The Nature Conservancy

Africa 2025

Year in Review

Celebrating Seychelles

In 2014, the Republic of Seychelles started a historic journey. With support from TNC and many partners, the island nation completed a $21.6 million debt conversion in 2016 that unlocked funding and technical support for long-term conservation of its entire ocean territory. By 2020, Seychelles legally protected 32.6% of its ocean waters—an area more than twice the size of France. Biodiversity protection was one of three goals for the science-based Seychelles marine spatial plan (SMSP), which also included climate change adaptation and sustainable use of ocean resources.

TNC supported Seychelles' government in the country's largest ever participatory process, bringing together communities, government, and more than 12 marine sectors, including fishing and tourism. The SMSP attained broad public support, and in March 2025, it was signed into national law. It was approved by the Cabinet in May, and in June, Seychelles celebrated this historic journey and began implementation. The SMSP is an enforceable pathway to sustainable and equitable ocean-based prosperity today and for future generations of Seychelles.

"Small and mighty Seychelles is paving the way, not only in the region but globally," says Helena Sims, TNC's project manager for the SMSP. "It is a defining moment for Seychelles."

Thank you for making a lasting difference for nature and people in Africa.

Together, we find a way.

Our cover: Two plains zebras (*Equus quagga*) © Manoj Shah/Getty Images
Left: La Digue Island, Seychelles © dibrova/Getty Images

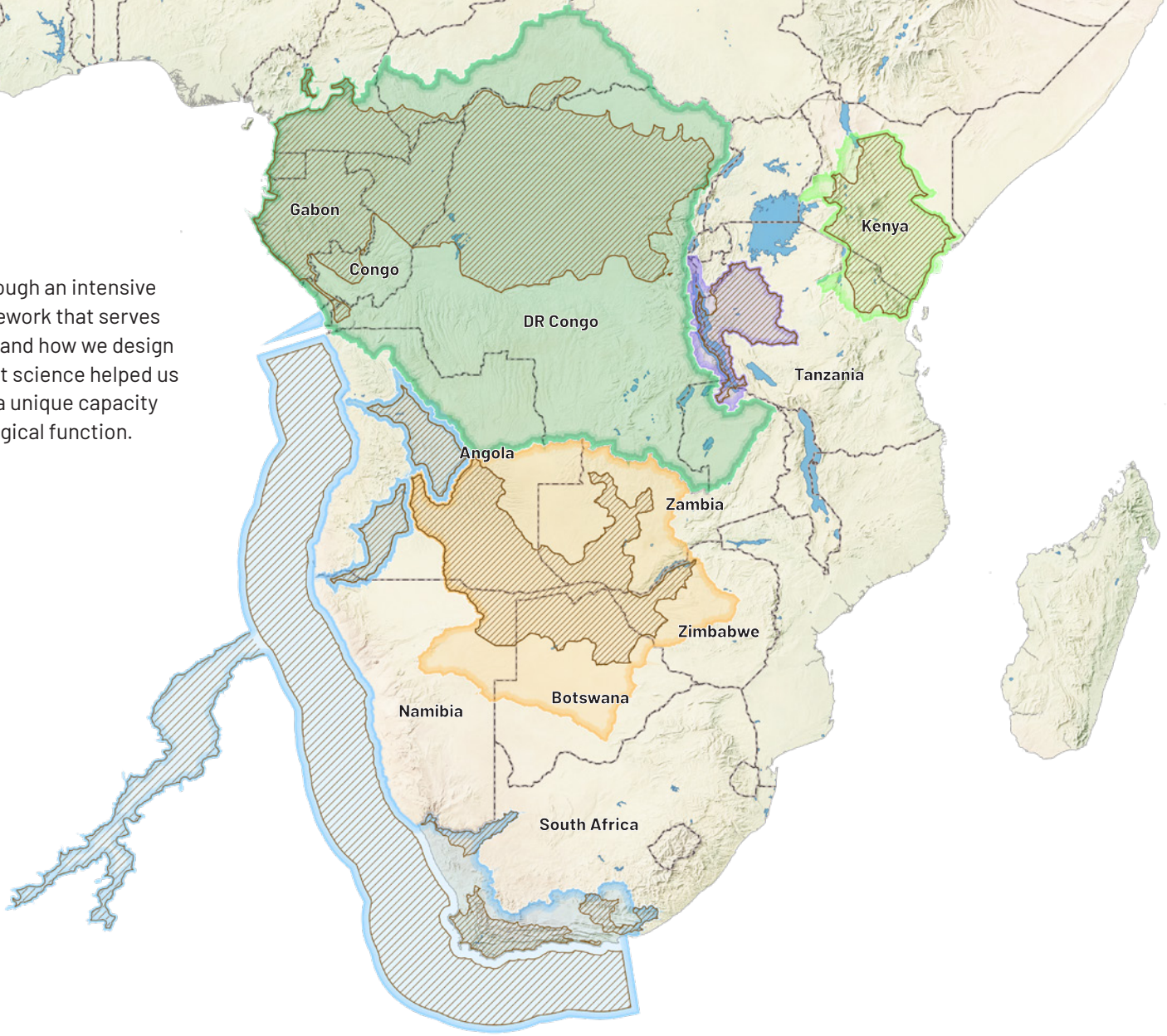
Africa's Big 5
Irreplaceable Landscapes

In 2025, we updated our conservation approach in Africa through an intensive strategic prioritization process. The result is a unifying framework that serves as a guiding star for where we work, what we aim to achieve, and how we design and organize our efforts. It focuses us on five landscapes that science helped us identify as irreplaceable and vulnerable, and where TNC has a unique capacity to drive conservation at a scale large enough to secure ecological function.

Our Big 5:

- Blue Benguela
- Congo Basin
- Kenya-Tanzania Rangelands*
- Greater KAZA (encompasses the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area)
- Lake Tanganyika Basin

Hashmarks indicate our core project areas within these vast landscapes.



"We don't have to be everywhere in order to secure the future of **these vast Irreplaceable Landscapes.** Our new conservation framework focuses us on the right places and on doing what we do best.

Kim Young-Overton, TNC Africa Conservation Director

** The footprint of this program is subject to revision in 2026.*

	Africa 2030 Goals	Global 2030 Goals
Healthy Oceans	294.5M hectares	4B
Healthy Lands	16M hectares	650M
Lakes & Wetlands	194.9k hectares	30M
River Systems	23.4k kilometers	1M
Climate Adaptation	6.3M people	100M
Climate Mitigation	61M metric tons CO_2e/yr	3B
People Benefiting	1.8M people	45M

Baby Roz, seen here with mother Seiya, is named in honor of Rosamond "Roz" Zander, a passionate environmentalist and late wife of Hansjorg Wyss. Hansjorg Wyss and the Wyss Foundation are generous lead supporters of Loisaba Wildlife Conservancy and TNC's work across Africa.

Dear Friends of Africa,

This year began with a moment that moved me deeply: the arrival of little Roz, a critically endangered black rhino, at Loisaba Conservancy. For 50 years, rhinos were absent from this part of northern Kenya, wiped out due to poaching. Roz's mother, Seiya, is one of 21 individual rhinos brought to Loisaba in 2024 to create a breeding population, a TNC-supported effort that took years of planning, partnerships, and investment. The reintroduction of the species, followed only months later by a birth, made me realize this was more than a conservation milestone; it is a powerful reminder that when we protect entire landscapes, life finds a way back and nature and communities thrive.

This notion has contributed to shaping a transformative year for us at TNC Africa. The continent's sheer vastness gives us extraordinary opportunities to move the needle at huge scales toward achieving our 2030 Goals. We've made a strategic pivot to focus on Africa's most ecologically valuable and socially significant places, what we're calling the Africa Big 5 Irreplaceable Landscapes: Kenya-Tanzania Rangelands, the Congo basin, Lake Tanganyika basin, Greater KAZA, and the Blue Benguela ocean current. In these uniquely biodiverse regions, we aim to deliver lasting, system-scale conservation outcomes that support thriving communities, boost climate resilience, and protect nature. This is where our efforts will be centered.

Our strategic plans are grounded in science and set forth clear routes to measurable results. Yet we must also be nimble and resourced flexibly so that we can adapt quickly to new learnings and capitalize on unexpected opportunities.

As I think back to that rhino calf in Loisaba, I'm reminded of what's possible when we act together, boldly and with determination. When generous TNC donors enabled the establishment of Loisaba Conservancy more than a decade ago, we knew that was just the beginning. Transformative conservation at scale takes time, perseverance, and the slow work of building strong partnerships with other organizations, government, the private sector, and especially local communities.

That is why I am more grateful than ever for your unwavering support and your faith in us. I'm excited for the work ahead and filled with optimism about what we will achieve, together, in the coming year.

Ademola Ajagbe,
Regional Managing Director, Africa

The path of water is the path of the wild. Elephants, zebras, Cape buffalo, and more navigate the vast Greater KAZA landscape by way of a sprawling network of rivers and wetlands that nourish and connect expansive miombo woodlands, grasslands, and papyrus-fringed marshes. Connectivity is the very essence of KAZA. Sustaining it is our top priority.
Elephant family, Bostwana. Photo © Henrick Karlsson

Irreplaceable Landscape

Greater KAZA

IN THE HEART OF SOUTHERN AFRICA there is a world woven together by water, where to live is to move: KAZA, defined by two mighty rivers, the Zambezi and the Okavango (called Cubango and then Kavango as it moves downstream), and spanning five countries—Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA-TFCA) was established in 2011 through a treaty dedicated to securing 50 percent of Africa's savanna elephants. It is also home to 25% of African wild dogs, 15% of Africa's lions, and countless other land and freshwater species, as well as 3 million people.

Our work here extends beyond the geopolitical borders of the KAZA-TFCA. Anchored by our programs in Zambia and Angola, the Greater KAZA Irreplaceable Landscape encompasses additional areas that are pivotal for ecological functioning of the entire system and the survival of long-ranging species. In Zambia, we are working with partners to foster community-led conservation in the Kafue-West Lunga landscape. In Angola, we are working to protect the headwaters and seasonal flood patterns of the spectacular Okavango Delta. To unlock systemic change across the entire Greater KAZA landscape, we're drawing on our proven ability to convene, influence, and mobilize across borders and sectors to protect habitats and connectivity between them. This dual capacity—local execution and regional leverage—enables us to bridge what has been a persistent gap in KAZA: connecting grassroots action with strategic landscape-level ambition.

Momentum

Carbon enterprises hold great promise for bringing revenue to communities that choose to manage their resources sustainably. However, this route is neither quick nor easy. There must be a rigorous scientific foundation in place. TNC is building out climate science in lesser-researched ecosystems, such as grassland soil and peatlands. In Angola, we are leading the first-ever probabilistic inventory of the country's peatlands. Covering about 3% of Earth's surface, these terrestrial wetlands store 600 billion tons of carbon—more than all the world's forests combined.

In 2025, we conducted research to guide our work to save them. One analysis illuminated top pain points for reducing the greatest threat: agricultural expansion. The second quantifies fire-caused emissions and the likely benefits of improved fire management strategies. With this research, we can effectively integrate our expertise in sustainable agriculture and fire management for holistic climate action.

Connecting the dots

It's as if the elephants are tiptoeing through the airy miombo woodlands in far northwestern Zambia. Their hubcap-sized feet are padded, muffling the sounds of twigs snapping under their enormous bodies. The herd wades across the West Lunga River on a mission: to reclaim a lost home.

West Lunga National Park, which sits at the northeastern tip of the Greater KAZA landscape, was once a renowned breeding refuge for elephants, with an estimated population of 10,000 in the 1960s.

"By the time I moved to this area in 2018, they were mostly gone," says Bruce Ellender, TNC's Kafue conservation director. "The estimated population in 2022 was just 25 elephants."

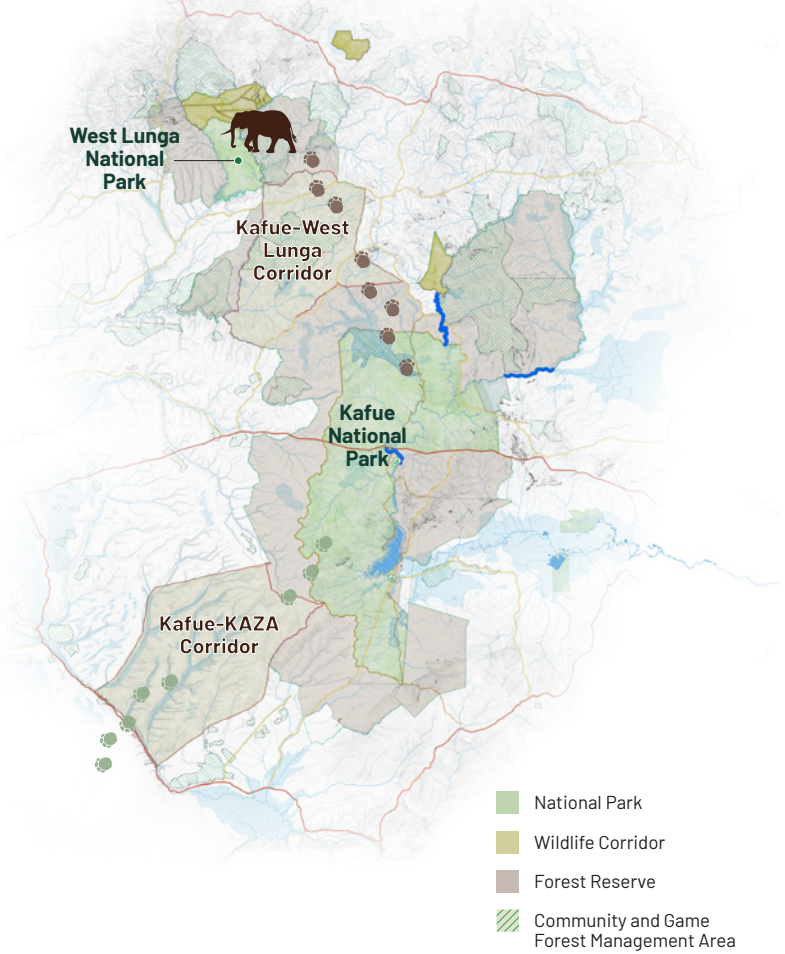
This shocking loss is the result of decades of neglect, including scant investment in anti-poaching enforcement and a lack of conservation incentives for neighboring communities. But in a remarkable turnaround, more than 150 elephants have been recorded in the national park over the past two years. About 120 of them made the 150-kilometer trek from the much larger Kafue National Park and surrounding community-conserved areas that lie to the south—and people who live here tell us that more elephants are on the way.

Kafue National Park holds 4,000 elephants—well below 10% of estimated historic populations, largely due to cycles of global demand for ivory. With climate change worsening drought here, a staggering 90% of the park is affected by fire each year. While TNC is helping improve fire management, elephants, wild dogs, cheetahs, and other long-ranging species need to be able to move if they are to survive.

But the corridor between Kafue and West Lunga—like the southward corridor from Kafue into the heart of KAZA—comprises communal lands, only a portion of which are under conserved status. Villages abut wild grasslands and forests, so as elephants and other wildlife return, danger to villagers increases. TNC has convened nine partners in the corridor for stronger collaboration, and we're sharing new resources, training, and science to bolster effectiveness.

"We're working together to make life in the corridor safer for both animals and people," says Bruce.

With TNC support, our local partners, including the West Lunga Conservation Project, have trained and equipped more than 120 community rangers and forest officers to work with communities to secure crucial areas in the corridor, the first-ever protection effort here. Together, we're also providing farmers with nonlethal tools like flare "bangers" and fog horns to protect their crops—their sources of food and livelihoods—from passing elephants. And in 2025, we supported Fortify the Forests to provide 400 families that live on the edges of wildlife areas with benefits such as fertilizer, seeds, and improved market access in exchange for concentrating farming in already-settled areas.



Page 5: His Royal Highness Chief Kamusaki Chibanda Ntambu, advocate for a TNC-supported, community-led carbon project in Zambia © Roshni Lodhia
Inset: Blue water lily, Zambia © imageBROKER/ Erich Schmidt

Clockwise from far left: Elephants, Kafue National Park © Simon Skafar/ Getty Images; elephants crossing Lunga River, caught on trap camera; wild dogs, Botswana © Martin Harvey; community rangers © Roshni Lodhia; Lunga River © Wiktoria West/Getty Images

"By supporting local partners to implement targeted activities, TNC can focus on driving systemic change at a landscape scale," explains Bruce. "For example, we've developed a new model that provides communities with incentives for implementing specific conservation actions that are tracked and measured."

Ultimately, the dotted lines created by elephant footfalls through the Kafue-West Lunga corridor—in dusty soil, floodplain clay, and muddy riverbanks past homes and schools and across roads and rivers—evoke the bigger story of the Greater KAZA landscape: By connecting the dots between the needs of wildlife and people, we can create space for all to thrive.

Lake Tanganyika is a dream: the chance to save a nearly pristine wild place of breathtaking size and beauty while directly making life better for hundreds of thousands of people. The vibrancy and color of the lake's spectacular rare cichlids are mirrored in basin communities where families depend on fish and forest resources for sustenance and livelihoods. Though life here isn't easy, there is laughter, hope, ingenuity, and deep pride in this very special lake. Together, we are making the future brighter for local people, including these beautiful besties of Chibwesolo fishing village, Zambia. Photo © Roshni Lodhia

Irreplaceable Landscape

Lake Tanganyika Basin

OF AFRICA'S SEVEN GREAT LAKES, just one remains nearly pristine. Lake Tanganyika is the world's longest lake and second deepest, and its crystal clear waters hold more than 250 species of gem-colored cichlids found nowhere else on Earth. Shared by Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, and Zambia, the lake provides food and livelihoods to more than 10 million people.

With our partners in the Tuungane Project, we have supported communities to fish sustainably and to protect rare fish habitats as reserves. Now we are advancing community-led conservation across borders, targeting key freshwater biodiversity areas. We are using science to influence governments and the regional Lake Tanganyika Authority on issues that have lakewide repercussions, such as aquaculture. Our program also extends deep into the basin, wrapping Tanzania's Mahale Mountains' lush forests, rivers, and the Malagarasi-Moyowosi wetlands to protect habitat and corridors for iconic wildlife, including Tanzania's largest population of chimpanzees.

We need only to look at Tanganyika's sister African Great Lakes to see what the future holds if we don't act: extinctions of rare species, crashing fisheries, flotillas of plastic pollution, and ecosystems too weak to adapt to climate change. The world has one chance to save Africa's last healthy great lake, and TNC's distinct capabilities may well be deciding factors, including freshwater science, system-scale planning, private sector collaboration, and sustainable finance solutions.

Momentum

In light of our two decades of collaborative work on Lake Tanganyika, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) invited TNC to play a lead role in designing a new project to tackle transboundary challenges. Launched in 2025 and following approval by national governments and the Lake Tanganyika Authority, the project is resourced with $14.5 million from GEF—the world's largest multilateral fund dedicated to environmental projects. Known for our expertise in freshwater conservation, TNC was tapped to provide research and models that now shape priorities for funding, new pilot projects, and other action. Our design role expanded to terrestrial conservation as well, drawing on our expertise developed inland in Tanzania. Now we are at the helm on implementation where we have a strong existing program on the ground. To drive regional change, we're providing essential technical expertise, chiefly on community co-management of fisheries.

Going farther on the lake

A 2025 analysis in Lake Tanganyika's Kipili Archipelago found that fish catch near some community fish reserves is nearly double that in areas far from such protections. Tag along with TNC writer **Julie Damon** for a glimpse at what's making a difference here.

Squinting, I scan the sparkling surface of Lake Tanganyika as we motor across its broad horizon, the usual bustle of boats strikingly absent from the deep blue view. We've arrived on day 88 of an experimental 90-day lakewide fishing ban.

Having grown up near Lake Michigan in the U.S., the scale of a Great Lake is simultaneously familiar and awe-inspiring to me—particularly this one, which holds nearly as much water as all five North American Great Lakes *combined*.

Approaching Manda Kerenge Village, brightly painted boats anchored to the rocky shore tug at their rope restraints as scores of fish bubble and jump around them, seemingly celebrating the bounty they've built during the three-month fishery closure. Lifting my gaze from water to land, my heart rises with the sound of singing and the offer of hands, welcoming us ashore.

We've come to sit with this fishing community, to listen and learn in the shade of a tree. We did the same at an earlier pilot site, but something is different here.

An elder gentleman steps into the center of our gathering and, pulling a sheet of paper from his pocket, begins to sing. His melodic poem paints a picture of the positive changes Manda Kerenge has created through our partnership.

After a few formalities, we break into cozy clusters that invite more and softer voices to be heard. Among others, I sit with a community fisheries scout sharply dressed in a dark green uniform and shiny black boots. "We are well prepared," he confidently explains when I ask about encounters with illegal fishers. "We have had extensive training."

"What else do you need to be successful?" I ask. A member of the community's Beach Management Unit (BMU) answers emphatically that they need jurisdiction in deeper water—outside the near-shore zone the BMU currently holds the right to manage. "We see fishers using illegal nets out there that harm the fishery and our livelihoods, but we don't have authority to do anything about it."

The voices of the scouts, BMU members, and others leave no doubt that the Manda Kerenge community agrees on the future they want and is taking bold, self-directed steps to get there.

After an elder closes our meeting with a story about fishing with his grandfather and his hope of abundance for the next generation, we walk the short distance to our boat, stepping onto a boulder and then the boat's wooden deck. I head straight for a seat next to TNC's Lake Tanganyika basin director, Fridolin Nzambimana, bursting with questions and with hope.

Fridolin explains that TNC and our partner Sustain Lake Tanganyika drew on lessons from pilot sites and evolving global best practices to define a different approach used in all 10 villages of Tanzania's Kipili Archipelago, including Mpanda Kerenge. Starting our engagement with inclusive community visioning sessions set the foundation for truly community-led conservation here. The ownership and confidence that shone, even during our brief visit, stem from this adapted model, which Fridolin and his team are now spreading with and through partners around this enormous lake.

As we motor away, I wish I could be here in two days, when the fishery reopens, to see how the community perceives the success of the temporary closure and uses that to inform their plans. Instead, I take with me enduring images of a plentiful near-shore fishery splashing with life, and one community—among a growing number—that is increasingly equipped to bring about their vision of a sustainable future on perhaps the greatest of our planet's Great Lakes.

> "By **working together,**
> we are protecting our lake.
>
> — line from poem by Kipili community member **Juma J. Yassa**

Page 9: Lake Tanganyika and the Mahale Mountains © Ross Exler
Inset: *Ophthalmotilapia nasuta* © Ad Konigs

Clockwise from far left: Manda Kerenge, Kipili Archipelago © Roshni Lodhia; Julie Damon with BMU members; women taking fish to market, Tanzania © Roshni Lodhia; young chimpanzee, Mahale Mountains © Roshni Lodhia

The forest is breathing. Sapele, mahogany, Afromosia, bembé, kapok, iroko, ekki, moabi—the list of trees in the Congo basin, like an ancient blessing, goes on and on. These trees are a lifegiving force. They absorb carbon, clean the air, even create rain, and together they hold an enormous diversity of life, including more than 1,000 birds, including black-collared barbets like this grumpy fellow. Photo © Kirkamon Cabello/TNC Photo Contest 2022

Irreplaceable Landscape

Congo Basin

THE ENTIRE WORLD NEEDS THE CONGO BASIN. Its intact forests and peatlands are the planet's largest *net* forest carbon sink, capturing more carbon than the Amazon. Its peatlands, which account for just 4% of the basin's land cover, store an amount of carbon equivalent to three years of global fossil fuel emissions. The forests are cloud-makers, too, drawing massive quantities of water from the earth, exhaling vapor, and sending "flying rivers" to swathes of Central and West Africa, where millions rely on rain-fed agriculture.

Spanning most of seven countries, the Congo basin is home to more than 400 species of mammals, including gorillas, leopards, and critically endangered forest elephants. It's estimated that 30 million people live in the forests and another 50 million-70 million in the region are dependent on forest resources. According to conservative estimates, we are losing *at least* half a million hectares of forest each year, chiefly to small-scale agricultural expansion. The Congo can't wait.

From our anchor program in strong Gabon, we are racing to deploy proven tools at a basin scale. Together with many partners, we are supporting communities to lead on conserving—and benefiting from—their forest resources. We are equipping government and industry with climate-smart logging practices and new decision support tools that scientifically quantify the full value of standing forests, and we aim to create new sources of revenue for forest conservation. Our potential impact together: protection and improved forest management across 1.8 million square kilometers—the size of Alaska, Texas, and California combined.

Momentum

Sometimes, simple solutions can make all the difference, like an electric fence that protects farms and keeps elephants out of trouble. Yet as we support local partners on grassroots initiatives, the climate crisis compels us to "play to our size" as a global organization. We are drawing on our distinct capabilities to drive national- and regional-scale progress in the Congo basin, such as by providing counsel to governments and public funders with whom we have long-standing relationships.

In 2025, at the COP30 climate summit, the "Belem Call to Action for Congo Basin Forest" initiative—shepherded by Gabon and France—mobilized a pledge of $2.5 billion over five years from a group of international funders, including the World Bank and five European nations. TNC is at the table, providing technical expertise to help direct funding to action that will yield the greatest benefits for conservation and communities.

Listening to the Congo

To make a meaningful difference in the vast Congo basin, we're using science to focus our efforts. According to TNC scientist **Tim Boucher**, the best way to understand a forest is to listen.

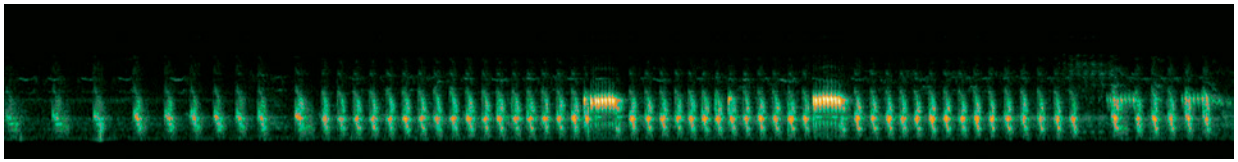
Hot and sweaty, stumbling over tree roots, wading through pitch-black swamp water up to our waist, branches scratching us. It was going to be a long day. The first day of fieldwork is always hard: ironing out the kinks, trying to find a rhythm. Over the next two weeks, our 10-person party would traverse about 50 kilometers of Gabon's thick rainforest on foot, gathering data to compare the health of a government protected area, a community-owned forest, and an area logged by a private company that has pledged to follow sustainable practices.

With the study sites plotted out for each area, one group of researchers deployed 25 cameras over three days. These were left out for six months. At the same time, another group deployed 24 acoustic recorders, which were left out for 48 hours.

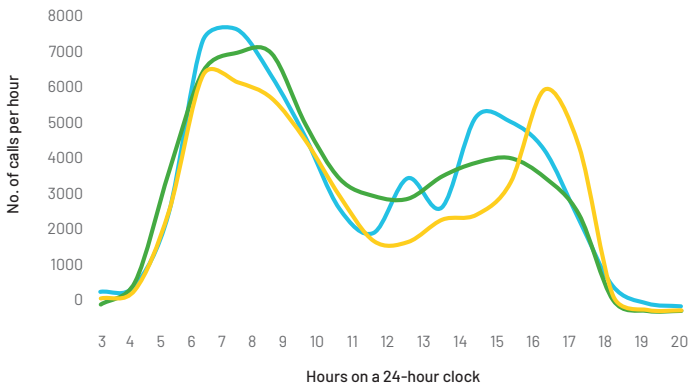
The 'acoustic niche hypothesis'

Inspired by scientist Bernie Krause in 1987, the "acoustic niche hypothesis" suggests that each species occupies its own unique "slot" in the soundscape. By analyzing frequency and amplitude patterns over time (day and night), researchers can actually quantify ecosystem health in freshwater, marine, and land (even soil!) environments.

As a birder and a scientist, I love listening to forests, and as our project data show, birds are particularly helpful in acoustic monitoring. Bird communities differ among forests of varying degrees of health—and each bird species has its own unique call.



Results of Acoustic Recordings (Bioacoustics)



Pilot Project Study Area	Ipassa Reserve Protected Area	Logging Concession	Mohoba Community Forest
Study area size	4,800 ha	7,800 ha	4,000 ha
Deforestation	0.7%	1.8%	12%
Bird species detected	44	41	37
Mammal species detected	30	24	17

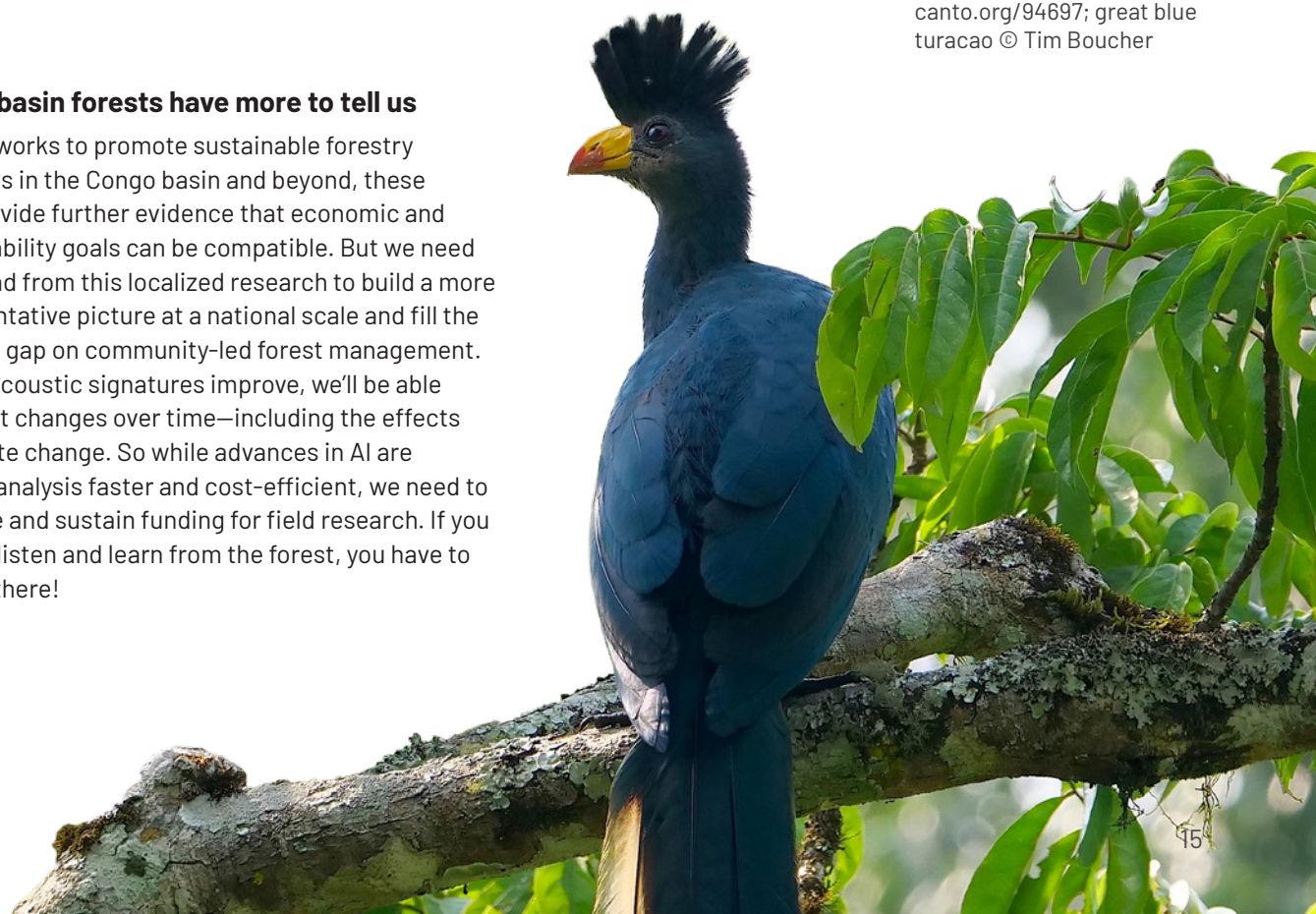
Our team left Gabon with 3,500 hours of recording—a huge amount of data! But recently, there have been significant advances in the ability of artificial intelligence (AI) to identify individual bird species based on their songs. Using Birdnet Analyzer AI software, we quickly uncovered that the sustainably logged forest was very similar to the protected area in terms of biodiversity.

While fewer species of birds were heard in the community-owned forest, it should be noted that the area recorded isn't a community forest reserve, so the findings don't speak to the effectiveness of community-led conservation. Local TNC teams report that communities are eager for support using their forests sustainably, reinforcing the emphasis on communities in TNC's new system-scale strategy for the Congo basin.

The chirps, songs, squawks, and squabbles that our recorders picked up are firsthand accounts of the nuances of forest condition.

Congo basin forests have more to tell us

As TNC works to promote sustainable forestry practices in the Congo basin and beyond, these data provide further evidence that economic and sustainability goals can be compatible. But we need to expand from this localized research to build a more representative picture at a national scale and fill the key data gap on community-led forest management. And as acoustic signatures improve, we'll be able to detect changes over time—including the effects of climate change. So while advances in AI are making analysis faster and cost-efficient, we need to increase and sustain funding for field research. If you want to listen and learn from the forest, you have to get out there!



Page 13: Peter Ofori, cassava farmer and community conservation advocate, Gabon © Roshni Lodhia
Inset: Green velvet beetle © Tim Boucher

Clockwise from far left: Rainforest, Gabon © Mike D. Kock; Tim Boucher and the research team © Tim Boucher; spectrogram recorded in the Congo of a great blue turacao © Julien Birard, Listen at: xeno-canto.org/94697; great blue turacao © Tim Boucher

The great sardine migration of the Benguela Current can be witnessed from space. The glittering fish—billions and billions of them—travel in giant orbs of perpetual motion, wheeling and diving, catching the light, spinning through the depths, racing to outswim the dolphins, sharks, and seabirds in pursuit of the world-famous feast. With the crash of the sardine fisheries—it's estimated that Namibia's has dropped by about 95%—TNC is working urgently with local partners and Benguela Current nations to combat illegal and unregulated fishing. Photo © Wildestanimal/Getty Images

Irreplaceable Landscape

Blue Benguela

AS THE ATLANTIC OCEAN surges against southern Africa, it pushes cold water up from nearly a thousand feet deep, generating the mighty Benguela Current. Prevailing winds pull the water northward from the tip of South Africa, along Namibia, to Angola. At the sunlit surface, a rich soup of phytoplankton emerges, giving rise to one of the world's most productive fisheries.

The powerful current is a superhighway for some the oceans' most majestic travelers. Humpback and southern right whales journey thousands of kilometers along this food-rich corridor during their long trek between icy Antarctic feeding grounds and tropical breeding waters. Above the waves, the skies over the Benguela host an equally dramatic seasonal migration. Cape gannets, terns, petrels, and even wandering albatrosses trace invisible routes between offshore feeding grounds and distant nesting sites, forming a living bridge between ocean and continent.

The great migrations are not just spectacle—they are vivid reminders of the interconnectedness of global marine ecosystems. Protecting these wild voyagers means safeguarding not only ocean and coastal freshwater habitats but also the glittering fish they chase. With illegal foreign fishing fleets stealing millions of tons of fish here each year, the need for action is urgent. Our potential impact together: a brighter future for **145 million hectares of ocean** and millions of people who rely on the current's fisheries.

Momentum

Among the top threats to the well-being of nature and people across the Benguela Current—and in fact, the entire world—are government policies that worsen conflicts between economic objectives and long-term ecological health. We are working to advance policy changes that facilitate real action to align economic, ecological, and social goals.

In 2025, Namibia developed a new Sustainable Blue Economy national policy that links biodiversity protection with sustainable use of marine resources. The policy integrates governance across fisheries, shipping, mining, and tourism. By bringing related functions together, the nation has created new pathways for effective and durable conservation of ocean resources at a sweeping scale. Together with Red-Dune Environment, TNC has played a pivotal role in this journey, providing technical expertise and strategic guidance to embed sustainability into national planning.

The Wild Blue Yonder

According to **Caitlynne Francis**, director of TNC's Blue Benguela Program, "The Benguela Current is the most important place in the global oceans that you've never heard of." She shares why—and how—TNC has dived in to help save it.

Pins and needles. That is my first memory of the cold waters that skirt the western shores of southern Africa, where I grew up. Mere seconds later came the unbridled wonder that still anchors me to this coast as the diversity of rocky shores, complexity of shifting dune systems, and the hidden world of underwater kelp forests interplay in the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (LME).

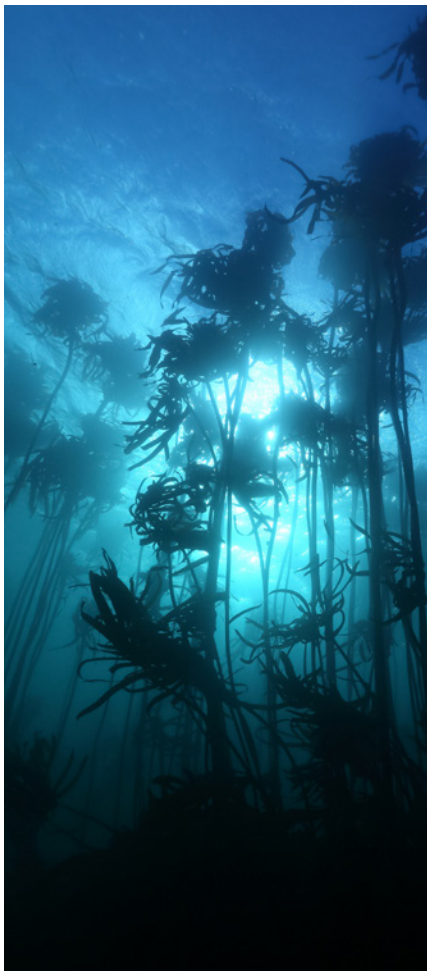
But only 1 percent of the LME is under protection, which means there is a lot to lose and a lot for us to do. TNC brings unique strengths that can be transformative at a regional scale, including marine spatial planning (MSP)—something that TNC is remarkably good at. We'll draw on our lessons learned with Seychelles, which just this year signed its MSP into law.

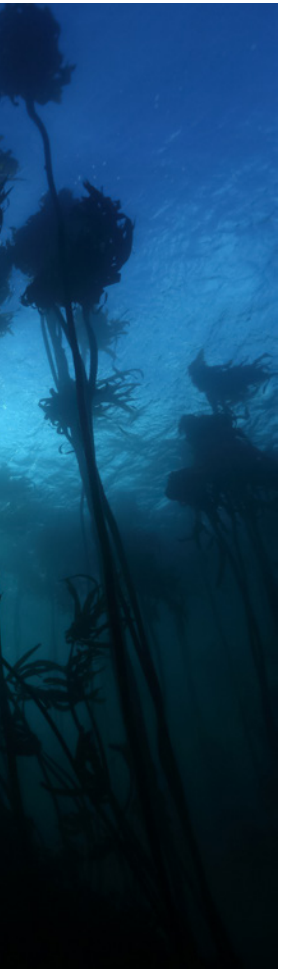
We're aiming to create and expand marine protected areas (MPAs) throughout the LME that are well sited and managed. By providing safe breeding grounds and stopover areas for migrating marine life, we can make an outsized impact for the health of the entire system. A 2026 priority is Namibia, where the sardine fishery has crashed to about 95% of historic levels, largely due to overfishing and climate change, causing mass deaths of endangered African penguins. We plan to support new research to ensure that a potential new MPA will encompass the most essential habitats. This is in an area where the Walvis Ridge, an extraordinarily biodiverse underwater mountain range, comes nearest to the continent.

TNC's global oceans team is helping us tackle rampant illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing that steals tens of millions of dollars—or more—from local economies every year.

This year we've supported local partner CapMarine to launch a pilot project with electronic monitoring technology. Fishers agree to have sensors placed on their vessels that continually record fishing activity and catches, then transmit that data to onshore teams that monitor adherence to regulations. Demonstrating the practicality of this technology is an important step in moving the three nations to share data, strengthen regulations, and team up on enforcement in order to close loopholes for illegal fishing fleets. In parallel, our ocean and terrestrial teams are developing a conservation strategy for important freshwater catchments along the current.

The Benguela Current is vast and complex, and safeguarding it may seem beyond ambitious. But by teaming up with strong partners like Namibia Nature Foundation and addressing key gaps, TNC can make a pivotal difference here.





Coast & current

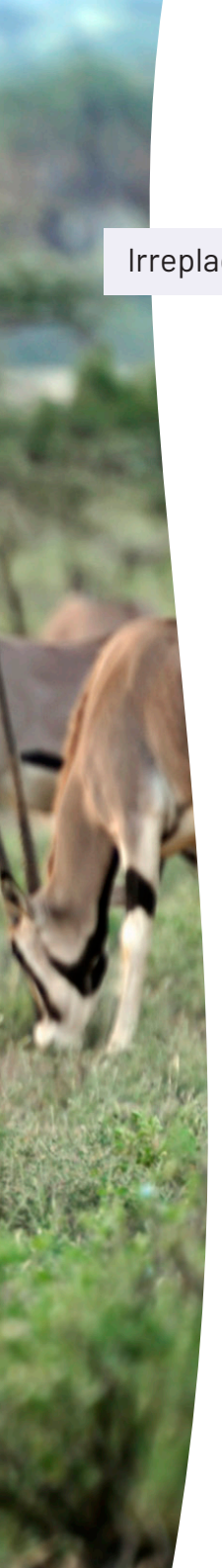
Our Blue Benguela program encompasses key coastal catchments—lands that "catch" rain and send freshwater and nutrients to estuaries where biodiversity flourishes. Estuaries are nurseries for marine life and sanctuaries for migratory birds. And it is estuaries that bear the brunt of terrestrial-borne damage, from erosion to reduced water flow.

In priority catchments in South Africa, we recently brokered the protection of 31,752 hectares that will be added to Augrabies Falls National Park, a biodiversity hotspot in the Orange River catchment, the source of a vital estuary. With our partners in the Greater Cape Town Water Fund, we have now reclaimed more than 35 billion liters of streamflow annually.

Page 17: Pejulia Scholtz, fisher, Laaiplek, South Africa © Roshni Lodhia

Clockwise from far left: Cape fur seal, Namibia © Roshni Lodhia; Caitlynne Francis greets a toddler during a visit to the Topnaar community in Namibia. © Roshni Lodhia; small super klipfish © Madelein Wolf/Getty Images; Melvin Naruseb, fisher, Swakopmund, Namibia © Roshni Lodhia; critically endangered African penguins (and inset on page 17) © Roshni Lodhia; gannets catching sardines, South Africa © Dmitry Miroshnikov/Getty Images; giant kelp forest, South Africa © Baramee Temboonkiat/Getty Images

Clockwise from above: Oryx, Samburu National Reserve, Kenya © Kyslynskyy/Getty Images; Susan Lantare of CHAT with her yellow backpack of supplies © Roshni Lodhia; little green bee-eaters, Kenya © Vicki Jauron/Getty Images



Irreplaceable Landscape

Kenya-Tanzania Rangelands

TNC AFRICA'S ORIGIN STORY on the continent begins here—the iconic savannas of East Africa. It is in northern Kenya and northern Tanzania where we learned with local partners how to blend TNC's knowledge of grassland science with pastoralists' traditional expertise to co-create effective approaches. Here is where we established Africa's first water fund and created a movement, with 17 water funds now in stages of development across the continent.

Together with a host of partners, we have built a robust foundation of success in targeted areas—trusted relationships, tested models, and lessons learned. We can and must build from these site-based projects to work across boundaries to restore and sustain the ecological functionality and vital connectivity of this vast system. To that end, a broad team of local and global TNC practitioners, scientists, and experts in fields including human rights and policy are at work evolving our conservation direction in the rangelands shared by Kenya and Tanzania, and the essential water sources that they encompass. Their objective: a unified, deeply integrated framework for conserving the health of the system and for actualizing the full potential of community-led conservation.

Momentum

The lack of roads and clinics isn't the only obstacle women from Kenya's remote community conservancies face in accessing healthcare. Traditional beliefs and misconceptions have been equally formidable barriers.

In 2025, Communities Health Africa Trust (CHAT) surpassed its seven-year goal by delivering accurate, empowering information about women's health and the links between the well-being of families, livestock, and the environment through more than 350,000 interactions since our partnership began. Through mobile tented clinics and door-to-door visits, CHAT provides women and men across generations with access to reproductive and basic healthcare and knowledge to shape their own futures. It takes time and trust to shift mindsets. That is why TNC has supported CHAT and its locally rooted, integrated approach since 2018. As an elder from Narupa Conservancy put it, "These young men should know that the women of today want to go to school and make money. They cannot have children every other year!"

Africa Council

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Matt Spetzler
Prashant Trivedi
Christine Vernier
Fred Wakeman

Ninae Mwema's pre-wedding celebration, Milola Village, Tanzania © Roshni Lodhia

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

The Nature Conservancy