



NEW SURVEY FINDS POACHING IS INCREASING ACROSS AFRICA AND WILDLIFE RANGERS ARE BRACING FOR IMPACT AMIDST THE ONGOING IMPACTS OF COVID-19.

RANGER TEAMS SPANNING THE CONTINENT CALL FOR PUBLIC SUPPORT AS THEY JOIN FORCES THIS SEPTEMBER TO BOLSTER THE ANTI-POACHING EFFORTS OF THOUSANDS OF THEIR COLLEAGUES.

PRESS RELEASE UNDER EMBARGO 00:01 GMT 27 JULY 2021

27 July 2021; Ahead of World Ranger Day on Saturday 31 July 2021, more than 150 ranger teams across Africa are gearing up for the **2021 Wildlife Ranger Challenge**, a multi-million-dollar fundraising initiative culminating on 18 September and supporting thousands of the men and women on the frontline of Africa's protected areas.

Africa's rangers are stretched to capacity and continue to see drastic cuts in resources and an increase in poaching due to the devastating economic impact of Covid-19. The Wildlife Ranger Challenge, a 21km race across the varied and challenging terrain of Africa's Protected Areas, will support rangers to safeguard the continent's iconic wildlife for years to come. [View the campaign film.](#)

Find out more, donate to the cause and sign up to run in solidarity with Africa's rangers on 18 September 2021 at wildliferangerchallenge.org

A new survey, conducted by Tusk and NATURAL STATE with 60 field conservation organisations across 19 African countries, found that Wildlife Rangers see no relief in sight, as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact Africa's communities and wildlife. The pressures on Africa's protected areas threaten to compromise decades of development and conservation success through:

(1) **A continental-wide collapse of wildlife tourism.** The Covid-19 crisis has eliminated essential funding for wildlife protection that comes from tourism¹.

Frankfurt Zoological Society, North Luangwa, Zambia: *"The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be felt in Nsumbu, particularly through the continued loss of tourism and the income derived which both directly and indirectly support rangers. This reduced tourism has*

¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-020-1275-6>



impacted jobs and related livelihoods and provided a challenge in linking the value of nature with the value to human life.”

Rhino Ark, Aberdares National Park, Kenya: *“Tourist revenue for the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) has dropped by 96%, triggering budget cuts to government [wildlife and] forest security programmes.”*

(2) **A rise in poaching.** The economic stresses of Covid-19 on communities, and reduced ranger presence, has resulted in an increase in poaching, but the threat is expected to increase further with ranger capacity remaining low and as international borders open.

Conservation & Wildlife Fund, Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe: *“Once lockdown restrictions started easing, poachers leapt back into action - the number of traps and snares recovered increased by 8,000% between May and July 2020.”*

Sergeant Nyaradzo Hoto, International Anti-Poaching Foundation, Zimbabwe; *“COVID-19 has presented unique challenges to our Akashinga Program. The pandemic has significantly impacted and continues to impact, our anti-poaching operations. There has been an alarming spike in the rate of ivory-related arrests made by our team over the last year. The poachers will not rest despite the pandemic so it is up to us to maintain operations. This is proving a challenge, but one we’re resolving well as a team. We stand strong in our commitment to patrol the vast wilderness areas we are entrusted with and protect those that can’t fend for themselves against poachers.”*

Edwin Kinyanjui, Senior Wildlife Community Officer, Mount Kenya Trust, Kenya; *“In the past year, rangers have had to be more vigilant than ever and enhance surveillance while repeatedly putting their lives on the line. Illegal activity due to widespread loss of income is on the rise and while combating this activity, rangers are at risk of contracting COVID-19. Poaching methods are also increasingly becoming sophisticated and the justice system overstretched. We keep going because we understand that what we are fighting for is bigger than us.”*

THE CHALLENGE

Launching today, ahead of World Ranger Day on 31 July, the Wildlife Ranger Challenge will bring together more than 150 ranger teams, across 20 African countries to participate in a series of mental and physical challenges, culminating in the Wildlife Ranger Challenge 21km half marathon on 18 September. The challenge brings rangers’ vital work to the fore and provides a platform for their organisations to generate crucial funding.

A global campaign **#ForWildlifeRangers** will use the power of ranger voices, influencers and celebrities to issue a call to arms to the public to support Africa’s rangers by donating to the Ranger Fund or by taking part in the Wildlife Ranger Challenge in solidarity, wherever they are in



the world. Today, [Bear Grylls kicks off the public challenge](#) with a film describing the need for urgent action. Throughout August, celebrities will encourage the public to 'Train Like A Ranger' with three weeks of mental and physical challenges. Throughout the campaign, WRC Ambassador and actor Alexander Dreymond will encourage the public to 'Run with Rangers' by [signing up](#) to join the global engagement to virtually run or walk alongside thousands of rangers on September 18th. The Greatest Marathon Runner of All Time had these words of support for all those taking part in the challenge:

Eliud Kipchoge, World Marathon Record Holder and Lewa Ambassador; *“As I head to the Tokyo Olympics, I wish all the wildlife rangers across Africa the best of luck as they come together for the 2021 Wildlife Ranger Challenge. Together with the organisers Tusk and Natural State, we believe wildlife rangers are critical to a strong and sustainable future for wildlife and communities. I look forward to being back in a few weeks to support and participate in the challenge together with my Lewa brothers. Good Luck and remember, No Human is Limited.”*

THE RANGER FUND

Funds raised will cover the operating costs for at least 5,000 rangers, enabling them to provide for their families, protect communities and wildlife in some of the continent's most vulnerable areas. Tusk, NATURAL STATE, Game Rangers Association of Africa, The Thin Green Line, For Rangers, and the International Ranger Federation have partnered with 60 conservation areas to launch the pan-African challenge. The Scheinberg Relief Fund, the Challenge's founding donor, has generously committed another \$1.35m of matching funds in support of rangers, on top of the \$5m provided in 2020, with the goal of raising a total of \$5m in 2021. In addition, for a second consecutive year, EJF Philanthropies contributed at Elephant Platinum Sponsorship level of \$100,000.

WILDLIFE RANGER CHALLENGE 2020

In 2020, the Wildlife Ranger Challenge was mobilised to tackle the crisis. \$10m was raised to support over 9,000 rangers who collectively work to protect more than 4,000,000 km² of conservation areas across Africa providing salaries, equipment and operating costs.

Kissama Foundation, Angola states; *“If it wasn't for the WRC, we wouldn't have been able to cover the salaries of most of the ranger force due to serious funding cuts related to the pandemic. The effort of many years could have been lost.”*

Honeyguide Foundation, Tanzania states; *“Covid struck and with it brought uncertainty and the risk of losing more than just our goals, but everything that has been invested in over the past four years. The Wildlife Ranger Challenge restored hope and helped the rangers to realize that they were not alone; that their fellow rangers throughout Africa were all experiencing the challenges.”*



#ForWildlifeRangers • WildlifeRangerChallenge.org
Download images and videos [here](#)

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Notes to editors:

TOURISM: In 2018, the global wildlife tourism economy generated over \$100bn and provided nine million jobs, worldwide. But COVID-19 has resulted in an almost complete end to crossborder travel, severely affecting countries dependent on tourism revenue as a significant part of their GDP. The [International Labour Organization](#) suggests that African tourism operators have seen more than a 70% decrease in bookings due to the pandemic (UNECA 2021. Building Forward for an African Green Economy), significantly impacting revenue streams for conservation areas. As a result, more than 50% of rangers reported that they had experienced budget cuts and over 30% of rangers reported that colleagues had been laid off. (Singh et al, 2021. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on rangers and the role of rangers as a Planetary Health Service. Parks 27: 119-134.)

The tourism impact alone could lead to a [USD 53-120bn](#) hit to the continent's GDP. The impact of the pandemic on revenue generation was so serious that nearly half of PA agencies across Africa reported that they could only maintain basic operations for up to three months if the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 continued to be in force. (Waithaka, 2020. The impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Africa's Protected Areas Operations and Programmes. IUCN-WCPA Report)

POACHING:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had catastrophic impacts globally on human life, physical and mental health, and on our societies and economies. In Africa, the International Labour Organisation predicts that 30m people will lose their jobs during the pandemic, with the ECA estimating that 100m people will be living in poverty. Such hardships place major additional pressures on protected areas as communities increase natural resource use to survive. (UNECA 2021. Building Forward for an African Green Economy.)

CHALLENGE:

The Wildlife Ranger Challenge was formed at the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020, following several conversations between Jonathan Baillie, a global leader in conservation biology, and Mark Scheinberg, a businessman and philanthropist with a keen interest in conservation and animal welfare. Mark was concerned with the devastating effect that the virus



was having on the livelihoods of Wildlife Rangers throughout Africa and the animals they were responsible for protecting. After consulting with strategic partners, they created this exciting campaign and fundraising initiative – The Wildlife Ranger Challenge – to restore thousands of ranger jobs, support communities and protect wildlife. The Challenge is being coordinated by Tusk and NATURAL STATE in collaboration with leading Ranger Associations and an independent Steering Committee. The initiative’s founding donor, the Scheinberg Relief Fund, will match donations from the public up to \$1.35m, covering operating costs for at least 5,000 rangers in at least 50 conservation areas in 2021.

ABOUT TUSK Tusk’s mission is to amplify the impact of progressive conservation initiatives across Africa. The charity has earned a reputation for providing a highly efficient solution for funding wildlife conservation programmes. Tusk partners with the most effective local organisations, investing in their in-depth knowledge and expertise. By supporting and nurturing their conservation programmes, it helps accelerate growth from an innovative idea to a scalable solution. More information available at [Tusk.org](https://www.tusk.org)

ABOUT NATURAL STATE The mission of NATURAL STATE is landscape restoration at scale. Through large-scale restoration projects, NATURAL STATE’s objective is to sequester and store carbon, secure biodiversity and make measurable advances towards the sustainable development goals. In addition to implementing large scale restoration projects, NATURAL STATE develops innovative technology and financial mechanisms to unlock private sector capital, thereby accelerating restoration efforts globally. More information available at [NaturalState.org](https://www.naturalstate.org)

ABOUT THE SCHEINBERG RELIEF FUND The Scheinberg Relief Fund was established by businessman and philanthropist, Mark Scheinberg, together with his family, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its mission is to provide strategic, high impact relief for individuals and communities. As well as reducing the short-term impact of the virus, the Fund also seeks to build a legacy in the communities and initiatives that it gives to, by providing funding for projects that secure a longer-term impact. More information available at www.scheinbergfund.org

ABOUT THE GAME RANGERS’ ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

Founded in 1970, the Game Rangers’ Association of Africa is a non-profit organization which is the oldest, largest, and most representative ranger association in Africa. More information available at [GameRanger.org](https://www.gameranger.org)

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL RANGER FEDERATION

The International Ranger Federation is a membership based organization who actively promotes and supports the formation of Ranger Associations around the world to ensure



Rangers are more adequately supported and represented. More information available at internationalrangers.org

[ABOUT THE THIN GREEN LINE FOUNDATION](#)

The Thin Green Line Foundation Protects Nature's Protectors by providing vital support to Park Rangers and their communities who are the front-line of conservation. They work predominantly in developing nations and conflict zones, and with Indigenous Park Rangers. More information available at thingreenline.org.au or thingreenline.org.uk