

THE TWGA TIMES

PRESERVATION, CONSERVATION, AND EDUCATION



Hippos may look cute but due to their territorial nature they are one of the most dangerous animals in Africa, responsible for more human deaths than lions, leopards, elephants, and crocodiles combined. (Photo by TWGA)

*“I never knew of a morning
in Africa when I woke up
that I was not happy.”*

Ernest Hemingway

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Hello Giraffe Friends,

Thank you for faithfully reading this newsletter. Sometimes it feels like we are all alone out here, trying to do what we can to make a difference against nearly insurmountable odds. Seeing that you open the newsletter gives us courage.

Thank you.

In February, I went to Africa. It was my first visit back since 2024. Kefas and I had a wonderful reunion, and I was able to spend time with the children and Anita, Kefas' long-suffering wife, who is so patient and encouraging through it all.

Kefas' caretaker home is half finished.

The three acres we purchased last year are lush and beautiful.

The trees we planted in 2023 are seven feet tall!

I stepped out onto the rise where the Wasafiri House will stand and looked into the distance. In my mind, I could see giraffes filling the landscape. How soon?

We can only get that answer from you.

We need to raise 30,000 this year to do three things—complete Kefas’ house, break ground on the Wasafiri House, and purchase two more acres. So here is the plan, and here is how you can help.

Kefas is the owner of GO2KILI, a safari and Kilimanjaro climbing company. He conferred with his staff, and they have agreed to reduce their fees to make a contribution to The World Giraffe Alliance. Anyone who goes on safari or climbs Kilimanjaro through GO2KILI in 2026–2027 will be supporting our mission to save giraffes. Most of Kefas’ team has agreed to work for half of what they normally make, and in an economically depressed country that is a true sacrifice. Kefas will take no fee at all when travelers sign up through The World Giraffe Alliance. If we can host ten safaris this year we will meet our goals and that brings us one step closer to creating this safe haven for giraffes. Taking a safari is a life-changing experience. Please give it some thought. Maasai and giraffes are waiting.

These resources are what will push us into our next phase.

The World Giraffe Alliance just celebrated its fourth anniversary on March 15. Look at all we have done in just four years. Imagine what we can do in the next two!

As always, we love and appreciate all who care about the natural world, indigenous people, and endangered species. As we look at the state of the world, let’s remember that it only takes a small group of deeply committed people to make a difference. The lakes, the oceans, the sky, the animals, and even the Maasai are waiting. Let’s show them they can count on us.

Kupenda na Amani,

Michele and Team Twiga

Kefas’ Corner

The Maasai and Heavy Rains

Maasai have been known for preserving their culture for centuries. Unlike many other indigenous groups who have been persuaded to convert to Western lifestyles, Maasai have maintained their culture in its purest form.

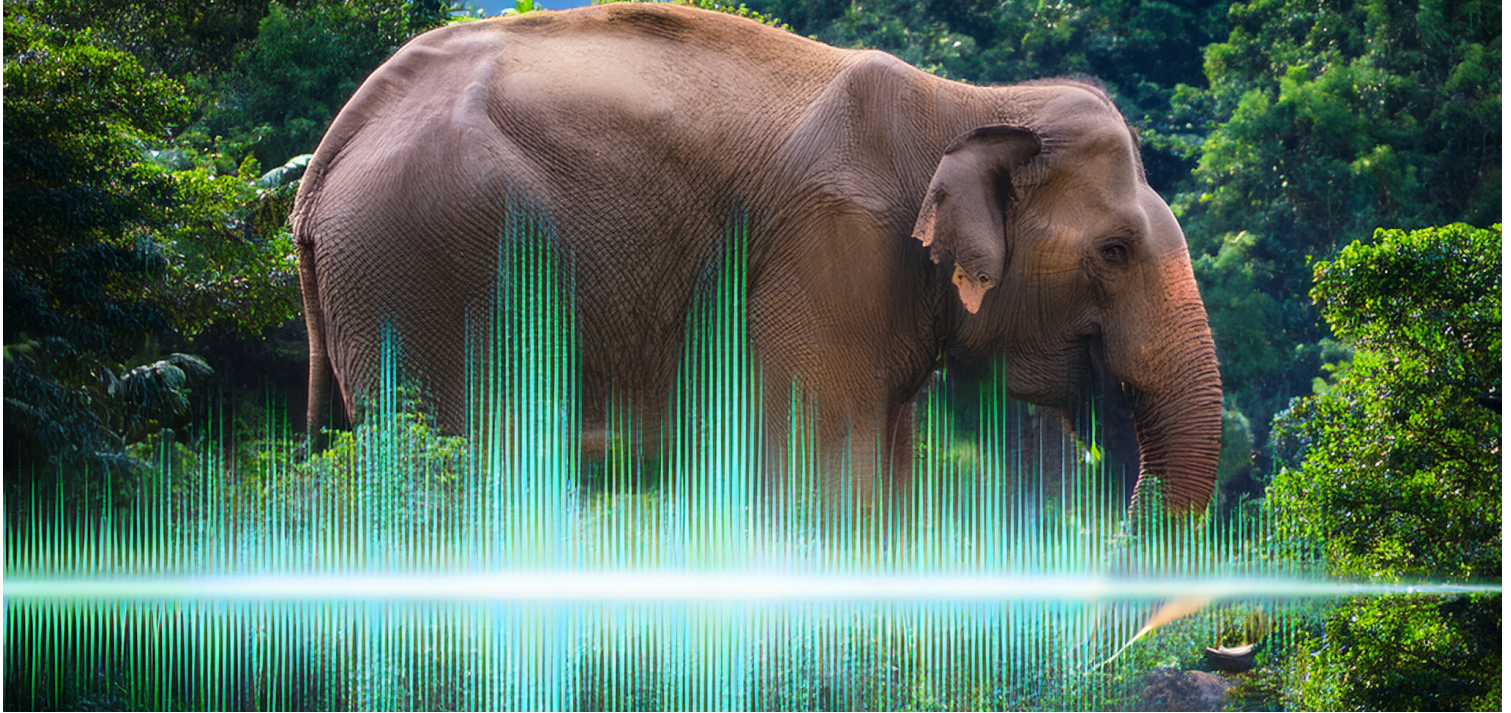
They do not own land, the land belongs to them. They do not farm or ranch. Many people think they raise cattle for food. This is not true. Cattle are wealth. To kill a cow is to throw away their money. As pastoralists they eat what grows and they drink cow’s milk and sometimes blood from their livestock, but they do not hunt. Maasai respect the environment and live in harmony with nature.

During this recent rainy season we have seen an unusual amount of rainfall. These are the heaviest rains the area has seen in four years. In the city, many have lost their lives from flooding. Some farmers have lost their crops. For Maasai it is understood that weather is part of the natural process. This is a time for waiting. Waiting for the rains to pass.



Heavy rainfall in Tanzania during March caused landslides flooding, and at least 20 deaths in the Rungwe District of Mbeya region. The Tanzania Meteorological Authority (TMA) forecasts above-normal rainfall through May. The extreme weather is part of wider East African flooding, with neighboring Kenya reporting over 88 fatalities.

Teen innovator builds AI tool to help fight poaching



Deep in the rainforests of Central Africa, a quiet network of listening devices is monitoring around the clock. Deployed by Cornell University Elephant Listening Project, these real time recorders capture the low rumbles of elephants and, more crucially, the sounds of gunfire. ELP has placed a web of these devices over nearly 2,000 square kilometers (772 square miles), the system is designed to help conservationists and rangers detect poaching activity in real time.

The biggest hindrance to this project has been picking out such specific sounds among all the background noise of the rainforests; sounds like snapping branches, rolling thunder, and even certain monkey calls can mimic gunshots. This leads to a flood of false alarms, overwhelming the system and forcing human analysts to manually sift through hours of audio.

Traditional AI solutions haven't fully solved the problem either, some models flag too many false positives to be practical, while others are so narrowly trained that they fail when applied to new environments. As researcher Daniela Hedwig explains, highly sensitive detectors often generate "thousands and thousands" of irrelevant signals creating a significant bottleneck for conservation teams.

This is where Naveen Dhar comes in, a 17-year-old from San Diego, Dhar taught himself programming

and, developed a streamlined neural network that approaches the problem differently. His model converts audio into visual spectrograms, allowing it to identify the distinctive spike-and-decay pattern unique to a gunshot.

By intentionally keeping the model lightweight, Dhar was able to avoid a common pitfall known as "overfitting" — where systems perform well only in the environments they were trained on. His approach, however, has proved far more adaptable: a model trained on recordings from Belize was still able to accurately detect gunshots in forests across Africa and Vietnam.

Cornell's earlier system achieved just 8.4% precision, meaning most alerts were false alarms. Dhar's model boosted precision to 87% on the same dataset, while still capturing a similar number of actual gunshot events.

With this incredible leap in detection accuracy rangers can respond to threats as they happen instead of reviewing recordings weeks later thereby making anti-poaching efforts faster, safer, and more effective.

To learn more listen to the Science Quickly Podcast : <https://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode/how-a-teens-ai-model-could-help-stop-poaching-in-rainforests/>

Report from the front-line of conservation

By Tomson Asiimwe [Transcribed from an interview]

Working in conservation is not always an easy job. Sometimes it is actually dangerous.

During my internship with the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Center in 2014, I was assigned my first real job.

I was assigned to a research group who were collecting data on *Cercopithecus kandti* (the golden monkey). We were to observe, monitor, take a census, and attempt habituation—that is, to help the animals become familiar with human voices and presence.

At 6 a.m. we were given a breakfast of chapati, a tortilla-like bread, and tea. At 7:30, we took backpacks with equipment, including two-way radios, notepads, pens, GPS monitors, and jackets. There were no roads. We hiked from headquarters approximately sixteen kilometers (twelve miles). This area was completely uninhabited and largely unexplored. We found the monkeys and began our fieldwork.

Two hours later, we heard voices in an area where no people should be. Our senior habituator left to find the source. What he discovered were 30 armed M23 soldiers in full uniform marching through the area.

We immediately threw ourselves into the bushes and stayed quiet. Our team leader went out of hearing range and radioed the commander of Mgahinga Gorilla National Park. The military enforcement team arrived four hours later and asked for our assistance in locating the rebels' trail. The insurgents were gone, but we recovered nine guns and 63 pairs of army uniforms. We carried all of this back with us on empty stomachs. We finally ate at 10:00 p.m.—silverfish (mukene) and posho.

Our incident report prompted management to recruit and deploy more rangers into our national parks.



M23 also known as the Congolese Revolutionary Army, is a Congolese Rwandan-backed rebel paramilitary group.



M23 rebels Based in The Democratic Republic of the Congo, operate mainly in the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu, which border Uganda and Rwanda.

Who are M23?

M23, (March 23 Movement) are armed rebels operating in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with the intent to overthrow the Congolese government. M23 infiltrates surrounding areas including Virunga National Park, which straddles Uganda. M23 encourages the wild meat trade which has exacerbated poaching.

In August 2024, during the environmental protection meeting with the DRC the ICCN (Institute of Congolese Conservation of Nature) director of parks reported the loss of 50% of species in the Virunga National Park since the resurgence of the M23 rebellion over just two years.

Conscious Conservation: Springtime is for pollinators

By Julie Morgan



“Pardon Our Weeds” signs are used to promote environmentally friendly practices by signaling that a lawn or garden is intentionally left un-mowed to support local ecosystems, particularly pollinators.

Pollinators are animals—primarily insects like bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, and flies, but also birds and bats, (and even giraffes) that move pollen between flowers. By transferring pollen from the male to the female parts of plants, they enable fertilization, allowing plants to produce seeds, fruits, and new plants. Bees are our most essential pollinators and are crucial for the reproduction of most flowering plants.

Did you know that for one out of every three bites we take, we can thank a pollinator? Pollinator populations are in decline, so here’s how you can support them.

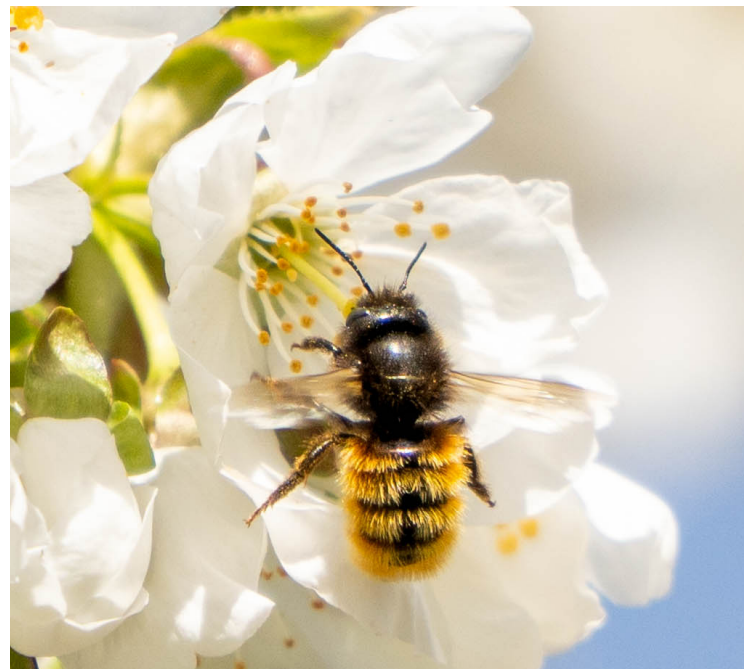
As we transition between winter and spring, please resist the urge to clean up your gardens. Pollinators overwinter* in dead leaves and hollowed-out stems from last year’s plants. If you clean up and throw these away, you may also be throwing away pollinators.

Dandelions are sometimes considered weeds, but please do not pick or spray these perennials, as they are among the first sources of food for bees. If you have used weed killers in the past (like Roundup), consider switching to natural alternatives.

You can also mow your lawn less, leave some wild zones in your yard or garden, and plant flowers such as lavender, zinnia, verbena, and sunflowers that attract and feed pollinators. Limit bright lights in your yard at night, keep fresh water available for bees and birds, and if a moth comes into your house, consider trapping it and releasing it outside.

Together, we can help stop the decline of pollinators. Protecting them helps preserve 75% of flowering plant species and maintains the production of essential fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Ultimately, this prevents agricultural losses, enhances ecological health, secures global food production, stabilizes ecosystems, and boosts biodiversity.

**overwinter-the process of keeping creatures alive through the winter season.*



Bees are responsible for roughly one-third of the food we eat and 80% of all pollination.

The Olduvai Gorge Part II

On a recent trip to Tanzania I was thrilled to visit the Ngorongoro Crater, which lies just three miles from the Olduvai Gorge. Our itinerary did not permit us to travel to the gorge, but seeing the crater was a glimpse into the historic area of which the gorge is the crown jewel.

What makes this location so unique is its anthropological and archaeological significance. It was the excavations of the gorge in the 1930s that led to groundbreaking discoveries about human development.

In 1959, Mary Leakey, wife of Louis Leakey, discovered the skull of a robust australopithecine, initially named *Zinjanthropus boisei* (“Nutcracker Man”). This find, dated to about 2.3 to 1.75 million years ago, provided crucial evidence of early hominin diversity and adaptation. It was originally labeled the Nutcracker Man due to its large, powerful teeth, but was later formally categorized as *Paranthropus boisei*. *Paranthropus* is derived from the Greek words *para* (“beside”) and *anthropus* (“human”) This reflects the species’ position as a close cousin to our own lineage rather than a direct ancestor. The name *boisei* was added by Louis Leakey in 1959 to honor Charles Watson Boise, the philanthropist who funded the Leakey family’s archaeological expeditions.

As the Leakeys and their team continued their excavations in the 1960s, they discovered *Homo habilis*, the “handyman,” dating from 1.9 million years ago. It is one of the earliest members of the *Homo* genus.

Finally, the gorge surrendered the most recent human fossils, *Homo erectus* (1.2 million years) is the species that exhibited advanced tool-making skills and greater mobility. It is considered a direct ancestor of modern humans (*Homo sapiens*). Living for over 1.5 million years, it was the first hominin with human-like body proportions and the first to migrate out of Africa.

Mary Leakey founded the Olduvai Gorge Museum in 1970 to ensure that the fossils remained part of Tanzania’s cultural history and national heritage. It was updated in 1993 by the Getty Foundation and later replaced by a new visitor center in 2018.

The museum is located near the entrance to the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.



The Gorge is located in the Ngorongoro crater and provides a continuous record of human evolution over 2 million years.



*Sculptures of *Paranthropus boisei* and *Homo habilis* by Tanzanian artist Festo Kijo at the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, installed on July 13 and July 22, 2019.*



**Paranthropus boisei* fossil.*

The road to Tafakari: progress report



The project continues. . .

Our first objective last year was to purchase three additional acres. Our second was to begin building the Caretakers Cottage.

One of the best parts of having a vision is watching it unfold, sometimes in ways we did not imagine. Our vision for the Caretakers Cottage was one of a 1400 square foot two story wooden house. As the project began we learned that wood is not only three times as expensive in Tanzania as it is in the United States, but also very difficult to come by. As a concession, we agreed to use local materials instead.

Houses in the United States are generally built with 10-12 foot ceilings. Not so in Africa. Because there are no air conditioners, ceilings are built higher so the hot air rises allowing for cooling in the living spaces. Ceiling are 13-15 feet high to meet this need. You can imagine our surprise when we drove up to the caretakers “cottage” and saw this!

Kefas agreed that the exterior needs siding to make it more cohesive with the Wasafiri House (which we are committed to building in wood.) But despite its industrial looking exterior, the interior of the house has beautiful views and because it was built at the edge of the property line and near very large trees, it is

obscured and non-intrusive.

Since our last site visit in 2024 we have purchased three additional acres. It gives us much more space. The grounds are green, the trees are growing fast and now we have three objectives for this year.

Our first is to finish Kefas’ home and relocate his family.

The second is to purchase the single acre adjacent to our property line that is currently owned by a farmer. Our giraffes will destroy his crops so it is in our best interest to purchase the land before he plants anything and help him, if need be, in acquiring land somewhere else for farming.

Finally, our big goal is to do what we can to begin construction on the Wasafiri House. Until the house is built, we cannot bring in our giraffes. This is the most challenging of all our projects, so for the next three months we will be searching for investors who would like to be part of Tafakari.

This is a monumental and life changing opportunity for anyone who believes in the future. As giraffes disappear, Maasai are displaced and open range diminishes, only those who believe the Earth is not a commodity but a gift to us all will understand the importance of Tafakari.

The invitation is open to all of you.

EARTH DAY is April 22, here are 10 ways to celebrate

All around the globe, people are celebrating the pale blue dot. Earth Day began in 1970 when a senator from Wisconsin thought it was time to raise awareness about the fragile ecosystems of Earth.

When NASA astronauts sent back photos from space, we were suddenly aware of the beauty of our planet, and people looked at our world differently. That iconic image of Earth floating alone in the vast darkness of space reminded us just how precious and vulnerable our home truly is.

Today people celebrate Earth Day in a variety of ways but perhaps we should all aim to make these nature-focused holidays like Earth Day a cherished part of our family traditions, passing these values down to younger generations so we might build a culture of stewardship and mindfulness that can last for decades. The more we focus on these kinds of celebrations, the more likely we are to take active steps to help our planet thrive.



Here are some of the ways you can celebrate this day:

Building milk carton bird feeders can be a fun family activity!

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- 🦋 Visit a local beach or lake and look for trash. (It won't take long to find it.)
 - 🦋 Hide the car keys. Spend a day without using your vehicle. Ride a bike or take a bus.
 - 🦋 Visit a farm. Remember that 96% of the world's animals are either raised for food or living in captivity. Choose to eat pasta or salad on this day.
 - 🦋 Visit a natural history museum. Take time to marvel at the evolution of our world.
 - 🦋 Build a birdhouse or bird feeder.
 - 🦋 Check the trash. Dare to look in your garbage can for items that could be up-cycled.
 - 🦋 Use natural pest control agents — eliminate the “Raid” or other insect repellents and replace them with natural ones.

Share the bounty. Invite friends over for a Mother's Table. Fill your table with Mother Earth foods — those that grow in the Earth, on a tree, or in the ocean

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However you decide to celebrate Earth Day, remember that we are all part of an intricate, precious, and miraculous ecosystem. It's a day to stand in awe and wonder. Let it also be a moment to reflect on how even small actions can help protect and nurture our shared home.

Happy Earth Day!

Why I Stand With The World Giraffe Alliance

By Shari Baier

The first time I saw a giraffe it was like seeing a unicorn—but this stately magnificent giant was real! When I learned about the state of the giraffe population, I felt a mix of awe and heartbreak. These gentle, towering animals, so iconic that it feels impossible to imagine Africa without them, are quietly slipping toward extinction. Not in some distant future, but now, in our lifetime.

Giraffe populations have declined by nearly 40% in just a few decades. Habitat loss, expanding human development, and poaching have pushed them into smaller and more fragile spaces. What struck me most was how preventable this loss is. Giraffes aren't disappearing because we don't know how to help—they're disappearing because we haven't done enough yet.

That's why I stand with The World Giraffe Alliance. TWGA focuses on one of the most powerful conservation solutions we have: protecting land, giraffes and the people who live there. By purchasing and safeguarding critical habitat, we give giraffes the space they need to survive and recover. Saving land means saving lives—giraffes, other wildlife, and the ecosystems that sustain them all.

I want to be part of a future where giraffes still roam freely, where they are protected—not remembered. The World Giraffe Alliance will buy and protect land, saving giraffes from extinction, acre by acre, tree by tree.



All Eyes on Giraffes

Giraffes are amazing for many reasons, not the least of which is their extraordinary eyes.

A giraffe is able to see, with detail and clarity, as far as six miles in the distance.

Giraffes have panoramic vision. Unlike humans who can only focus on one item at a time, a giraffe can look at two things simultaneously, yet their vision is binocular, allowing them to see depth with a nearly 360 degree view! (Talk about eyes in the back of your head!)

Giraffes have the second largest pupils of all land mammals (only a horse's is larger.) A unique arrangement of light-sensing cells allows giraffes to simultaneously look at their feet and a few meters ahead while walking. Their retinas provide a high concentration of cone cells, which are responsible for color vision. (Yes, giraffes see color.)

One of their particular eye adaptations, is rapid adjustment of focus. They can quickly focus on something two miles away, then at something in front of them effortlessly. (If you are over 40 you probably know how hard it is to focus on the food label after reading the signage in the supermarket.)

The most extraordinary part of the eye research on giraffes proves that they have a better than average development of their visual cortex, the area of the brain responsible for processing visual information. Compared to other mammals, a giraffe has a highly sophisticated interpretation of images. Giraffes don't just see, they understand what they are seeing in a way most other mammal don't. The next time you make a face at a giraffe, think about it. He might just know what you mean.

Sources: [Sciencing/giraffe vision/2025](#) [Brittanica/giraffe eyes/2026](#)

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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