SEPT/OCT VOL. 19
TWGA

THE TWGA TIMES

PRESERVATION, CONSERVATION, AND EDUCATION



Maasai at the 2026 TWGA Team Meeting

"Climb the mountains, the winds will blow freshness into you, while cares drop away like the leaves of Autumn."

John Muir

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Letter from the Director

Habari Marafiki (Hello, Friends)

Welcome to autumn.

The summer closed with a lovely meeting in September, as you know, and for these last few months of the year, we are doubling down to get the building project started.

Since the first moment Kefas and I decided to partner in a project to save wild giraffes, we have seen miracles, serendipity and coincidence galore. It seemed the very universe opened its arms and said, "We got you." From the unexpected path that took Kefas to Oldonyo Murwak, where we bought land, to my rerouted plane that gave us Moureen and Tomson, we have felt it was meant to be.

This month, we were given another surprise. It came in the form of Gloria and Evance.

When Aleigha finished the house plans, I had a little panic. These are American standard plans. How would we find people in Africa who could manage them? Kefas did his typical, "Let me look, Mom," and when I arrived, he had the name of a structural engineer. I still had one

eyebrow raised in doubt, so I looked up this engineer's name: Gloria Peniel Shali. Gloria helped build a home for orphaned children and was recognized on World Humanitarian Day. My eyes filled with tears. This is exactly the person we need.

We took Gloria to Tafakari, and she brought along her charming father (also an engineer.) They were touched by the beauty of the place and the mission of TWGA. Gloria asked if we had an architect. No, but we were hoping to find one. She knew just the perfect person, Evance Mosha. He and his father own Mosha Building Works, which built the Sacred Heart of Jesus convent and retreat house in Arusha. Again, serendipity.

The two were knowledgeable, kind, and very enthusiastic about our project. Another door opened.

It will take twenty months to build the Wasafiri House. Since it is the "travelers' home," we want everyone who has ever traveled to own a little piece of this home. If you remember the tale of Stone Soup, the weary travelers came to a town and had no food. No one would help them. So they put a stone in a pot and called it stone soup. One by one the community came out to add just one thing: a carrot, a potato, an onion... By the end, they had a feast, and everyone was fed.

We have one stone. It is our Cornerstone. (It's the one I always sit on when I visit.) Now we need our community to help us.

On page seven, you will find the Phase One "pieces." Everyone who supports a piece will find their name on



Gloria and her father with Kefas at Tafakari

our Builder's Walk, a brick walkway from the back door to the garden. The Wasafiri House will be your house.

You can truthfully say that you helped build it.

It's been a long journey, and we still don't have giraffes, but we know where they are! As soon as we have the infrastructure to support them, they will be everywhere. The countdown is on: twenty months, from October 1, 2026, to June 1, 2028.

Let's build it—they will come.

Peace and Love,

Michele and Team Twiga



From left, engineer Gloria with Michele and architect Evance, September 2026

Giraffes on the Move All Across Africa



Uganda Wildlife Authority rangers and vets guiding Nubian giraffe at Murchison Falls National Park during a 2019 transportation. Rangers use a blindfold and ropes to keep a giraffe calm and steady during a move.

This year, at least 35 giraffes across four African countries were loaded onto trucks, driven for hours over rough roads and released into new homes. For some, it was a homecoming generations in the making.

Moving a giraffe is never simple. Each animal must be sedated, blindfolded and guided with ropes into a trailer tall enough for a passenger who can stand five meters high. Stephanie Fennessy of the Giraffe Conservation Foundation says every translocation is years in the making. So why do it?

In Uganda, the answer was oil. Murchison Falls National Park holds an estimated 40% of the country's oil deposits, and drilling inside the park has picked up. In July, rangers moved 12 Nubian giraffes 106 kilometers to Ajai Wildlife Reserve, where giraffes had been missing for decades. If disaster strikes Murchison, at least twelve giraffes are safe.

In Angola, the reason was restoration. War and poaching erased giraffes from much of the country. In August, 12 Angolan giraffes made the trip from Namibia to Bicuar National Park, following two herds returned to Iona National Park. Every animal wears a solar-powered GPS tracker, and Angola's president has signed a national giraffe plan that runs through 2030.

In South Africa, the problem was too many giraffes, not too few. Pongola Game Reserve had more animals than its land could feed. Instead of culling, eight giraffes went to Somkhanda, a reserve owned by the Gumbi community, who won back their land in 2005. The giraffes bring tourists, and tourists bring jobs.

In Kenya, it was about bloodlines. Three young Rothschild's giraffes, now recognized as Nubian giraffes, moved from Soysambu Conservancy to the Giraffe Centre in Nairobi to keep a small population from inbreeding. It is part of a remarkable comeback: Kenya's Nubian giraffes have grown from about 130 in the 1970s to roughly 1,040 today.

While conservation efforts continue, giraffes are still drastically under served. Twelve or eight giraffes is helpful, but not significant. Giraffes need land. The translocation is still a matter of humans taking giraffe land.

But this year shows the slide can be reversed, one truckload at a time. Every giraffe that steps off a trailer into open bush is proof that governments, conservationists and local communities working together can put twiga back where they belong.

Living Planet Report 2026: The Case for Hope

By Jeff Jackson



Here it is, the tragic news: monitored wildlife populations have fallen by an average of 73% since 1970. That is the headline finding of the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Report, released on October 7, 2026.

But there is also a case for hope. WWF deliberately subtitled this year's report *The Science of Hope*, because alongside the losses, its data shows real recoveries. The same forces that drive collapse, it argues, can be turned to drive recovery. Tigers, green sea turtles, bluefin tuna and southern African elephants are proof that targeted conservation works. That is exactly the kind of work we do at The World Giraffe Alliance, and the findings are inspiring.

The Zoological Society of London conducted a comprehensive study tracking populations of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish from the year 1970 through to 2022. The extensive data reveals that freshwater species suffered the most severe declines, dropping by an average of 85% over this period. Meanwhile, land animal populations decreased by 69%, and ocean life experienced a 59% reduction.

The main cause of the decline is habitat loss and degradation. At TWGA, we are fighting this by purchasing land for giraffes, land that will never be farmed or developed. The next biggest threats are overexploitation (such as overfishing), climate change, pollution, invasive species and disease.

However, the 73% figure is easy to misread because about half of the populations monitored are actually stable or increasing. The average drops so sharply because the populations that are declining are falling so steeply.

But the real optimism is found in the recoveries:

Tigers. The population of wild tigers has risen from around 3,200 in 2010 to approximately 5,700 in 2025, due to stronger anti-trafficking measures across borders, expanded protected habitats, and skilled ranger teams.

Green sea turtles. Green sea turtles, like our friend in the photo, have been down-listed from Endangered to Least Concern on the IUCN Red List. It took five decades of work across 80 countries: guarding nesting females and eggs, managing beaches, regulating coastal lighting and fitting fishing gear with turtle excluder devices.

Bluefin tuna. By 2010, Atlantic bluefin tuna had collapsed by about 80%. Science-based catch limits and international fishing agreements turned that around, and neither Atlantic nor Pacific bluefin is now considered over-fished.

Southern African elephants. Savannah elephants remain endangered across Africa, but they are increasing in southern Africa, where the law gives local communities a direct stake in managing wildlife.

However, WWF's main point is that these victories are fragile. Saving species one by one cannot keep pace with the forces causing their decline. To achieve significant progress, we need to transform the ways the world cultivates food, generates energy, and allocates investments. The work we do at TWGA is only part of the challenge, and even small shifts in our daily routines can make a difference.

Food. Food production is the leading driver of habitat destruction. Forests, wetlands, and grasslands are constantly being cleared to make way for agriculture and livestock, with soy, palm oil, and cattle being the leading contributors. Here is something many people don't know: roughly 75% of the world's soy is cultivated to feed animals rather than humans. Only a minor portion is used for products like tofu, soy milk, or edamame.

Energy. How the world powers itself also shapes the land wildlife depends on. Oil and gas wells, mines and pipelines cut through habitat, and spills and runoff pollute the water animals need. Burning coal, oil and gas also drives climate change, bringing longer droughts that leave giraffes and elephants walking farther between shrinking water holes.

Money. Money is flowing in the wrong direction. A UN Environment Programme estimate found that about $7.3 trillion went into activities that harm nature in 2023, compared with roughly $220 billion spent protecting or restoring it. More than 30 to 1.

Still there is hope, researchers at the University of Exeter, whose work in the report introduces the concept of a "positive tipping point": a stage beyond which change becomes self-sustaining, more affordable, and increasingly difficult to reverse. Solar energy might be the prime example, currently standing as the most cost-effective source of new electricity in the majority of countries.

WWF Chief Scientist Rebecca Shaw's prescription is blunt: go after the root causes in these three systems instead of saving one species at a time. From October 19th to the 30th, governments will meet in Yerevan, Armenia, for COP17, the UN biodiversity conference, to review their pledge to protect 30% of the planet's land and ocean by 2030. Going in, the outlook is not encouraging draft UN review found the world falling short on 22 of its 23 nature targets for 2030, and countries are far behind on their pledge to raise $200 billion a year for nature. What remains to be seen is whether governments can keep or follow through on their pledges.

We cannot wait for governments to act because tipping points aren't reached in conference halls. They are pushed by millions of everyday choices, and that can start right at the dinner table. We can fill our plates with more greens, even just a few days a week, we can look for deforestation-free palm oil and choose less beef, because every meal is a vote. It takes a willingness to change, but there is hope, together we can make a difference.

Sources:

[WWF press release: Living Planet Report 2026]

[Inside Climate News: Wildlife Populations Have Plunged Globally, But Some Buck the Trend]

[Tech Times: WWF 2026 Report: Tigers, Turtles, Tuna Bounced Back; Nature Protection Outspent 30 to One]

El Niño: What We Can Learn When Disaster Strikes

El Niño is a natural climate pattern that returns every two to seven years, when the Pacific Ocean warms and the trade winds weaken or reverse, warm water and moisture shift eastward, and weather patterns change around the world.

This year's El Niño is expected to be the strongest on record, and it is arriving on a planet that is already warmer than at any time in modern records. While El Niño itself is a natural occurrence, climate change has raised its baseline, which means its effects: heat waves, droughts and floods, which it naturally produces will hit harder. This El Niño is being dubbed a "Super El Niño", and research suggests extreme El Niños like this one will become more frequent as the planet continues to warm.

This matters especially for Africa — in Africa, El Niño usually means drought in the south and heavy rain in the east. The last one, in 2023 and 2024, brought one of southern Africa's worst droughts in decades. Crops failed, and Namibia announced a cull of more than 700 wild animals, including 83 elephants, 30 hippos, 60 buffalo, 50 impala, 100 blue wildebeest and 300 zebras. Giraffes were spared from the cull, but drought puts them at risk too: from hunger and thirst, and from conflict with farmers when they wander onto farmland in search of food and water. For giraffes and elephants, drought means ever-longer walks between shrinking water holes.

Meanwhile, in East Africa, heavy rains brought floods that washed away homes and roads. In northern Tanzania, where Tafakari calls home, floods and landslides near Mount Hanang killed more than 60 people in 2023.

The damage spreads into the global economy, too. The lack of water led to failed harvests, which raised food prices. When crops fail in one part of the world, prices rise at grocery stores thousands of miles away. Fewer crops and natural fibers affected clothing, timber shortages affected housing, and flooding slowed economic growth. But for families in Tanzania who live season to season, a failed harvest is not an economic statistic. It is a hungry year, and hunger can push people to turn to wildlife for food, as it did in Namibia.

Is there an upside? Maybe, when production slows, so



does the pressure on nature, and fewer emissions go into the air. We saw it in 2020, when the world shut down due to COVID-19 and emissions dropped sharply. But the drop lasted barely a year and the emissions bounced back and soon reached record highs, undoing any benefit from the shutdown. A slowdown forced by disaster helps nature only briefly, and its fallout hits the people with the least the hardest.

The real lesson of the 2020 shutdown is that our choices matter and we can make a difference—not because a crisis forces us to but because we choose to. We can shop less, use and reuse what we have, and live a little more simply. Those are changes that last, and they don't require anyone to go hungry.

This intense Super El Niño will eventually end, but the underlying cause will remain with us. We should take the opportunity to understand the lessons it offers.

One Piece at a Time

Building the retreat house is a major undertaking. While we have the land, the cost to build in Tanzania is higher than you think. Wood is rare and many components have to be imported. We want to be completely transparent about this project so we are including a link to Evance's breakdown of costs. It is a bit intimidating, but when the miracle happens, it will feel so much grander when we look at where we started. Remember the travelers and their empty pot in Stone Soup, and trust that the funds will come. So, bring your potato or carrot. Pick your piece and make your donation. The names of our donors and what they bought will be published in each newsletter from now until the project is complete (unless you request to remain anonymous.) We want to honor your faith in this mission.



The countdown is on. Let's build it. See the List here

The Safari to Save Giraffes



Photo by Kefas October 2026

In May, The World Giraffe Alliance partnered with Go2Kili Adventures to develop a two-year campaign called The Safari to Save Giraffes. This opportunity takes travelers on a life-changing journey across East Africa, knowing that 40% of their investment goes toward the preservation of giraffes.

This October, a couple from Washington was on the journey.

Sandy and Jeff found us in a Google search (our thanks to Google) and, after looking at a variety of safari excursions, chose ours because of our philanthropic mission. While most safaris are group tours of 6–12 people, there's was a private tour with pricing comparable to a group rate. This private tour allowed them to move at their own pace and choose where they wanted to linger. They received personal care and were able to engage with their guide, who just happened to be—Kefas. In addition to their trek across the savanna, they were able to make a stop at Tafakari, where they saw the land they had donated to preserve, and the site for the Wasafiri House. They visited the Olduvai Gorge and crossed the Serengeti, spending 2 weeks on tour.

This chance to see Africa and ALSO contribute to the future of giraffes will only be offered until next September. Right now we can help you plan your visit. A 100.00 deposit will hold your spot, and now is the best time to buy airline tickets. If you need assistance arranging your travel, we will be happy to help. We've done this trip many times. You can reach out to The World Giraffe Alliance at (818) 268-1000 through WhatsApp, Facebook or the website. We'll be waiting for you.

See you on the savanna.

Reflecting on Kilimanjaro Ten Years Later

By Michele Mattingly



Next month makes ten years since my summit on Mount Kilimanjaro. That was the week I sweated, stumbled, scrambled, crumbled and cried more than any other week in my life. I woke up nauseous. I went to bed weak and woke up sore. I recall how I shivered all night and tossed against pad so thin I thought I could feel every pebble under me. My hair was knotted, my face puffy, my skin dry. There was throbbing in my eyes and my legs felt like weights were tied to my ankles.

Despite all of this, it was one of the best times of my life. Nothing compares to the moment I looked up from watching my own feet and saw that world-famous sign: "Congratulations you are now at Uhuru Peak—Africa's Highest Point 19,341 feet."

There was a rush of euphoria, but more than that. Everything I had suffered throughout my life, the pain, trauma and injustice, all the failures and disappointments, just fell off in hoary flakes and were rinsed away by pure sunlight. There was only sublime beauty and joy remaining. I was overwhelmed by soft remembrances and wistful happiness, and in that, I was profoundly thankful to have had this incredible human experience.

As I look back, I know I must have harassed everyone I knew with constant urging to make the journey. When one has an extraordinary experience, it is only natural to want others to have the same. But how do you describe something so monumental? It is a trauma that leads you straight into the arms of peace so encompassing that you can only let it happen.

That moment is when time stands still.

Ten years have passed, but I still feel the same. I can still feel the joy, the misery and the awe. In September, Kefas and I went back to the mountain, and it was he who reminded me that joy and purpose are two sides of one coin, that pain and wisdom live side by side, and when you are given a gift, to hoard it is the greatest disrespect of all.

Not everyone will climb Kilimanjaro, but her reach is grand. Those of us who have stood in her shadow and beheld her from above the clouds are gifted with a rare vision of what transformation means. That is what I was desperate to share with those I pressed to make the climb. I realize now that Kilimanjaro isn't a place; she is a state of mind.

As I begin the next ten years' journey through The World Giraffe Alliance and Tafakari, it is more than a mission, more than a project. It is a fiery passion to live deeply and meaningfully. It is this gift of Kilimanjaro that I wanted to share back then, and still want to share today.

So, whether you are sitting in your armchair on a rainy day, or watching the sunset from your back porch, when you are suddenly overwhelmed with a desperate need to find the answers to the unanswerable, when your soul is panting for something deeper, richer, more inscrutable, more mystical than your daily life allows. . . close your eyes and listen. It's the best advice I can give.

The mountain is calling . . . and I must go. Listen. Maybe she's calling you.

The World Giraffe Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of giraffes and the land they inhabit. Through global collaboration, we educate, raise awareness, and take action to protect nature and save these gentle giants.
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