



PROJECT REWILD

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

PROJECT REWILD ANNUAL REPORT

GREAT PLAINS FOUNDATION



It is hard to keep up, but Lloyd Mushire, the Manager at Tembo Plains in the Sapi Reserve, sent this note today - “Went on a boat trip today and saw three large herds of elephants, all notably calm. We could approach very closely. Lions, painted dogs and a great deal of herbivores. Rewilding Zambezi is REALLY working. Thank you all.”

The year we have taken to scientifically monitor elephant movement has paid off. The translocated elephants have integrated with the resident herds in Sapi and their movements in their new home have completely stabilised to what we consider normal. The project has been a landmark one for many reasons but for me, most notably for the observations that are coming out about the way elephants communicate - new herds to resident herds and vice versa and we really want to find out more about that. Our plans to move other animals, like giraffe, continue with work being done on roads to get them moved safely.

The Great Plains Foundation and our teams aspire to be as helpful as we can to alleviate pressure in areas with overpopulations. As a result, we are being approached by more and more fenced reserves and ranches who want us to help. And we will.

Once again, we want to thank everyone who has helped us start this project. Translocation and rewilding are becoming some of the most important tools in the arsenal of conservationists around the world. It’s the right thing for us all to do and we as Great Plains are ready to drive that in our regions. I hope this report fills in the story for you for this phase, but I can only smile at the report to come in 2026, that I already look forward to writing.

Kind regards

Dereck Joubert
Founder, Great Plains Foundation

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Project Rewild aims to reintroduce keystone species to the Sapi Reserve and other depleted former hunting concessions in Zimbabwe. The focus of this report will be the work done in Sapi Reserve in the past year and a half as part of Project Rewild and the Sapi Restoration Initiative including 1) wildlife translocations, in particular elephants 2) supporting ZimParks’ personnel and development and 3) establishing our own monitoring and security teams to work alongside ZimParks’ rangers with a focus on biodiversity monitoring, research and data collection.



101  **ELEPHANTS &**
184  **IMPALA SAFELY RELOCATED TO SAPI RESERVE**

A REVIEW OF 2023

THE FIRST TRANSLOCATED ELEPHANTS SETTLE IN TO SAPI

Between June and August of 2022, we successfully relocated 101 elephants in 13 herds and 184 impalas to Sapi. The primary focus of our team in Sapi this year has been the monitoring of both the resident and translocated elephants, to understand how they are settling in to the Sapi Reserve, to observe their movements and to establish comprehensive herd profiles. To monitor the collared elephants, the team in Sapi rely on the Earth Ranger online system for monitoring collared elephants, our research assets, and the geofences established for our human-elephant conflict protocol. Additionally, our female Biodiversity Monitors are in the process of creating individual ID kits for every animal in collared herds, both resident and translocated, as part of the herd profiles. We also have PhD students conducting research on various aspects, such as the relationship between resident and translocated herds, stress levels, and impact on vegetation.



In June, one elephant herd encroached into the Masoka community for the first time since their release. Fortunately, we responded promptly, collaborating with ZimParks' rangers from Sapi, Mkanga Field Station,

Dande Safari Area, and Mbire Rural District Council officers. Through this collaborative effort, we successfully guided the herd back into the protected area, preventing any negative impact on the community and showing the effectiveness of our human-elephant conflict mitigation protocols.

We are also thrilled to report that five elephant calves have been born in the Sapi Reserve to translocated elephants since late 2022, reflecting both the success of the move itself and the ability of these translocated herds to settle into their new environment!



5 ELEPHANT CALVES BORN IN SAPI TO TRANSLOCATED ELEPHANTS!

PROJECT REWILD ANNUAL REPORT

GREAT PLAINS FOUNDATION



A NEW RESEARCH AND MONITORING CAMP

Research and Monitoring form the bedrock Sapi Restoration Initiative. Beginning in February 2023, we began constructing a new research and monitoring camp. The camp's infrastructure, accommodation units, operations room, and laboratory are available to visiting researchers. We are thrilled to report that construction is complete, and the camp is fully equipped with solar power and internet. Our team has engaged in productive discussions with both international and local Zimbabwean researchers and we are excited about the promising collaborations ahead.

1 NEW OPERATIONS ROOM

1 NEW RESEARCH CAMP



SUPPORTING ZIMPARKS

We continue to work closely with ZimParks and provide ongoing support for their rangers, including food rations, fuel, uniforms, and infrastructure improvements to their ranger station in Sapi (G-Camp). G-Camp, which serves as ZimParks' regional base, underwent a complete renovation supported by Great Plains, including improved accommodation facilities, an ablution block, a new operations center, and the implementation of the SMART system. Since many of ZimParks' stations already use the SMART system, it is crucial to integrate G-Camp into this network. As the GPF team also uses SMART, alongside Earth Ranger, this presents an excellent opportunity for collaboration and cooperation.



FEMALE RANGERS AND BIODIVERSITY MONITORING

Our on-the-ground teams in Zimbabwe, include our Biodiversity Monitors, also referred to as Female Rangers. The role of a Female Ranger/Biodiversity Monitor is to monitor all natural resources from endangered species, plant species, habitat changes, water sources, populations, and more – deepening our understanding of the ecosystems we are working hard to protect and informing management decisions. These women are proving to be hugely successful at their jobs, not only with data collection and monitoring but also becoming ambassadors in their communities for education and conservation. We currently have a two qualified Biodiversity Monitors in Zimbabwe, with six more being hired.



NEW FEMALE RANGERS HIRED

8000KM PATROLLED BY BIODIVERSITY MONITORS

Our first two female rangers in Zimbabwe, Veronica and Rachel, traveled two very different paths before joining the Great Plains Foundation team. Veronica spent holidays in Hwange as a child, which ignited her passion for nature at a young age. She completed her Wildlife Biology and Conservation degree from Chinhoyi University and was employed at Southern Alliance For Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE) in Zimbabwe before becoming a Female Ranger. Rachel on the other hand, was applying to nursing colleges when she fell in love with nature and ultimately changed her career direction. For Rachel, being hired by Great Plains Foundation was a “dream come true.”



BEGINNING RESEARCH IN THE SAPI RESERVE

While our Research and Monitoring Camp will allow us to ramp up the resources we can provide to researchers while they are in Sapi, the work has already begun! One benefit of having paused elephant relocations in 2023 is that it allowed us to gather more than a year's worth of data on the movement patterns of the released elephants. This allowed us to assess their movement and demonstrate that neither wet nor dry season movement to date have seen the elephants roam extensively into communities, try to return home, or put excessive pressure on the landscape immediately bordering the Zambezi River.

PROJECT REWILD ANNUAL REPORT

GREAT PLAINS FOUNDATION



In addition to intensive monitoring of elephants movement, this period also saw the beginning our predator monitoring efforts. We partnered with WildCru to conduct a standardized camera trapping survey, which spanned six weeks. Our Biodiversity Monitors helped design the methodology and implementation for learning and training purposes. WildCru provided us with interim results, which have provided a valuable baseline for the large carnivore population in the region. The initial survey identified 17 lions, 62 leopards, a pack of six wild dogs, and one cheetah. We continue to expand this database through ongoing camera-trapping efforts. Between October 2022 to March 2023 alone our female Biodiversity Monitors assessed over 43,000 camera trap images! We hope to have 100 camera traps in place by the end of 2024.

20 CAMERA TRAPS 
RECORDING PREDATOR DATA

100km
OF ROAD MAINTAINED

62 LEOPARDS
IDENTIFIED



Simbai Mutenmahima, from the University of Zimbabwe, visited the team in Q1 2023 to assist in setting up vegetation sampling in Sapi, with the aim of creating a detailed vegetation map for the area. During his visit, Mr. Mutenmahima trained our Biodiversity Monitoring team on ArcGIS, a geographic information system software. Twice during 2023, our Sapi team hosted a group of wildlife students from the Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) with the aim of providing the students with practical learning opportunities on elephant monitoring, bird and tree identification, carnivore monitoring, use of GPS and SMART data and software, telemetry equipment and camera trapping methodologies.

Our long-term research plans for Sapi are aimed at helping to bridge the gap between academic research and conservation management.

PLANS FOR 2024

In 2024 we plan to forge ahead full steam with Project Rewild and Sapi Restoration Initiative activities including hiring up to 24 new Wildlife Rangers (a mix of both men and women), further improvements to the G-Camp ranger station and the continued translocation of elephants and other species beginning in April/May of 2024.

CONCLUSION

We are grateful for the opportunity to continue our important work restoring the Sapi Reserve with your support. We have achieved significant progress towards our goals and objectives in 2023 and we look forward to the opportunity to build on those successes in 2024. Thank you.

Continue below for a full overview of Great Plains Foundation's work across Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

TOTAL IMPACT OF THE GREAT PLAINS FOUNDATION SO FAR

Generating Impact is the at the core of the Great Plains Foundations work.
Here is a summary of our Impact so far from our programs across Kenya, Botswana & Zimbabwe.



SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM

Nutritious meals to boost attendance, attention and progress

2.5 MILLION
Nutritious Meals Distributed



ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION

Land under Great Plains protection in Africa

1.1 MILLION
Hectares Protected



CONSERVATION ROOTS

Planting indigenous trees for ecosystem restoration, food security and carbon sequestration

33,275
Indigenous Trees Planted

TOTAL IMPACT

OF THE GREAT PLAINS FOUNDATION SO FAR



MOBILE CLINICS

Bringing regional medical specialists to schools in rural communities

2,502

School Kids Reached



CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Knowledge sharing through Conservation Education camps for schools

1,145

School Kids Hosted



SOLAR MAMAS

Women-led business bringing safe renewable energy to off-grid communities to support education and human-wildlife coexistence

600

Homes Installed with Solar



CONSERVATION GOALS

Engaging youth in conservation and development through Netball and Football

390

Young People Engaged



BEADS FOR BUSINESS

Supporting a Women Empowerment bead business where profits go towards education and healthcare of the Mamas

105

Women Hired for the Business



REWILD ZAMBEZI

Protecting and restoring the 128,000-hectare Sapi Reserve Ecosystem on the banks of the Zambezi River

101

Elephants Reintroduced



GREAT PLAINS EARTH ACADEMY

Bringing vocational training courses to rural communities to boost employment rates in young people

101

Students Trained



PROJECT RANGER

Grant-based project funding anti-poaching units across Africa

39

Grants Awarded



SPONSORED TEACHERS

Sponsoring the salary of teachers to boost quality of education and support teaching

35

Teachers Sponsored

TOTAL IMPACT OF THE GREAT PLAINS FOUNDATION SO FAR



RHINO PROJECT

Protecting endangered rhinoceros for future generations

32

Rangers Hired



COMMUNITY FARM SUPPORT

Supporting human-wildlife coexistence farming in partnership with Ecoexist

29

Farmers Supported



FEMALE RANGERS

Hiring, training and equipping women from local communities to become Female Wildlife Rangers

15

Female Rangers on the Program



BIG CATS INITIATIVE

A grant-based project funding Big Cat Conservation across Africa

157 29

Grants in Countries

In partnership with National Geographic

7 6

Grants in Countries

Under Great Plains Foundation Management



BUILDING BRIDGES

Providing communities with safe access across dangerous rivers to school and medical facilities

4

Bridges Built



SPONSORED STUDENTS

Sponsoring students to attend Conservation Leaders Courses as the next generation of leaders

3

Students Sponsored