

Saving Tanzania's Coastal Forests: WLT appeal launches to preserve part of elephant corridor following findings of population collapse

- ❖ Eastern Africa has lost 90% of its coastal forests but a new plan will seek to save a crucial stretch in Tanzania, where what is left of these habitats could fit in Greater London
- ❖ Supported by World Land Trust, Tanzanian people will protect a part of a route used by savanna elephants, a separate species [found days ago](#) to lie one step closer to extinction
- ❖ The proposed protection of 49,000+ acres will help keep deforestation away from one of the world's most endangered primates and the hunting grounds of lion and leopard
- ❖ In an area with high levels of poverty, local people will decide where reserves are created and will be supported through microfinance and sustainable livelihood plans

TUESDAY 30 MARCH 2021: World Land Trust (WLT) is supporting Tanzanian conservationists and local people as they act to protect part of a crucial elephant corridor in the country's southeast, in the process saving some of the last 10% of coastal forests of Eastern Africa.

In a year [key for global conservation efforts](#), a new initiative launched by WLT around International Day of Forests and World Earth Day will fund the protection by Tanzania Forest Conservation Group (TFCG) of 49,000 acres (20,000 hectares) of coastal forests in southeastern Tanzania – a milestone for a country where what is left of these habitats could comfortably fit within Greater London.

TFCG's plan to create 10 reserves alongside local people could not come soon enough for African Savannah Elephants. Only days ago, this variant – now seen as a separate species – was uplisted by the IUCN from Vulnerable to Endangered, following [a 60% collapse](#) of Africa-wide populations over the last 50 years.

In Tanzania, the elephants in the vast, unprotected corridor between Selous Game Reserve and the Rondo Forest Reserve are no exception to the worrying Africa-wide trend. [Researchers have already noted](#) the “narrowing and blocking off” of two migratory routes from Selous to the east, forcing small matriarchal herds onto roads and farms and sparking conflict that has already cost animal and human lives.

For the African Elephants migrating vast distances from Tanzania to Mozambique, such backdrop makes it more crucial than ever to save another route further south, linking Selous to the Rondo landscape of Lindi District. With support from WLT's new £360,000 new campaign, TFCG will help preserve part of this wildlife corridor, targeting an area where large-scale cashew and sesame farms are razing the forest.

“What we hear from the ground is conflict with humans is making the area's elephants act like hunted populations, hiding by day to move at night and never staying in one place for more than 12 hours,” says TFCG Executive Director Charles Meshack. “Scientists [warned already years ago](#) of rising deforestation in Lindi and our plan is to intervene now, before it's too late – protecting this stretch of elephant corridor while we still can and involving local people so that the plan works in the long run.”

Saving the home of lion and leopard in a country that loses one million acres of forest a year

The coastal forests of Eastern Africa once used to blanket nearly 300,000km² all along the Indian Ocean, a colossal belt larger than the UK, all the way from Somalia to Mozambique. Today only 29,000km² or 10% is left – a remnant of forest fragments not much bigger put together than Wales.

The remaining fragments are astonishing in their beta-diversity, says botanist Roy Gereau. As the Missouri Botanical Garden's Tanzania Program Director explains, life can vary so wildly from spot to spot that plant species in two forests just 100km apart can differ by as much as 80%. And every tree counts: Gereau points at species like the *Gigasiphon Macrosiphon* and its huge white flowers, with only 48 mature trees confirmed by scientists across a vast theoretical range from Tanzania to Kenya.

In Tanzania, a country home to 11,000 of tropical Africa's 40,000 vascular plant species, one million acres of forest are currently destroyed every year. And of all possible landscapes, Rondo Plateau – the area that TFCG's proposed 10 reserves will protect – is special, Gereau explains: "At 900 metres, the plateau's elevation makes it stand out from other coastal forest fragments. It draws moisture and creates forests packed with endemic flora, with 18% species threatened with extinction."

The misty forests shaped by such microclimate host tiny specialists that would struggle to live anywhere else. Primatologist Andrew Perkin points at the Rondo Galago – one of the world's most endangered primates, found only at Rondo and a handful of other spots in Tanzania – as well as the Chequered Elephant Shrew and the 8-cm-long Bearded Pygmy Chameleon. For all, the 49,000+ acres TFCG wants to protect will bring a major buffer belt all around the Rondo Forest Reserve.

The life of Rondo doesn't stop there, however. With help from WLT's campaign, the proposed 10 reserves will protect part of the hunting grounds of African Lion – a local reprieve for the species after its continent-wide populations halved over 25 years – and African Leopard. They will safeguard habitats home to Yellow Baboon, Sykes Monkey, Vervet Monkey and spectacular birds including African Pitta, Spotted Ground Thrush, Narina Trogon, Böhm's Bee-eater and Livingstone's Turaco.

VILLAGE LAND FOREST RESERVES: WHY TFCG'S PLAN WILL BENEFIT PEOPLE AS WELL AS PLANET

"The instrument chosen by TFCG for this project will allow local people of tribes like the Mwera, Makonde and Makua to play a decisive role in conservation efforts. Our partner won't be purchasing land directly – instead, they are already engaging with Lindi's communities so that they can determine where the 10 Village Land Forest Reserves (VLFs) will be created. For each reserve, a village-run Natural Resource Committee will oversee sustainable community forest management.

"In return, and to ensure conservation benefits everyone, TFCG will work to boost local livelihoods. Our partner has already established savings and loans associations and will now support a shift to sustainable agriculture in a district where commercial plantations are expanding across the land. In an area of Tanzania blighted by high levels of poverty, where at least 84% of the population are engaged in subsistence agriculture, TFCG's project promises to be truly transformative."

Mary McEvoy, Project Manager at World Land Trust

NOTES TO EDITORS

World Land Trust (WLT) protects the world's most biologically significant and threatened habitats acre by acre. Through a network of partner organisations around the world, WLT funds the creation of reserves and provides permanent protection for habitats and wildlife. Partnerships are developed with established and highly respected local organisations who engage support and commitment among the local community. It also works to raise awareness, in the UK and elsewhere, of the need for conservation, to improve understanding and generate support through information and fundraising.

<https://www.worldlandtrust.org/who-we-are-2/>

Tanzania Forest Conservation Group (TFCG) was established in 1985 and is today Tanzania's largest forest conservation NGO. The WLT partner works to protect Tanzania's unique and threatened biodiversity of Tanzania through the preservation of two crucial forest ecoregions: the coastal forests by the Indian Ocean and the Eastern Arc Mountains. To achieve their flagship mission, TFCG's teams of biologists, foresters and communicators work through capacity building, advocacy, research, community development and protected area management.

<http://www.tfcg.org/>

For further information, please contact **World Land Trust's communications team:**

José Rojo

Communications Manager

jose.rojo@worldlandtrust.org

+44 (0) 1986 874422

Pictures of the coastal forests of the Rondo Plateau that will be protected through TFCG's plan can be found in this [media gallery](#) and used in coverage, provided that they are appropriately credited.

To find out more about the **species** the 'Saving Tanzania's Coastal Forests' appeal will help preserve, follow the links to [WLT's dedicated pages for African Elephant](#), [African Leopard](#), [African Lion](#), [Rondo Galago](#), [Chequered Elephant Shrew](#), [Bearded Pygmy Chameleon](#), [African Pitta](#), [Spotted Ground Thrush](#), [Vervet Monkey](#), [Yellow Baboon](#) and [African Civet](#),