

# THE BIG BUSINESS OF

# CONSERVATION



**W**ild things in Africa are under threat as never before. With exploding human populations, poorly managed development and criminal intrusion from afar, many fear that the continent's most iconic animals may soon vanish from their natural habitat. The disappearance of lions, elephants and others would mean the crumbling of vital ecosystems—and the loss of billions of dollars in tourism revenue. But in a place notorious for bad news, it is perhaps this crisis that offers the greatest promise of hope. The 25 conservationists

listed here represent the passions of thousands of people across the continent. They come at the crisis with opinions that differ and clash. But among their shared beliefs is the view that tourism is a vital part of the fight—go on the right safari and you contribute to the cause. We spoke to environmentalists, philanthropists, development workers, safari guides, travel agents and journalists throughout Africa and the world. These were the names that came up the most. The way forward passes through them. **BY AUSTIN MERRILL**



**LUKE  
BAILES**

SINGITA  
South Africa, Tanzania,  
Zimbabwe

It began in 1925 as a hunting concession in Sabi Sand, on the edge of what is now Kruger Park in northeastern South Africa. Today Singita has grown into one of the world's most recognizable brands in luxury safari tourism, with 12 lodges and camps spread over 500,000 acres in three countries. **"We have one mission," Bailes says, "to protect land for future generations." The key to success, he says, is trust and sustainability, attained by showing local communities that if they protect the wilderness and wildlife, tourism will flourish, leading to long-term jobs and a higher standard of living.** It's not just about employment; Singita also runs environmental education centers, a culinary school, teacher training, micro-finance seminars and antipoaching units.

In Tanzania, the antipoaching force is 140 strong and consists almost entirely of ex-poachers—men who are now among the most strident defenders of Singita's famously abundant wildlife. And there's no letting up. "The UN projects that by 2050, Africa's population could double to 2.4 billion people, and the resulting increase on the scramble for resources could take a fatal toll," says American hedge funder Paul Tudor Jones, who found a kindred environmental steward (and partner) in Bailes, 57, when they met in 2006, after Jones acquired properties in Tanzania. (See "Update Grumeti," page 158.) "Luke's a third-generation conservationist, an advocate of 'responsible tourism,' a self-perpetuating strategy that strengthens communities and provides its own financial resources, thereby guaranteeing its sustainability," Jones says. The definition of modern conservation. [singita.com](http://singita.com).

**COLIN  
BELL**

AFRICA'S FINEST

Bell started Wilderness Safaris in 1983 with practically nothing—"less than a thousand dollars and one rusty little Land Rover," he says—but he had a revolutionary idea. He was an early proponent of involving local communities in safari and conservation work, and what he pioneered in Botswana—private companies partnering with locals—became a model for the continent. **"When the surrounding communities are not brought into the mainstream of the tourism industry, you've got trouble," Bell says. "You have to share with the country."** In 2005, having built 55 lodges with 2,500 employees spread over several countries, he sold his shares and teamed up with like-minded friends to start Great Plains Conservation, with an eye to expanding within Africa and beyond.

But soon the South African-born Bell left that project for a new passion: assembling the just-published *Africa's Finest*, a critique of the continent's safari industry as seen through conservation ideals. Intent on celebrating the good and running the bad guys out of town, Bell, 58, and his team spent two and a half years canvassing the continent's safari offerings. "We found only 50 gems," he says. "It's a shocking indictment of the state of the tourism industry." The book isn't just a bible of the best; it also includes a how-to section on getting green—instructions on solar power, waste disposal and interacting with local communities. "The calamitous collapse of the wildlife population has to be stopped," Bell says. "If we can get the market to move toward companies that do good, we can reverse a lot of problems." [africasfinest.co.za](http://africasfinest.co.za).

**LUCIA  
BELPIETRO**

CAMPI YA KANZI,  
THE MAASAI WILDERNESS  
CONSERVATION TRUST  
Kenya

My father was a hunter," says Italian-born Belpietro, who traveled to Africa with his father frequently in his youth. But his perspective changed as he got older—he wrote his doctoral thesis on wildlife as a natural resource in Kenya and later moved to Africa for good. "Living in the wilderness took away any interest in hunting," he says. In 1996 Belpietro, 49, opened Campi ya Kanzi. **Located in the Chyulu Hills in Kenya, with views of Mount Kilimanjaro in the distance, the lodge was built and managed with the cooperation and oversight of the local Masai.** "The idea was to prove to the Masai community, who are the landlords of these 280,000 acres, that wilderness teeming with wildlife has an economic benefit," Belpietro says. "Their best bet for the future is maintaining that wilderness and wildlife."

As part of that goal, Belpietro established the Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust, which is funded by fees paid by guests at Campi ya Kanzi and helps compensate the Masai for livestock killed by lions, resulting in a tripling of the lion population in the last seven years. Belpietro employs almost 300 Masai, led by Samson Parashina (who started as a waiter and is now chairman of the board for the trust), and the foundation supports 7,000 students in the area. "I could not have done what I've done without these people. They're the ones in the field, the ones believing in it," he says. "In 30 years you probably won't have the chance to be with tribal people living in a traditional way. This is an opportunity to be in touch with an incredible culture." [maasai.com](http://maasai.com).

**RICHARD  
BONHAM**

BIG LIFE FOUNDATION  
Kenya, Tanzania

It is, perhaps, the most iconic setting in all of Africa: The Amboseli ecosystem straddles the border of Kenya and Tanzania—the Masai people live here, Kilimanjaro rises to the south, and the mixture of forests, wetlands and dry plains attracts a huge array of wildlife. In the 1980s Bonham, 58, leased 300,000 acres from the Masai in the nearby Chyulu Hills, beginning an almost three-decades-long relationship with the locals. He understood early that sustainable conservation and tourism in Africa were possible only with the deep involvement of indigenous communities. (Today the ol Donyo Lodge offers guests an elite safari experience while providing jobs and profit-sharing to the Masai.)

**In 1992 he created the Maasailand Preservation Trust, working with the locals to improve education and health care, provide training in antipoaching and habitat-conservation methods and establish a compensation fund for livestock killed by wildlife. In 2011 the trust was merged into Big Life Foundation, a nonprofit started by Bonham and photographer Nick Brandt that has already had a huge impact on the poaching crisis in the area.** Big Life has established a force of 250 game scouts, built 15 outposts and purchased 14 patrol vehicles—all to protect two million acres of land in Kenya and Tanzania as the only cross-border operation of its kind in East Africa. In its first two years, Big Life helped secure the arrest of 627 poachers and confiscated 1,630 weapons. Still, Bonham fears that seeing animals in the true wild may soon be a thing of the past. "The current trend means the only elephants left will be in small, well-protected conservancies and parks," he says. [biglife.org](http://biglife.org).

**STEPHAN BRÜCKNER**

NAMIBRAND RESERVE,  
WOLWEDANS  
Namibia

Not far from the spectacular red sand dunes of Sossusvlei, in southwestern Namibia, lies the NamibRand Nature Reserve, a private conservancy of nearly half a million acres of desert. It was founded in 1992 by Namibian businessman Albi Brückner, who had frequented the countryside in the 1960s, when he went ranch to ranch selling water pumps to farmers. He began buying land and eventually stitched together 13 former livestock farms to create one of southern Africa's largest private reserves. In 1994 Brückner's son, Stephan, 45, came on board to build the Wolwedans collection of lodges and camps, hoping to lure the curious and the well-off to a safari experience whose draw is not big game (though there are springbok and giraffes, and cheetahs have been reintroduced) but breathtaking and otherworldly landscapes. (See "Namibia Chic," page 96.)

**The plan seems to be working: For the last seven years, the nonprofit reserve has run in the black, Stephan says. "Normally conservation projects of this scale depend on donors or government support," he says. "We stand on our own feet."** Despite its tourism successes, NamibRand is primarily a conservation project, Stephan says, and revenues are poured back into running biodiversity and community projects. Wolwedans provides jobs and educational programs for locals, but it has also started a culinary institute in Windhoek, Namibia's capital, which has produced 220 employed chefs in six years. "It shows how wide the impact of the conservation project is," he says. "It's moving beyond the borders of the reserve." [wolwedans.com](http://wolwedans.com).

**GREG CARR**

GORONGOSA NATIONAL PARK  
Mozambique

Gorongosa was once one of Africa's best-known national parks. Wildlife was so plentiful that early visitors called it the place where Noah had left his ark. But civil war erupted in 1977. Troops slaughtered animals for food and poached elephants to trade ivory for guns. The park lost 99 percent of its buffalo, zebra and wildebeest. After the war, locals began burning Mount Gorongosa's rainforest—the water source for the park—for subsistence farming. Carr, a philanthropist from Idaho, first visited in 2004, and by 2007 he had signed an agreement with the Mozambican government to oversee the park's rehabilitation.

Carr, 53, is a man of big ideas. In the 1980s and '90s, his Internet and voice-mail-technology ventures made him hundreds of millions of dollars. **He has jumped into the conservation of Gorongosa with an enthusiasm equal to his funds—taking on not only wildlife preservation but reforestation and community relations, too. He is building a science research center, supports schools and health clinics and trains local youth in the ways of luxury safari tourism. His idea to stop deforestation on the mountain? Coffee.** He's just begun showing locals how to plant coffee trees in the shade of the rainforest, hoping to halt the slash-and-burn methods that could eventually rob the park of all its life. It's slow going, but the long view, for Carr, is the only way to ensure sustainability. "Everything about the project is designed so that at some point, we slip away, and the Mozambicans are there with their national park." [gorongosa.org](http://gorongosa.org).

**IAN CRAIG**

LEWA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY,  
NORTHERN RANGELANDS TRUST  
Kenya

In 1977, Kenyan-born Craig took over his family's cattle ranch on Lewa Downs—40,000 acres just north of Mount Kenya National Park. A poaching crisis was destroying Kenya's rhino population, and the animals' numbers were in a free fall: What had been 20,000 rhinos were now fewer than 300. The Craig family set aside 5,000 acres of its land to create a sanctuary in 1983. The program's success called for more space, and so in 1995 Craig founded the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, combining the rest of his ranch with government-owned land to create a protected area of 62,000 acres. **In 2004 Craig expanded again, creating the Northern Rangelands Trust, an association of communities north of Lewa that covers more than six million acres. The NRT employs more than 600 locals, has six tourist lodges and boasts Kenya's second-largest elephant population and one of the largest populations of black rhinos in East Africa.** It teaches communities how to balance livestock operations with wildlife protection, supports locally owned tourism ventures and provides grassroots micro-finance opportunities.

But the biggest job remains rhino protection. The vital connections Craig, 61, has made with local communities combined with a boost in technology—thermal vision goggles, microchip implantation, radio telemetry—have made him cautiously optimistic. "We can win this fight," he says. But the animals' prospects for survival are still in crisis. (See "Apocalypse Rhino," page 228.) "There will always be rhino, but they might end up in zoos to keep them safe." [lewa.org](http://lewa.org); [nrt-kenya.org](http://nrt-kenya.org).

**HELEN DOUGLAS-DUFRESNE**

THE MILGIS TRUST  
Kenya

When Douglas-Dufresne moved from her hometown of Nakuru to an area just south of Lake Turkana in northern Kenya, the elephants were about gone. Most had been killed by poachers, and the few survivors had fled south to protected lands. But she was so taken with the beauty of the remote region, she made a home and began leading camel safaris—teaching travelers and locals alike about the importance of preserving a fragile ecosystem. **In 2004 she established the Milgis Trust to protect the wildlife and the environment as well as the way of life for the people who live in the area—nearly 2,500 square miles around the Milgis River, which runs between the Matthews and Ndoto mountain ranges.**

Douglas-Dufresne employs the local Samburu people as guides, and the trust has built schools, refurbished a health clinic, treated 900 people afflicted with trachoma (an eye disease that causes blindness) and installed solar-powered water pumps in six communities. It has also funded the digging of 22 water dams in the last two years, a boon for the resurgent elephant population, which is returning in great numbers, having been squeezed out of their recent habitat by renewed poaching and Kenya's soaring human population. In turn, deforestation has nearly come to a halt. Without the elephants, the locals couldn't find their way through the dense brush with their livestock, so they set fires that burned out of control. "It's fascinating to watch; the elephants are now doing their job," Douglas-Dufresne, 53, says. "They're opening up the forest, and in the last three years we've stopped the fires. And all the streams that had dried up are starting to hold water again." [milgistrustkenya.com](http://milgistrustkenya.com).





**IAIN DOUGLAS-HAMILTON**  
SAVE THE ELEPHANTS  
Kenya

No one knows elephants like Douglas-Hamilton. He moved from Britain to Tanzania as a young man and in 1965 became the first person to conduct an in-depth study of the animals' social behavior. In the 1970s he piloted his plane over much of the continent to conduct the first Pan-African elephant survey, alerting the world to the ivory-poaching crisis and the plummeting elephant population. He was instrumental in securing the 1989 ban on international trade in ivory, and in 1993 he founded Save the Elephants, a nonprofit dedicated to preservation through research, protection, community involvement, education (his wife, Oria, runs the lodge component, Elephant Watch Camp) and global publicity campaigns.

The ivory ban was widely effective, and although poaching never disappeared, elephant births exceeded deaths from 2003 to 2008, Douglas-Hamilton says. The population was recovering. "But then came 2009," he says, "and there was a tipping point." Fueled by a spike in demand from China and Vietnam, the price of ivory soared, and the illegal killing surged along with it. **Today Save the Elephants supports antipoaching initiatives and encourages locals to develop an interest in the animals based on cultural pride, fearing that financial incentives are less sustainable.** Enter Yao Ming: In 2012 the organization brought the former NBA star to Kenya for an anti-ivory campaign. And in 2013 Douglas-Hamilton, 71, briefed Obama Administration officials at the White House on the elephant crisis. Still, it's an uphill battle. "We're trying to buck the trend. But the trend is down," he says. [savetheelephants.org](http://savetheelephants.org).

**PETER FEARNHEAD**  
AFRICAN PARKS  
*Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Republic of the Congo Rwanda, Zambia*

As a 13-year-old boy in his native Zimbabwe, Fearnhead helped to build a 2,000-acre wildlife reserve on his school campus. "When most other kids were on the sports field, I was doing bird banding or taxidermy," he says. "Building fences, erosion control—I've been doing this since I can remember." Today Fearnhead is CEO of African Parks, a nonprofit he cofounded in 2000 that works toward the long-term survival of national parks across the continent. The group is a kind of quasi-government structure, stepping in when countries lack expertise and funds and implementing strict procedures designed to rehabilitate parks, wildlife and the adjacent communities. The goal is to create a conservation-led economy by restoring what travelers want to see, thereby fostering a plausible environment for commercial interests. "And it's all linked to the parks," Fearnhead, 44, says. "That's good for conservation, local people and finances." **In the seven parks under his control, the results are remarkable. Zakouma National Park, in Chad, was losing up to 800 elephants a year prior to his involvement. In the two and a half years since African Parks took over, it's lost just 11.** In Malawi's Majete Wildlife Reserve, "there wasn't a single animal, not a single tourist, not a single dollar of income for our first three years," he says. Now it's reintroduced more than 2,500 animals, and two tourism operations have set up shop. Last year the park had 6,000 visitors and generated \$250,000 of income, a huge boost for conservation and the local economy. "We don't want to be on the sideline, we don't want to be advising," Fearnhead says. "We want to have responsibility and accountability for doing." [african-parks.org](http://african-parks.org).

**TONY FITZJOHN**  
MKOMAZI NATIONAL PARK, KORA NATIONAL PARK  
Kenya, Tanzania

In 1971 Fitzjohn, who'd grown up with foster parents in the gray suburbs of London, hitchhiked his way from South Africa to Kora National Park in Kenya. There he was offered a job assisting the famed wildlife conservationist George Adamson. The previous assistant had just been killed by a lion. Fitzjohn took the job, and four years later he nearly suffered the same fate when a lion attack left him with a fist-sized hole in his neck and most of one ear missing. Thus began a career in conservation that has been as notable for its wild adventurousness as for its remarkable success.

**After Adamson was gunned down by Somali bandits in 1989, Fitzjohn, 68, headed for Tanzania, where he began working to rehabilitate the ravaged populations of wild dog and black rhinoceros in the Mkomazi Game Reserve. There he has built roads and airstrips, erected dams and fence lines, constructed schools and vocational training centers and run water projects and polio campaigns.** That's in addition to the wildlife work, and it's all done with a staff made up entirely of volunteers. Tanzania granted national park status to Mkomazi in 2008, but access to the animal preservation areas is by invitation only (call WildlifeNow at 310-777-3555 to make a request). The threat of rhino poaching is the main reason for the caution. Thanks to tireless fundraising efforts, Fitzjohn is now protecting the rhino with ex-Tanzanian army personnel and a state-of-the-art electric fence and tracking devices. "Everything we do is to avoid that confrontation where it becomes necessary to get into armed conflict," Fitzjohn says. "There's no joy in having battles just because you have not put systems in place to avoid them." [wildlifefirst.com](http://wildlifefirst.com).

**KUKI GALLMANN**  
THE GALLMANN FOUNDATION,  
THE GALLMANN AFRICA CONSERVANCY  
Kenya

Gallmann's passion for conservation was born of tragedy. In 1972 she left her native Italy and moved to Kenya with her husband, Paolo, and son, Emanuele. They made their home on Olari Nyiro, a 100,000-acre cattle ranch on the Laikipia Plateau, at the edge of the Great Rift Valley. Then, in 1980, Paolo was killed in a car accident while Gallmann was pregnant with their daughter. Three years later Emanuele died from a puff adder bite.

In their honor she created the Gallmann Memorial Foundation, transforming the ranch into a nonprofit nature reserve dedicated to conservation through research and education programs designed to enrich the lives of locals. (She chronicled her story in the 1991 memoir *I Dreamed of Africa*, which was made into a film starring Kim Basinger.) **One of her main missions is to combat elephant poaching, which she blames on poverty and "bored idle youth guided by seasoned criminals." Through her foundation—and employment opportunities at the two safari lodges on her reserve—she provides a viable alternative way of life to young locals, who have limited schooling and job prospects.** "Or the illegal traders and corrupt politicians will reach them first," she says. Gallmann, 70, has built a community center and sports complex in the area and has hosted some 50,000 students from all over Kenya for environmental education programs. Paolo and Emanuele remain nearby—Gallmann planted acacia trees on their graves next to her home, and she gives their seedlings to visiting schoolchildren, who have planted them all over the country. She calls the trees her grandchildren. [gallmannkenya.org](http://gallmannkenya.org).

**TARA  
GETTY**  
AFRICA FOUNDATION  
*South Africa*

Just north of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi, Africa's oldest protected park, lies the Phinda Private Game Reserve—56,000 acres of forest, grassland, marshes and hills in eastern South Africa, near the Indian Ocean. Once the site of pineapple farms and old hunting camps, Phinda began its reincarnation in the early 1990s with the help of Getty, grandson of oil tycoon J. Paul Getty. Today it's a luxury safari destination and conservation zone known for its high-quality wildlife, in particular a vibrant population of cheetahs. It stands as the flagship of &Beyond, one of Africa's leading elite safari operations with 32 lodges and camps in five countries. (Getty is on the board.) Ecotourism was a relatively new idea for the area when Phinda got its start, and Getty, 45, was excited to "combine a magical experience and at the same time restore the land and look after the communities," he says.

**&Beyond, run by Joss Kent, now operates in almost ten million acres, and its conservation work is monitored by the Africa Foundation, Getty's affiliated nonprofit, which works closely with the communities in and around the company's game reserves. It has built hundreds of classrooms and health clinics, taught computer literacy, supported centers for orphaned children and provided access to clean drinking water to thousands of families.** For Getty, working with the locals is the only way African conservation has a fighting chance. "Relationships with the people and sustainability are key," he says. "If you get that wrong, you'll end up with abandoned buildings on the side of the road—projects where the community just wasn't interested." *africafoundation.org.*

**JAKE  
GRIEVES-  
COOK**  
GAMEWATCHERS SAFARIS  
*Kenya, Tanzania*

Grievess-Cook, 66, was born and raised in Kenya, but it wasn't until he began working in the tourism industry and saw his country's wild animals under threat—killed off by poachers, forced from their habitats by human growth—that he realized the importance of fighting for their preservation. "There were vast tracts of land that were wild, that were teeming with wild animals," he says, thinking back on his childhood, "and you kind of took it for granted." In 1972 he started his career and quickly understood the troubles that came out of haphazard development and the fragmenting and fencing of unspoiled land. **"Without the wildlife you don't have the tourists," he says, "and the animals were disappearing. I wanted to find alternative ways of doing things and use tourism to pay for it." Today Grievess-Cook is CEO of Gamewatchers Safaris, which runs ecofriendly tented camps in the Laikipia, Masai Mara and Amboseli ecosystems.**

The company was one of the first to partner with local landowners to establish private conservancies of protected land that can support low-impact tourism. The revenues earned by locals through land-lease agreements and jobs have led to self-policing within the communities—now that people value the animals in a way they hadn't before, there are fewer cases of poaching and poisoning on the conservancies than elsewhere. A kind of peer pressure has taken hold, with more and more safari camps and communities following Grievess-Cook's model. And lands that had been killing fields for animals are now becoming their safe havens. *porini.com.*

**DERECK  
& BEVERLY  
JOUBERT**  
GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION,  
BIG CATS INITIATIVE  
*Botswana, Kenya*

Love of lions brought Dereck and Beverly to Botswana in the early 1980s, and they went on to become renowned wildlife filmmakers. **Seven Emmys, a Peabody, 11 books and hundreds of millions of viewers later, they realized that despite the exposure and their success, animals in Africa were disappearing faster than ever. In the last 50 years, lions there have gone from 450,000 to about 20,000. "Extinctions are looming," Dereck, 57, says. "When I looked at the Emmys lining the shelf and the falling lion numbers over our lifetimes, I knew we needed to do more."**

In 2008 the South African couple started the National Geographic Big Cats Initiative, which supports 39 projects in 17 countries, and created Great Plains Conservation, which runs low-volume, high-cost safari camps in Botswana and Kenya. (See "How to Do the Mara-Serengeti," page 117.) The tourism revenue pays for the Jouberts' conservation work, which includes bolstering local schools, moving rhinos to safe areas and lobbying governments for effective policy change. (They used to buy hunting licenses to help fill national quotas, then tear them up. Now they've helped Botswana institute a nationwide hunting ban.) Their well-heeled clients help their cause, too. "We sit around the dinner table and talk about conservation," Dereck says. "We bring opinion makers into Africa, and they leave as ambassadors." As for the daunting numbers, they remain upbeat. "We are seeing change," Beverly, 56, says. "But we can never be complacent. As soon as you stop, the rot sets in. And the animals are killed." *greatplainsconservation.com.*

**PAULA  
KAHUMBU**  
WILDLIFE DIRECT  
*Kenya*

Elephants are our heritage," says Kahumbu, "and there's a growing sense that our heritage is at risk. It's unifying people to stop the slaughter—to stop the illegal trafficking of ivory." Kahumbu, a native Kenyan, is the executive director of Wildlife Direct, a nonprofit founded by Richard Leakey and based in Nairobi that supports conservationists by connecting them with donors around the world while working on a policy level to effect change through legislation and publicity campaigns. **Kahumbu works with other nonprofits and Kenya's private game reserves and safari companies to coordinate the efforts of an industry whose members share common goals. Kenya's private conservancies occupy about the same amount of land as its national parks, Kahumbu, 47, says, calling their contribution to wildlife preservation "monumental."**

But with no formal structures guiding these private initiatives, particularly for those located along animal migration corridors, she worries about the sustainability of their achievements. And in the end, she knows this is not just a fight over the elephants' place in Kenya's culture. "It's bigger than that," she says. "The animals are Kenya's economic capital. We have to defend it." Her recent campaigns have starred Kenya's first lady, the national rugby team and the country's world-class distance runners. It is this kind of support, she hopes, that will help build a sense of national pride in the anti-poaching fight. "The idea that the problem will be solved by some multinational agency doesn't fly anymore," she says. "They've been here the last 20 years and the animals remain in great danger. We have to do this ourselves." *wildlifedirect.org.*



**CHARLIE  
MAYHEW**

TUSK TRUST

56 projects spread across  
18 African countries

**M**ayhew led 33 Europeans on a seven-month overland drive from London to Cape Town in 1985. His obsession with Africa, which had begun years earlier on a pre-university trip to the continent, took on new urgency during the expedition. Poaching was on the rise, and the group helped build a perimeter fence for a rhino conservation park in Kenya's Great Rift Valley. Jumping into the fight, Mayhew established Tusk Trust in 1990 with actor Timothy Ackroyd. In 2000 he left the finance world to make Tusk his full-time job.

Frequently partnering with safari lodges like Lewa House, other conservationists and even Buckingham Palace (ardent supporter Prince William is Tusk's Royal Patron), the nonprofit works to protect Africa's wildlife through projects that also aim to improve education and lessen poverty for people living near at-risk animal populations. **Tusk has raised more than \$30 million for its 56 projects in 18 countries, benefiting 150,000 people and three million acres of land. Today, with ivory and rhino-horn poaching on the rise once again, Mayhew, 52, believes that educating young Africans is critical to the animals'—and the communities'—survival.** In Tusk's environmental programs, some students are seeing elephants for the first time. "For kids living in Gaborone, most of the parks are thousands of miles away from them, and yet these young Botswanans are going to become their country's next leaders," he says. "They need to understand the value that wildlife represents in their country so they'll conserve it for the future." [tusk.org](http://tusk.org).

**EMMANUEL  
DE MÉRODE**

VIRUNGA NATIONAL PARK

Democratic Republic of the Congo

**D**e Mérode's career in conservation has been defined by perseverance in the face of civil war. He came to the Democratic Republic of the Congo as an anthropologist in 1993, the year before the genocide in Rwanda, the trigger for a conflict in the DRC that has become the world's deadliest war since 1945. Rival militias set up bases in Virunga (established in 1925 as Africa's first national park), hiding in its vast forests and feasting on its fauna. In 2008 De Mérode—who's married to Richard Leakey's daughter, Louise, a paleontologist herself—was made the park's director. Only a foreigner (De Mérode is Belgian and was born in Tunisia), it was thought, could rise above the war's underlying ethnic tensions and have any hope of saving the park's wildlife. Incredibly, under his watch things appear to be looking up.

**His great coup? Coaxing rebels to allow an armed government presence—300 rangers—to help De Mérode secure the park. There are only 800 or so mountain gorillas left in the world (about half of them live in the Virunga mountains), but the numbers have doubled in the last 20 years. And the park's hippo population, which was 27,000 in the 1970s but crashed to 300 by 2005, has climbed to 1,200 today.** To De Mérode, the heroes are the rangers, who are charged with the security of visitors and wildlife alike. Outbreaks of fighting—which force immediate closure of the park, including Mikeno Lodge, which opened in 2011—have killed 140 rangers since 1996. "I can't tell you how hard their work is," De Mérode, 43, says. "They deserve all the credit for what's been achieved." [visitvirunga.org](http://visitvirunga.org).

**PRAVEEN  
MOMAN**

VOLCANOES SAFARIS

Rwanda, Uganda

**G**orillas are very important to the rich world," says Moman, who had a career in British politics before returning to his native Uganda in the 1990s. "But they're not important to people in the actual area where the gorillas live—because they're worried about getting bread on the table." The dilemma is at the heart of Moman's work at Volcanoes Safaris, a group of four lodges that dot the forests and foothills of the volcanic range of mountains along the border of Uganda and Rwanda. **The crown jewel of the group is Virunga Lodge, in Rwanda (see "Mountain Gorillas Uganda + Rwanda," page 150), where guests can track critically endangered mountain gorillas, climb volcanoes, visit the grave site of Dian Fossey and meet students at a local school that is supported by the Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust, a nonprofit set up to enrich the lives of the people who live closest to the property.**

This is the most densely populated part of Africa, with homes running right up to the edge of protected parkland. For Moman, 58, who was the first to build a luxury safari lodge in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, fostering a strong relationship with the locals not only benefits the community, but it's also the only way to save the region's wildlife. The people in this area are desperate for land and space, "so they'd love to just cut down the park and have more farmland," says Moman. "They're right next to us, right at our gate. You have no choice but to think about them, to interact with them—because if you don't have tourism in these areas, the great apes will not survive." [volcanoessafaris.com](http://volcanoessafaris.com).

**YONATHAN  
OPPENHEIMER**

TSWALU KALAHARI, TSWALU

FOUNDATION

South Africa

**A**t nearly 250,000 acres, Tswalu is the largest private game reserve in South Africa. Owned by the Oppenheimer family (which sold its stake in De Beers in 2011) and located on a remote edge of the Kalahari Desert not far from Botswana, Tswalu prides itself on its balance of luxury safari accommodations and closely monitored conservation work. To minimize its footprint in an extremely fragile ecosystem, no more than 30 guests are allowed at a time. **To maximize its impact on the environment, the Tswalu Foundation, under the leadership of Oppenheimer, 43, oversees a conservation approach that aims to restore the former hunting and livestock land to its natural setting while reestablishing the area's biological diversity.**

It is a carefully managed process and includes a yearly analysis of the reserve's biomass and climate conditions, used to determine what animals might need to be relocated to maintain the area's equilibrium. Simply letting the place revert to wilderness on its own is not an option. "Historically that has worked perhaps in the short term but has been a disaster in the long term," he says. "We're working to find a sustainable balance between the environment, the wildlife and the area's communities." Among the eclectic research endeavors the foundation supports are studies of the behavior and habitat of such creatures as the aardvark and the pygmy falcon. "I hope we challenge guests not to just take photos," he says, "but to think about how these things interconnect." [tswalu.com](http://tswalu.com).

**THE GROUNDBREAKER: RICHARD LEAKEY**

TURKANA BASIN INSTITUTE, WILDLIFEDIRECT Kenya

**I**t was an audacious move. In 1989 Leakey, who had just been named director of the Kenya Wildlife Service and was desperate to stop his country's rampant ivory poaching, convinced President Daniel Arap Moi to join him in setting fire to a 12-ton pile of elephant tusks. The scene made the news worldwide and helped bring the price of ivory from \$150 a pound down to \$5. The slaughtering of elephants stopped, and Leakey's already outsized reputation grew. He'd made that reputation as a fossil hunter around Lake Turkana, in northwest Kenya, following in the footsteps of his famous parents and

making groundbreaking discoveries in the '60s, '70s and '80s that sent shock waves through the world of paleoanthropology. The '90s were tumultuous for him—he lost his legs in a suspicious plane crash in '93, resigned from the Kenya Wildlife Service and spent a few years in politics before quitting public life and heading back to Turkana.

Leakey, 68, has spent the last several years running the Turkana Basin Institute with Stony Brook University and speaking out against corruption and the renewed destruction of Africa's wildlife. **"Lions can be put back into a lot of these**

**areas where they've disappeared," he has said, chastising lackluster government action, "but that in no way justifies negligence in letting them disappear."** He founded WildlifeDirect in 2006 to support conservationists and is developing plans to bring tourists to Lake Turkana. Broad curiosity, the involvement of local communities, strict procedures—these are crucial in both the study of ancient fossils and the pursuit of sustainable wildlife conservation. For a man who has long been interested in who we are and where we came from, it's all connected. [turkanabasin.org](http://turkanabasin.org); [wildlifedirect.org](http://wildlifedirect.org).



**SABINE  
PLATTNER**  
ODZALA WILDERNESS CAMPS  
*Republic of the Congo*

German philanthropist Plattner grew up in Freiburg, Germany, exploring the Black Forest. She began visiting South Africa with her husband in 1978, ultimately making it a second home. In 2007 she traveled to the Congo to explore setting up an environmental education program for villagers living in Odzala-Kokoua National Park, a stretch of rainforest in the northern reaches of the country, bordering Gabon. Nearly the size of Connecticut, the park lies in the Congo River basin and is home to important populations of forest elephants and lowland gorillas.

**“My intention was to get involved in community work and education,” Plattner, 64, says, thinking back on her days as a schoolteacher. “But conservation doesn’t work in a sustainable way without commerce. And commerce means building a lodge.”** She had no interest in tourism but was convinced that her goals would never be met without it. Talks began with local elders. “They said, ‘We don’t trust until we see,’ so it took a few years,” she says. “They had been promised so many things that never happened. I said I would try my best, but I do not promise a thing. That was how we started.” This year two lodges, built and staffed with local labor, finally opened, offering five-star accommodations in vast, unspoiled rainforest—a very rare thing. (See “Rumble in the Jungle,” page 148.) This fall, in nearby M’boko, Plattner will open a community center to host conservation researchers along with education programs, including a mobile theater. “It must be fun. It’s how you motivate a child. While you’re playing, you learn.” [odzala-kokoua.com](http://odzala-kokoua.com).

**IAN  
PLAYER**  
WILDERNESS LEADERSHIP  
SCHOOL  
*South Africa*

My most vivid memory was all these dead bones, these carcasses.” That’s what Player, 86, says today, reflecting on the rhino-poaching massacres that gripped Africa in the ‘50s and ‘60s. Player’s rhino conservation work began in 1952, when he joined the South African park service. Soon he was spearheading an effort that protected the rhino habitat at home while relocating scores of the animals to zoos worldwide. He also credits hunters—by 1970 the white rhino population had recovered enough that South Africa placed it back on the legal hunting list, and game reserves charged up to \$20,000 to shoot one. “The hunting industry exploded,” says Player, who was born in Johannesburg. “And with it came the explosion of the white rhino numbers.” Money and resources poured in, and by 2007 the population had crested at 17,000. (With renewed poaching sending those numbers tumbling again, the idea that hunting still plays a positive role is “increasingly difficult,” he says.)

**But to have any long-term hope of true conservation, Player says, the most important thing is to expose as many people as possible to true wilderness, something he considers a highly spiritual experience. In 1957 he founded the Wilderness Leadership School, one of several foundations he’s created, and it has led some 60,000 people on walks through the wilds of Africa.** “You’re walking in the areas where early man walked,” he says. “Sleeping on the red earth of Africa.” No cell phones, no liquor are allowed. “In wildness lies the preservation of mankind,” Player says, paraphrasing Henry Thoreau. “I have certainly come to see that.” [wild.org](http://wild.org).

**SVEIN  
WILHELMSSEN**  
BASECAMP EXPLORER, MARA  
NABOISHO CONSERVANCY  
*Kenya*

The Masai Mara National Reserve, in southwestern Kenya, runs to the border of Tanzania, where it gives way to the Serengeti plains. It holds one of Africa’s most renowned concentrations of wildlife and is home to the great migration—the seasonal movement of millions of wildebeest, zebra and other grazing animals that flood into the Masai Mara every year. (See “How to Do the Mara-Serengeti,” page 117.) When Wilhelmsen, 59, visited in 1996, he sat down with a Masai chief who spoke of his worry that the local ecosystem and way of life were under threat. “If you destroy the Masai Mara, you destroy something that is irreplaceable,” Wilhelmsen, a Norwegian, says.

And so he and the chief joined forces. Two years later Basecamp Masai Mara opened, the first of three safari lodges Wilhelmsen would build there. **He leases the land from the Masai, and the locals make up 95 percent of his workforce. In 2010 Wilhelmsen worked with community leaders to form the Mara Naboisho Conservancy, pulling together 500 landowners to create 50,000 acres of newly protected land north of the Masai Mara.** He credits the success to the Masai’s interest in finding sustainable ways to use tourism to balance their culture with wildlife preservation. His affiliated foundation has teamed with locals to fund schools, create fair-trade handicraft workshops and fight deforestation by planting 70,000 trees. In 2011 he flew five Masai grandmothers to India for a six-month training program to become solar engineers. Today 300 of the community’s households have solar power—they call the grandmothers their Solar Mamas. [basecampexplorer.com](http://basecampexplorer.com).

**JOCHEN  
ZEITZ**  
SEGERA, ZEITZ FOUNDATION  
*Kenya*

Zeitz bought Segera, a 50,000-acre ranch northwest of Mount Kenya, in 2006 and promptly removed 300 miles of fences to let wildlife move freely. Now he has opened a luxury safari lodge on the property (see “Sexy, Cool Kenya,” page 50) and is running the place according to the “4 C’s,” his operational philosophy that calls for equal focus on conservation, community, culture and commerce. **This way of working guides the lodge and his associated nonprofit foundation and has led to numerous projects geared for good, including the restoration of endangered cheetah and wild dog populations, improved health care for 23,000 locals and support for small-scale, sustainable income-generating projects like beading, beekeeping and briquette-making.**

The method was born of his early days in the business world—in 1993, at age 30, he was named CEO of Puma, becoming the youngest person in German history to head a public company. He brought Africa into Puma’s DNA, having fallen in love with the continent on a trip in 1989, and the company now dominates the soccer apparel market there. Today Zeitz, 50, uses soccer as a vehicle for change. In a community near Segera, he created a tournament for kids that calls for more than playing games—for a team to advance, contributions to the 4 C’s are also required. “We have to find a holistic way of looking at conservation and community development,” Zeitz says. “With sustainability as the ultimate goal, philanthropy is a good kick-starter, but a project needs to be viable. It can’t always be built on aid.” [segera.com](http://segera.com); [zeitzfoundation.org](http://zeitzfoundation.org).