

THE TWGA TIMES

PRESERVATION, CONSERVATION, AND EDUCATION



Maasai warrior tending his goats near Tafakari 2025

*“Could a greater miracle
take place than for us to
look through each other’s
eyes for an instant?”*

Henry David Thoreau

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Dear Giraffe Supporters,

This summer has been an eventful one. Our whole team has been working overtime to boost our outreach. Tomson has posted videos of his work with giraffes, Moureen keeps us updated on conservation, Kefas is putting together safaris for the fall, and Johnmark has given us our first client. As for those of us in the Western Hemisphere, we are making contacts and calling on our friends and neighbors to join the effort to open Tafakari. We’ve experienced many successes, not the least of which is our first, in person, upcoming international meeting!

In September, all of us will meet in Tanzania for the very first time. Johnmark is coming from India, Tomson and Moureen from Uganda, and Shari, Jeff and I are flying in from the United States. All of us will gather with Kefas at Tafakari, near Moshi Tanzania.

When the seven of us step on the land, we will begin a new chapter. We will plant new trees, set bricks on the walkways, and break ground on the Wasafiri House. We will meet with local leaders, visit the animal corridor,

meet with the government officials and contractors, visit lumber yards and hardware stores, and connect with our Giraffe Guardians. But most importantly, we will spend an evening with the Maasai who have graciously offered to bless our land. This is where we bring it all into focus for our upcoming documentary *Beyond the Mountain*.

It is an exciting time. We are standing on the edge of something extraordinary. What began as a message from Kilimanjaro has become a force of nature, and we couldn't be more grateful or humbled.

With Love & Peace—

And gratitude,

Michele Mattingly

Conversations With Kefas



Maasai life is not Western life

People in Western countries wonder what life is like in sub-Saharan Africa. I can tell you about life in the Maasai Village.

Western civilization is complicated. People are chasing many things they think can make them happy. Maasai life is simple and clear. Our goal is clear. It is not about brands of shoes or price of cars or even going on holiday. Maasai life is about family, community and living each day. It is about the daily care of cattle, sheep, and goats. Most importantly, it is about the cows. Cows are wealth and survival.

People awaken with the sun, there are no clocks. They know the time of day by sunlight. When they awaken they begin the care of cattle. Like many Western homes, women do the cooking and serving of the meal. But at rituals or celebrations the men

eat first. This is because they are the providers and protectors which translates into privileges at the dinner table.

All the day is relationships. Boys herding cattle and spending time together, men discussing ways to improve community life, purchasing cattle, caring for livestock, negotiating, bargaining, making friends.

There is no ideal of independent success or outward signs of wealth. In fact, Maasai people rarely use the words “mine” or “my.” There are “the children” not “my children” there is “the well” not “my well.” There is peace in a Maasai community. Jealousy and competition are rare. Those who have success are celebrated, a success for one is a success for all. Everything is about the benefit to the community. After dinner there is storytelling where traditions and beliefs are shared. There are no night clubs, no pubs, amusement parks or restaurants. When night falls the village settles in for the night. Life is a steady rhythm. It is understood by everyone. What matters is each other.

Congratulations Moureen and Tomson

Our Ugandan team stays motivated in so many ways, they are an inspiration to us all!

This summer Moureen finished her master's degree in tourism, and Tomson just completed his bachelor's degree in wildlife management. Both of these dynamic young people also have full time jobs and work with The World Giraffe Alliance. We are honored to have this kind of commitment and energy on our team. Congratulations Moureen and Tomson!



The Doctor Frankenstein in American Giraffe Conservation

For generations, we have believed that conservation sites and even private collectors have been protecting species from extinction, but is it true? A revealing article by Lauren Quinn of the University of Illinois has brought to light what many conservationists have long feared: American giraffe populations have been hybridized across different species, resulting in genetically distinct giraffes that do not accurately represent the pure species found in their natural habitats. (University of Illinois and Morfeld Research and Conservation)

“Captive breeding programs in zoos would be better off restarting with fresh stocks from the wild if they want to maintain assurance stocks for the purposes of conservation,” said senior study author Alfred Roca, a professor in the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Illinois.

In 2016, researchers found genetic evidence showing giraffes are four distinct species, not one, and that they do not interbreed. Through crossbreeding, we lose the uniqueness of each species. These new giraffes only vaguely represent those found in the wild.



As genetic repositories for wild populations, animals in human care should represent what’s in the wild. After analyzing the DNA of 52 giraffes across American facilities, including private ranches and zoos, Roca and his colleagues found the opposite: these animals have become a genetic mishmash, reflecting decades of interbreeding and hybridization.

Wesley Au, a doctoral researcher in the informatics program at the University of Illinois, discovered that of the 52 giraffes examined, “Only eight got close to representing a single species—reaching about a 90% match—but the rest were a mix of two and sometimes three species.”

According to the researchers, these mixed breeds are the result of a 2004 Association of Zoos and Aquariums policy that treated giraffe breeding as a single “generic” unit rather than maintaining separate breeding programs for individual subspecies, as the AZA had done previously.

In captive breeding programs, organizers often prioritize an animal’s demeanor and overall temperament without giving sufficient attention to the underlying genetic diversity and health. As study co-author Kari Morfeld explained, breeding decisions may come down to an animal’s demeanor rather than its genetics: “She’s a nice female, he’s a nice male. Let’s put them together for breeding.” Morfeld said genetics are not usually considered in giraffe breeding decisions, but they should be, along with demeanor and physical characteristics.

Ultimately, researchers have concluded that giraffe conservation efforts should not depend solely on the limited environments of zoos and ranches. Instead, major financial and logistical investments are urgently needed to restore and protect wild populations across Africa, some of which have declined drastically and are now approaching local extinction.

Cash for Captivity



On any given Saturday you can pass by a zoo and see a parking lot full of cars with strollers and backpacks and kids in tow, paying for a day's entertainment. Families walk past lions behind glass, giraffes in deep ravines and apes separated by a mote. But what they are really looking at is one of the cruelest of human practices. Captivity.

Most of what you see in a zoo are animals whose natural habitat is the entire outdoors. They come from Africa, Asia, and Australia where they are grabbed from their herds and homes, boxed into cages, transferred in planes or on ships in unspeakable conditions and dumped in an area completely foreign to their species. They are fed processed foods, forced into schedules, and housed in spaces that even convicts in prison would deem insufferable.

Consider: A wild elephant walks between fifteen and 120 miles a day, but elephants in zoos average about three, mostly back and forth along the same worn path. No amount of "enrichment" closes a gap that large. Giraffes can walk five miles a day, but most enclosures offer little more than a few steps. Hooves require friction to prevent overgrowth, so zookeepers must shave down the hooves manually as there is not enough walking to do it naturally.

This is the problem zoos cannot design their way out of.

Their stated purpose has been revised roughly once a century— first to show dominion, later to satisfy curiosity, then to promote science, and now for "conservation and education." But the physical fact at the center has never changed: animal confinement for exhibition.

From Royal Menagerie to Modern Zoo

Before the zoo (short for zoological garden) came the menagerie: royal animal collections that symbolized power and wealth.

3500 BCE animal bones discovered with fractures consistent with tethering.

1235 Henry III kept leopards at the Tower of London and a polar bear forced to fish the Thames in chains.

1664 Louis XIV built the Versailles menagerie on a radial plan so he could see every animal at once.

1793 Revolutionary France abolished the aristocracy and inherited its animals. They were moved to Jardin des Plantes then re-branded as a "scientific institution": the same animals, the same cages.

At no point did anyone look at the confinement and conclude it was justified.



*The seventeen-year-old Silverback gorilla
Harambe was shot by zoo in 2016*

In 1906, the Bronx Zoo displayed an African man in its “Monkey House” —its director sincerely believed he was educating the public but sincerity about tells us nothing about the morality of the mission.

The Damage of Captivity

Walk past any zoo enclosure and you will see tigers pacing, elephants swaying, and parrots pulling out their feathers, animal behaviorists call this behavior “stereotypies” that is any purposeless, repetitive behavior in animals that appear only in captivity.

Neuroscientist Bob Jacobs of Colorado College spent decades studying elephant and cetacean brains, and has shown conclusively that confinement in barren, unstimulating, uncontrollable environments produces measurable structural changes, thinning of the cerebral cortex, shrinkage of the capillaries supplying it with oxygenated blood, smaller neurons with less complex dendritic branching and therefore fewer connections. Chronic elevation of stress hormones damages and kills neurons in the hippocampus,

which handles memory, and the amygdala, which handles emotional processing. Among captive carnivores, the species that naturally roam the farthest, the deterioration is most prominent, regardless of enclosure quality. In 2003, Clubb and Mason published an analysis in *Nature* showing that among captive carnivores, natural home-range size predicts welfare outcomes — the wider-ranging the species in the wild, the more stereotypy and the higher the infant mortality in captivity. Polar bears, with the largest ranges, fared worst, spending roughly a quarter of their waking hours in stereotypic behavior.

An audit of the Indianapolis Zoo found 1% of its budget was spent on conservation, far less than the CEO’s salary. Zoos are nonprofits, but they operate with an amusement park’s incentives. That is why they favor charismatic animals like lions, giraffes and elephants over amphibians (which are seriously endangered.) It is why the Copenhagen Zoo killed Marius, a healthy 2 year old giraffe and fed him to the lions, and why zoos cull thousands of “surplus” healthy animals each year. It’s about the bottom line.

What’s the Alternative?

Captive breeding helped save the Arabian oryx, California condor, and black-footed ferret, but each was a targeted recovery program with a defined release plan and not simply for public exhibition.

Capturing animals and transporting them across the world has to be viewed differently. In 2016 a three-year-old climbed into the gorilla enclosure at the Cincinnati Zoo and a seventeen-year-old Silverback gorilla, Harambe, was shot dead. What followed was a national argument about the mother’s attention and the zoo marksman’s judgment, but no one asked why an African mountain gorilla was in Ohio.

The strongest reason to end zoos is that the institution’s core function is incompatible with the welfare of its occupants, and always has been—every justification offered for two hundred and thirty years has been retrofitted to a practice that predates all of them by five thousand.

It is evident today that putting a human being on display for the edification of a crowd is wrong, but that wasn’t always the case. We cannot argue that the reason for it being wrong was that the exhibit wasn’t educational enough, or that the cage was too small, the reason is that a life is not a display.

Everything since has been a question of where we were willing to draw the line, and how long can we keep from noticing that the line is arbitrary.

Sources: Bob Jacobs, “The neural cruelty of captivity,” *The Conversation* (2020); Damian Aspinall, *The Independent* (2019); Animal Justice, “Crisis of Cruelty in Canada’s Zoos” (2022); Born Free USA, “Caged for Capital” (2025); Clubb & Mason, *Nature* 425 (2003); Clubb et al., *Science* 322 (2008)

Plastic, Plastic Everywhere...

By Julie Morgan

Earlier this year a documentary on Netflix entitled *The Plastic Detox* was released. This popular watch educated many people on the detriment of plastics, microplastics and phthalates in our homes present in everyday products.

Many household items are endocrine disruptors; they are cancer causing and can break through the blood brain barrier leading to an early death or health issues. Despite these evidences, they are legal and are in almost everything. The chemicals that create plastic pollution are harmful to humans are hiding in plain site. Educating ourselves is of the utmost importance now.

The paper receipts we get at the market or other retail shops are made from BPA, bisphenol A, an industrial chemical. When we touch the receipts BPA enters our bloodstream, upsets our hormone system and places a strain on our liver as it tries to remove it. (Center for Environmental Health) If you are out shopping and must have a receipt, you can carry a nitrile glove for one hand to block the BPA.

Fast fashion is yet another issue. Most of our clothing is now made from plastic fibers. The insidious part of this industry is the language. No manufacturer writes “made with 100% plastic” so look for words like, polyester, nylon, acrylic, spandex, elastane, fleece, microfiber, polypropylene or vinyl. Read labels. We still don’t understand how these products impact health or the environment.

A simple solution is to move toward sustainable clothes, that means cotton, bamboo, wool, cashmere, hemp or silk. Organic fabrics are best if you can confirm the process is done without pesticides. Not everything that says “organic” is truly chemical free.



Wool is durable, biodegradable, and has natural resistance to odors and stains.



Spinning silk dates back to 5,000 BCE China and is still a popular practice around the world today.

While making these decisions may be a bit more expensive in some cases, there is always thrifting vintage materials. It is actually dollar wise as these items are more likely to hold up over time. The most important reason, however, for purchasing sustainable clothing is that it prevents ocean pollution. Each time we wash our clothes, fibers (dyes and microplastics) are flushed into the ocean where our sea life (and often food) lives and thrives.

Plastics have permeated all aspects of our lives. From our kitchen cupboards with plastic cups, plates and mixing bowls, to Tupperware, they all need to be replaced! Stoneware bowls and plates, wood or steel utensils, and stainless steel or wood cutting boards are sustainable alternatives. These small changes will reduce plastic waste and the microplastics we ingest.

If you are feeling overwhelmed right now here is a significant step that you can take today. Invest in a high quality water filtration system that removes microplastics. Think of how many times a day you use water. Every drop is tainted.

Taking action by making these changes will help reduce and repair any lifestyle dramatically help the environment.

If people demand sustainable items made from glass, metal and wood- then companies will manufacture less plastic, and we will begin to heal our oceans and world overall. If we stay educated about the items we purchase for our homes, share what we learn with others, and speak with our dollars, together we can be the change not only for our personal and our families health, but for the well being of our planet.

Compassion Means Nice

If you want to know the meaning of a word, ask a five year old. Five year olds have an exceptional talent for explaining things in a way adults can understand.

Some years ago a friend took her child to a pet store to pick out a small animal. At first the five-year-old was amazed. There were kittens and puppies, an iguana, a parrot, and any number of smaller birds and reptiles.

Like most parents, my friend was excited. There is a special joy in giving a young child a friend, a companion, and a little responsibility along the way. But while the child was thrilled with the assortment of creatures, the event suddenly became stressful.

“Mommy, what will happen to the other animals?”

“Someone else will take them.”

“But what if they don’t?”

It was a fair question.

“I don’t know.” The mother’s answer was honest.

The child began to cry. Now the mother was fretting.

“What’s wrong?”

“I can’t pick one.”

“Why not?”

“Because it isn’t nice to the other ones.”

Five-year-olds are the guardians of fairness. The mother was just beginning to notice.

“We can’t take them all.”

“Can we wait?” The child was wiping the tears.

“Yes, when would you like to come back?” Asked the mother anticipating that the child needed time to think about what kind of pet to choose.

“I want to wait till they are all gone, except the one that nobody wants. Then I want to take it home. That would be nice, wouldn’t it?”

As I share this story the tears are coming back again. What happens to us as we age that kills off or at least diminishes that thought about how best to be “nice” to others? Are we nice to the checker at the store, or the man sleeping on the sidewalk? Are we nice to the gardener who knocks on the door asking to sign us up? Or even the stray cat trying to climb our door screen? How many times in a day are we given an opportunity to show compassion for another being, and we miss it? This little one didn’t miss it.

The mother just looked into her child’s face.

“Wouldn’t it Mommy? Wouldn’t it be nice to come back for the one nobody wanted?”

“Yes, I think it would.” She answered. They turned toward the door as her child heaved a contented sigh and gave the room a wistful look.

“So, would you like to go get an ice cream?”

A ruddy tear stained face smiled.

“Yes. That would be nice.”



Giraffe Guardians



Some years ago it was discovered that lions were being eradicated by farmers in Kenya. Too many farms and not enough land led lions into human establishments completely by accident. Unfortunately, the sight of a lion is enough to warrant extreme actions. Lion populations were dramatically impacted.

Then Lion Guardians was formed. This nonprofit paired Kenyan Maasai with tagged lions. The Maasai were tasked with safeguarding the lions by ensuring that they did not enter human areas. The project has been very successful.

Giraffes are not predators, but that doesn't make them any less vulnerable. "Masai giraffe is classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List due to a historical 40-50% drop over the previous three decades" (Giraffe Conservation Foundation.) Despite all we know, giraffes are still being squeezed out of their native lands. They are forced into smaller areas with less water and fewer trees. It is rare to see them now, except in protected parks.

Introducing Giraffe Guardians

Seeing the success of Maasai as protectors of lions has sparked an interest in giving them a similar role in Tanzania, but instead of lions, they can guard giraffes. The World Giraffe Alliance is now working with Maasai in the northeastern region where giraffes have gone missing from the wildlife corridor. This is protected land that animals have been using for migration for hundreds of years. Now, sadly, giraffes are missing. This new project is in need of resources. Trackers need binoculars, compasses and materials to record and date sightings. It is our intention to locate, and when needed, relocate giraffes from dangerous areas.

If you check out The World Giraffe Alliance on Givebutter.com you will find our campaign to raise \$800. This will get our guardians the needed supplies and will also pay them for their time over several months.

We need to be proactive for the protection of giraffes in every way possible. Lions are not the only ones who need guardians.