



Dear Friend,

Because of the generous spirit of our friends from all around the world, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust is doing some pretty heavy lifting when it comes to elephant conservation throughout southern Africa. We have some good news to share: a new IUCN study finds that the number of elephants dying from poaching is declining, with a mortality rate of 10% in 2011 falling to 4% in 2017. This is much cause for celebration so I wanted to pause and just say... thank you for your support and your confidence in our work!

We're not out of the woods by any stretch of the imagination; elephants throughout Africa are still very vulnerable to poaching and the illegal wildlife trade. Impoverishment is one of the biggest motivators for poaching, and drought and the economy here in Zimbabwe are once again magnifying a poverty crisis. We're beginning to see an increase in poaching and we're expecting more human-elephant conflict as the drought continues and people go hungry. We're asking for your continued help to stay the course. If ever there was a time to rally together – that time is now!

Recently, leaders from countries that comprise the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) met in Botswana's border town of Kasane to discuss elephant management and the international ivory trade. KAZA TFCA is home to roughly 220,000 elephants - half of Africa's remaining

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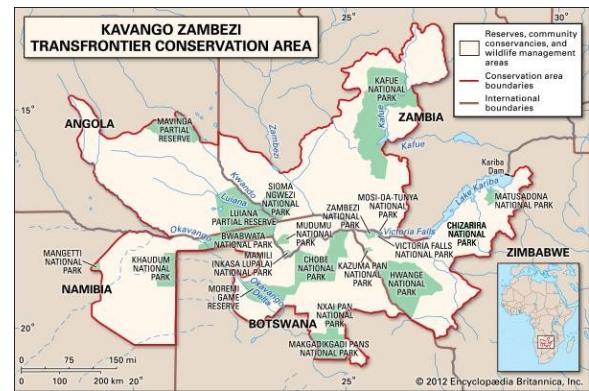


Figure 1. Situated where the borders of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe converge, the KAZA TFCA spans an area of approximately 520 000 km² and includes 36 proclaimed protected areas.



Figure 2. One of the collared elephants we monitor to collect information on home range, migration routes, and any interaction with humans.

population. Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust is a leader in this cross-border, transfrontier collaboration and together, the member countries are working together to find management solutions.

The Trust and its partners collect valuable data to monitor movements of elephants, inform conflict mitigation techniques, and to identify and protect wildlife corridors and migration paths in the face of growing human populations. This research is playing a critical role in helping wildlife authorities throughout KAZA TFCA make informed elephant conservation and wildlife management decisions.

To fight against illegal ivory trafficking, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust is developing a forensics test to match DNA from seized ivory to a database of validated samples from known geographic areas to determine the origin of the poached ivory. Wildlife products can change hands and cross borders more than once as traffickers move their wares to key ports before arriving at demand markets. It's critical to determine where the ivory has come from to improve poaching convictions, alert wildlife authorities to poaching in their areas, and to connect the dots within wildlife trafficking syndicates.

Preventing the spread of disease plays a significant role in conservation of wildlife. Anthrax, naturally occurring in the soil of every inhabited continent of the world, surfaces when the right conditions prevail – drought, hot and arid climate, and standing, stagnant water. Wildlife and livestock ingest the released spores in these conditions and can die if not vaccinated or treated immediately with antibiotics. Early detection of anthrax is critical in stopping an outbreak.

Our lab uses two techniques to diagnose anthrax. We look for the bacteria capsule under a microscope on a stained blood smear and we use a Polymerase Chain Reaction procedure that confirms the disease by identifying gene sequences in the bacteria's DNA.

In April, because of an early and prolonged drought, The Trust identified anthrax in a deceased elephant. We were particularly concerned about this case as the disease emerged very early in the year; an outbreak would likely follow if we didn't contain it right away.



Figure 5.. GPS Elephant Collars

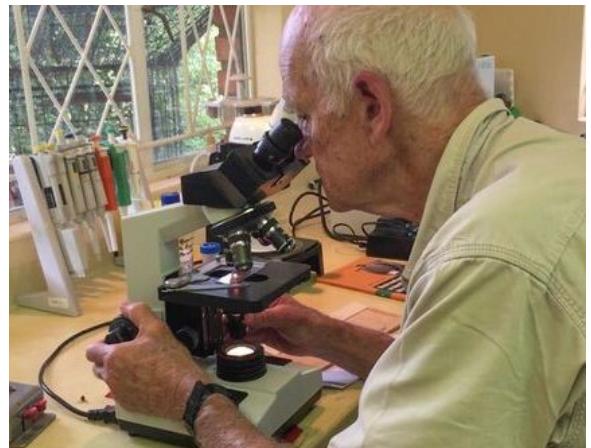


Figure 6. The Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust laboratory is the only wildlife disease and forensics laboratory in the KAZA region.

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Education and information play a key role in protecting wildlife, livestock, people and livelihoods during these times. We worked with wildlife authorities to warn people not to eat contaminated meat. We also vaccinated livestock to prevent spill over of the diseases into domestic animals in rural communities living adjacent to wildlife areas - people who can least afford to lose a cow that they depend on for milk, protein or to sell for their children's school fees. Fortunately, this outbreak has been minimal because of our early detection, cool winter temperatures that arrived and a rigorous outreach to rural areas about this situation.

We're also expecting to see a rise in the occurrences of human-elephant conflict. Low rainfall is limiting the amount of vegetation and forage in adjacent national parks and elephants will soon be in search for food. They will look to crops, water wells and gardens in neighbouring rural settlements.

The Trust's "*Community Guardians*" program mans a conflict hotline 24/7, trains and employs locals in protecting villages from invading and unwelcomed wildlife. They use chili guns for crop-raiding elephant and vuvuzelas (loud horns) with lions to move animals out of the villages. Since we've started the "*Community Guardians*," elephants and people are less in harm's way and people are successfully able to protect their food sources from hungry and potentially dangerous animals. Out of the 123 conflicts so far this year, we had a 100% deployment of guardians, zero human or livestock fatalities, and only one elephant casualty has occurred.

The business of saving wildlife will never stop as long as we have exploding human populations, dwindling resources, poverty, and foreign demands on our natural heritage. The more we can do now, the more battles we will win.

Our lab needs improvements including equipment and capacity expansions to keep up with demand when combatting the illegal ivory trade. Our rescue and rehabilitation efforts needs to keep up with the forecasted rise in poaching and we need to carry on with our research on elephant movements and wildlife corridor usage to inform management plans and mitigation strategies. As important as our "*Community Guardians*" program is, and it saves hundreds of wildlife and human lives each year, it is surprisingly difficult to



Figures 3/4. Chili guns spray hot chili powder at elephants causing them to turn and run. Chili fields and fences are effective deterrents as well.



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fund. Not only is this work effective in conservation, it goes a long way in making sure we foster a coexistence spirit in these communities, which is vital for long-term conservation success.

Major decisions will be made at the next CITES meeting in Geneva in August that will affect the future of elephant conservation. A proposal by Southern African countries to allow sale and trade in ivory will be put forward to try and derive income to support conservation in those member countries, which have half of the remaining African elephant population, and the communities living with and impacted by elephants. Other CITES member countries will put forward a proposal to completely ban the sale and trade of any elephant products in an effort to close loopholes in the illegal wildlife trade. Although both sides have strong opinions and the conversation is emotional, the goal of both proposals is to benefit elephant conservation. It is our role to provide the best science on elephant ecology and movements, and effective mitigation practices so that the best management decisions are made. We're counting on you to help us do just that.



[Please give a gift today](#) to help Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust. The present and future of these wonderful, iconic giants is in your hands; together, we have a real chance to save them!

For wild Africa,



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