaining more and more strength in her growing trunk to be able to pull up grass and tug down branches.

The herd have surrounded her every little step of the way. This is especially evident as she has started swimming. Elephants have an incredible way of looking after one another and when the youngest and most vulnerable is lolling about in the thick mud where threats like crocodiles or lions, or simply getting stuck, are posed, the herd protect the baby with their legs, helping it to get up



when necessary. They keep an eye on the bush all around them, at all times.

For our carers, the elephants’ role in raising a baby elephant is never done, but also, like us, in the human herd, it is fortunately a job that is shared among many hands – or trunks. Raising an elephant, as with a child, takes a village. A herd.

Acceptance and belonging, support and love, these are values that are vitally important in elephant social structures and go a long way in helping the calves who have experienced the great

trauma of snares, poaching, and abandonment to heal and have a second chance at life as nature intended.

When Khanyisa and the herd arrive back at sunset, Khanyisa heads over to the orphanage again, often with her adoptive mother, Lundi accompanying her to the gate, where Lammie, Nungu, and one of our carers welcome her, with a bottle in hand (in the carer’s hand, Lammie is not quite that flexible yet).

Her two woolly friends Lammie and Nungu provide such lovely company for the calf in these nursery moments, with the three grazing together, chasing one another, playing, headbutting,



simply being in one another's presence. Lammie and Nungu give each other company during the day while Khanyisa is out.

After twelve hours out in the African wilderness, Khanyisa is often ready for bed when she arrives back to the orphanage, and she may head straight to her nursery for a wind-down. Sometimes though, there's still plenty of pep in her step to chase the wind through the long grass in the orphanage garden, or to frolic with her tyre tube. Keeping the calf stimulated is vital, but rest is just as important. When it is time for slumber, Khanyisa plops down onto a bed of hay to get some rest with our carer arriving for night duty by her side.

There is so much that goes on behind-the-scenes at an elephant

orphanage; nursery cleaning, gardening, branch collecting, milk making, dishwashing, admin... the household chores that allow a home to run smoothly. Caring for the little elephant orphan through the fragile years until it is ready to leave the home, that is our role, our purpose, and our great joy.

There are incredible challenges every step of the way, the journey is never smooth, what with everything that the orphan has gone through, but our team come together to do everything we can as humans to undo the wrongs of the past and give the baby the best new chance at a future among the welcoming and loving trunks and tails and tusks of fellow gentle giants. In Khanyisa's case, she has found everything we could have hoped for – a family to call her own. ■

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