

WOMEN IN CONSERVATION

LEADING THE WAY

Following International Women's Day in March, *msafiri* celebrates the increasing and inspiring contributions that women bring to the conservation effort.

At grassroots level across Africa, women are uniquely positioned to witness the pervasive environmental and conservation pressures caused by climate change, poaching and human encroachment. It is estimated that women constitute 70% of Africa's agricultural workforce and cultivate 90% of its food; they are usually the water carriers, seed sowers, land tillers and crop growers, encountering wildlife daily. Yet their voices are seldom heard. With the exception of a handful of well-known pioneers, including Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey and Wangari Maathai, conservation has hitherto been almost exclusively a male domain. That is slowly changing. More women are finally making their mark in the spheres of policy-making and management, in community leadership and conservation projects, blazing a trail for others to follow. Here's a selection of our women making a mark.

DOMINIQUE GONÇALVES
MOZAMBIQUE

www.gorongosa.org

After her studies, Gonçalves worked as an intern for the elephant ecologist Joyce Poole in Gorongosa National Park, eventually becoming manager of its Elephant Ecology Project, focusing on human-elephant coexistence in the park's buffer zone. She works with Gorongosa's Girls' Club programmes on education, health and preventing early marriage.

DR GLADYS KALEMA-ZIKUSOKA
UGANDA

www.ctph.org

Named in the BBC 100 Women list for 2023, showcasing inspiring women around the world, Dr Kalema-Zikusoka became Uganda's first Wildlife Veterinarian in 1996. She's since won multiple awards for her work on mountain gorilla conservation and its connection with communities through her NGO Conservation Through Public Health.

DR PAULA KAHUMBU, KENYA

www.drpaulakahumbu.com

Ecologist, documentary-maker, educator and advocate, Dr Kahumbu is one of Africa's best-known conservationists. Growing up in Nairobi, her love of wildlife flourished after meeting her neighbour, the renowned paleoanthropologist Dr Richard Leakey, eventually becoming CEO of his NGO, WildlifeDirect. She started the impactful Hands Off Our Elephants campaign with Kenya's First Lady Margaret Kenyatta (aimed at ending the ivory trade) and produced *Wildlife Warriors*, the first wildlife documentary programmes to be made by Africans, featuring Kenyan conservationists. Passionate about linking Africa's people, particularly children, to conservation, she has won multiple awards and was named among 'The Most Influential Women of 2022' by the *Financial Times*.



EDWARD SELFE

THANDIWE MWEETWA

fzs.org/en/projects/zambia/nsumbu-national-park/

As a child, biologist Mweetwa attended Chipembele Wildlife Education Trust's conservation classes in Mfuwe, developing her love of wildlife. In 2009, she joined the *Zambian Carnivore Project* (www.zambiacarnivores.org) as an intern, and by the time she left at the end of 2023 she was project manager for their *Luangwa Valley* team, focusing on lion research. Believing that local communities and women are vital to conservation, she also managed ZCP's Conservation Education and Women and Wildlife Conservation programmes to encourage more diversity in research. She is now the integrated landscape custodian manager at the Frankfurt Zoological Society's *Nsumbu Tanganyika Conservation Programme*, promoting co-existence between people and wildlife in and around Nsumbu National Park in northern Zambia.



RACHEL MCROBB, ZAMBIA

www.cslzambia.org

In 2000, when *Zambian-born* McRobb was working in a lodge in South Luangwa National Park, she set up a team of six scouts to combat poaching. That has morphed into the NGO *Conservation South Luangwa* (CSL), with herself as CEO and over 120 staff protecting 14,000sq km. In collaboration with Zambia's national parks authority, CSL has responsibility for anti-poaching, aerial surveillance, veterinary staff and K9 teams. They launched a dedicated community department in 2021 working on human-wildlife co-existence, reaching an estimated 100,000 people.

Professor Amy Dickman, Tanzania, and Dr Alayne Cotterill, Kenya and Zambia

www.lionlandscapes.org

Having worked in lion conservation over several years, with Dickman founding *Ruaha Carnivore Project* and Cotterill establishing *Laikipia's* innovative *Lion Ranger* teams, the pair joined forces in 2021 in a rare collaboration in the conservation world. Through their *Lion Landscapes* initiative, they ensure thousands of local people benefit from protecting lions and their habitat.

Dr Moreangels Mbizah, Zimbabwe

www.wildlifeconservationaction.org

Zimbabwean zoologist Mbizah completed her doctorate at Oxford University before returning home to establish *Wildlife Conservation Action*, one of the few Black-founded conservation organisations in Zimbabwe. It aims to improve sustainable livelihoods for communities and encourage them to protect and co-exist with wildlife, particularly lions, providing predator-proof cattle bomas and training community guardians to respond to instances of human-wildlife conflict. Mbizah strongly believes local people are key to conservation and focuses on training and capacity building to inspire future African conservation leaders, especially women.





KAREN KEMP

FANNY MINESA DR CONGO

www.bonobos.org

Winner of the 2023 Tusk Award for Conservation in Africa, Minesa became director of Friends of Bonobos of the Congo (ABC), founded by her mother Claudine André, in 2014. With 100 staff, ABC rescues and rewilds rare bonobos and protects their rainforest habitats, including the Ekolo ya Bonobo Community Reserve, which, thanks to her efforts, has expanded to four times its original footprint. Aiming to reduce the bushmeat trade in bonobos, ABC supports healthcare, schools, infrastructure and job creation for local communities and has delivered environmental education programmes to around 380,000 people across DRC.

OLIVIA MUFUTE, ZIMBABWE

www.awf.org

As Zimbabwe's country director for the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), ecologist Mufute is responsible for overseeing a range of projects from anti-poaching to community and conservancy developments, and from governance to transboundary collaboration. She brings 25 years of wildlife conservation experience to her role, including as chief ecologist for Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, in policy development and implementing multi-lateral environmental agreements. A current focus is AWF's 10-year anti-poaching conservation programme with both Zimbabwean and Zambian park authorities.



Lisa Hywood, Zimbabwe www.tikkihywoodfoundation.org

Hywood founded the non-profit Tikki Hywood Foundation in 1994, and it has become synonymous with pangolin rescue and conservation, working in Zimbabwe, Liberia and Cameroon. The foundation recently partnered with renowned NGO African Parks, sharing her expertise in their protected areas across the continent.