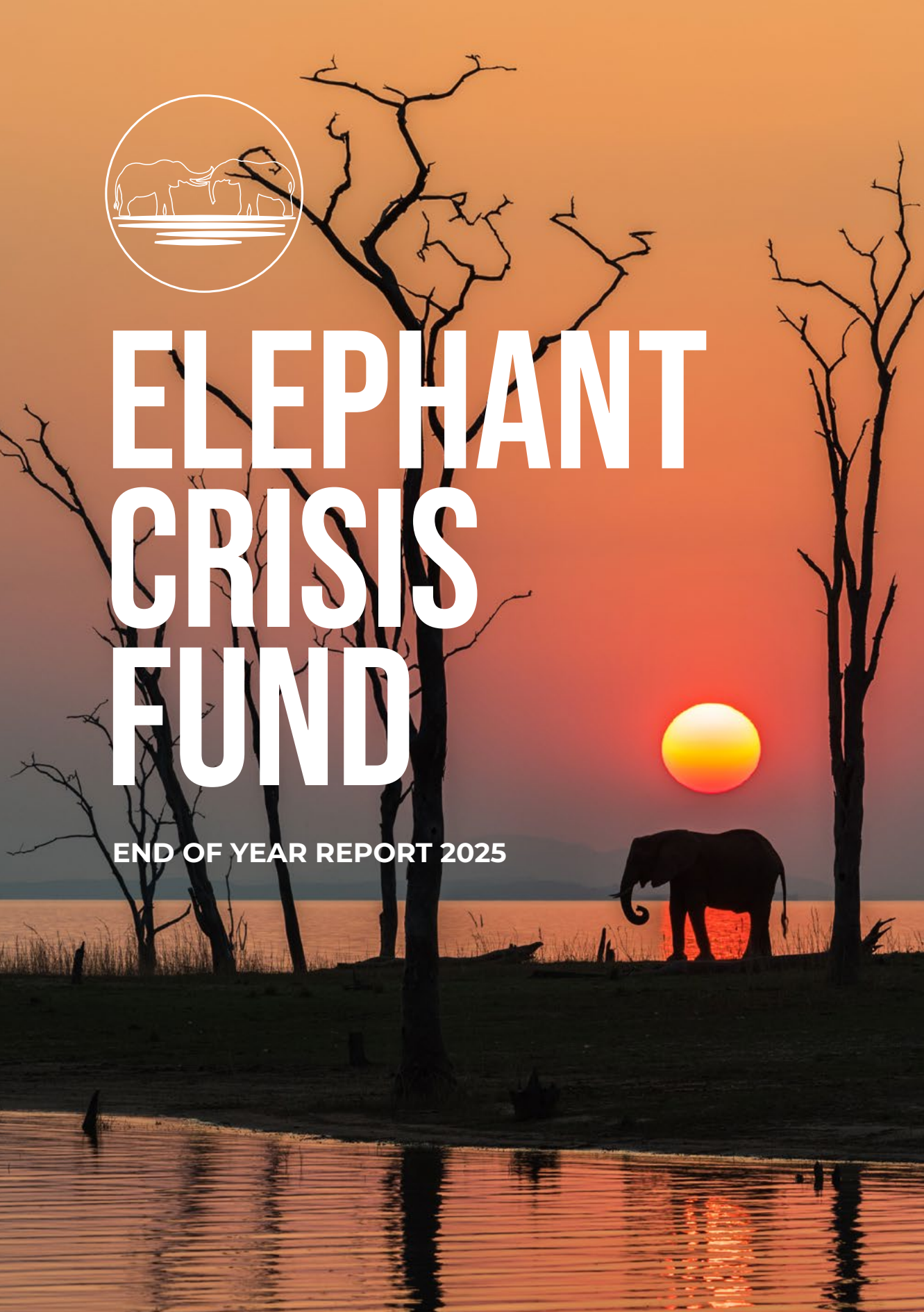


# ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND

## END OF YEAR REPORT 2025

# ABOUT THE ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND

The Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) invests in organizations, big and small, to ensure that elephant populations across Africa can thrive without threat from ivory poaching and coexist with the humans they share the landscapes with. The ECF is a joint initiative of Save the Elephants and the Wildlife Conservation Network, and was launched in 2013.

Cover photo: Matusadona National Park, Zimbabwe. © Artur Stankiewicz
Inside page: The legendary tusker Craig (far right) with two companion bull elephants, in Amboseli, Kenya. Mt. Kilimanjaro in nearby Tanzania looms in the background. © Joshua Clay

# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

It has been both a challenging yet productive year - one that tested our resilience but also revealed the strength of our network and the depth of support for elephant conservation.

The unexpected and near-total loss of US government funding for conservation in Africa this year caused significant disruption for many of our partners across the continent. However, thanks to your generosity, we were able to respond quickly with emergency funding for the worst-affected organizations, and we are pleased to report that many of our partners coped much better than initially feared.

This ability to respond rapidly to sudden and unforeseen crises underscores the vital role that the Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) plays for conservation partners across Africa.

We are also pleased that there has not been any noticeable increase in poaching or ivory trafficking this year. This has enabled us to focus on our core priorities - safeguarding vulnerable elephant populations and supporting human-elephant coexistence.

We have concentrated our efforts on supporting local and community-based organizations, providing them with technical assistance from ECF staff members, the wider Save the Elephants (STE) team, and other partners. The Continental Elephant Tracking Initiative and Save the Elephants' human-elephant coexistence training courses in Tsavo, Kenya, have been particularly instrumental in strengthening continental collaboration.

We were delighted that the work of the ECF was recognized with the 20th BBVA Foundation Worldwide Conservation Award for 2025. Beyond the valuable endorsement of our conservation model, the award comes with a cash prize for the ECF.

As always, we are deeply grateful to you, our donors, for your steadfast support of conservation organizations protecting elephants and their habitats across Africa.

**Dr. Chris Thouless**
Director of the Elephant Crisis Fund

Matusadona National Park, Zimbabwe. © Melanie van Zyl

A forest elephant crosses the mineral rich Jobo Bai in Batéké Plateau, Gabon. ECF emergency funding helped Panthera to continue protecting elephant hotspots in Batéké in the face of significant US federal funding losses. © A.E. Botha/Panthera.

© Robbie Labanowski





**$41,329,435**
Amount granted since inception

**543**
Number of grants issued to date

**120**
Number of partners that have received grants

**44**
Number of countries supported

## Total amount granted in 2025: $2,604,620

US$ allocation by region:

| | |
|---|---|
| Central Africa | $1,000,345 |
| East Africa | $346,818 |
| Southern Africa | $682,457 |
| West Africa | $150,000 |
| Multiple Africa | $25,000 |
| Multiple Asia | $100,000 |
| Global | $300,000 |

## US$ allocation in 2025

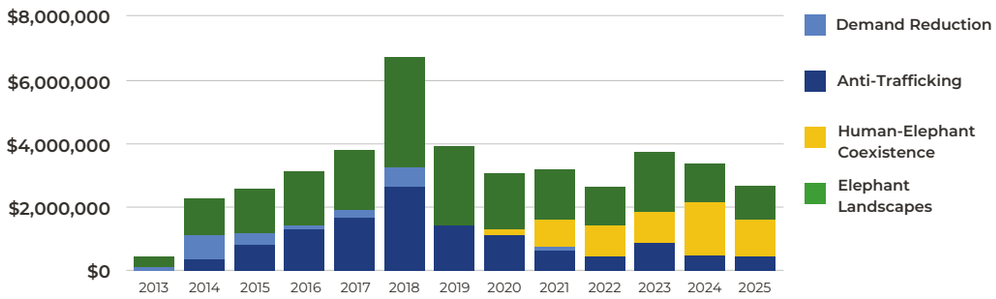
Demand Reduction & Anti-Trafficking
**$445,000**

Human-elephant Coexistence
**$1,174,942**

Elephant Landscapes
**$984,678**

Total: $2,604,620

## US$ allocation by year




*The data above uses figures up to the end of November 2025*

# US FEDERAL FUNDING CRISIS

## By Dr. Chris Thouless

The sudden suspension of US government funding (principally from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, USAID, and the State Department's Office of Narcotics and Law Enforcement) at the end of February left many of our partners facing uncertainty about whether funds would eventually be released, and the need to cut spending to keep afloat. It was critical not to halt frontline activities, and particularly not to lay off rangers, as their loss can undermine livelihoods and conservation efforts.

As reports about the unfolding crisis began to arrive from our field partners, we immediately reached out to them to assess their funding gaps. Some were in a desperate situation, having been reliant on US government support. In response, we immediately released reserve funds kept aside for this kind of situation and made 11 grants totalling $266,000 in unrestricted funding. We also gave partners more flexibility in how they used existing grants, allowing them to plug the most significant budget gaps.

> **Your swift action and commitment made it possible for us to continue critical frontline conservation work during an exceptionally uncertain period. We are truly grateful and deeply value this partnership, it has made a real difference on the ground.**
>
> Richard Moller, Co-Founder and CEO, Tsavo Trust

We were deeply grateful that many of our donors responded to an urgent plea for additional support. A particular concern was the Chinko Conservation Area, in the Central African Republic, where four elephants - a significant part of its small population - had been poached for ivory in late 2024 outside the main conservation area. Plans to expand protection into this area had been paused due to the funding cuts, but thanks to the amazing generosity of a group of ECF and Lion Recovery Fund donors, these plans were able to move forward.

It has been a huge relief that all of our partners were able to get through this crisis without shutting down their operations. While some staff lay-offs have been unavoidable, almost no frontline rangers have been made redundant. The loss of US federal funds, however, has forced many organizations to significantly reduce spending and expansion plans, and to curtail or stop important but less critical activities.

An elephant in the Chinko Conservation Area, Central African Republic. © Thierry Aebischer/African Parks.

Nouabalé Ndoki National Park in the Republic of Congo is a key area for forest elephant conservation. The ECF provided emergency support for this site, following the unexpected loss of USAID and USFWS funding. © Will Burrard-Lucas/Wildlife Conservation Society.

Unfortunately, the prospects of a resumption of US government funding do not look promising, and this will have long-lasting consequences for many of our partners. Since our initial response, we have stepped in with a further $745,000 in emergency support, bringing the total allocated to fill this gap to just over $1 million. We were pleased to be able to provide this short-term help, but with our reserves reduced, we hope that larger granting bodies will step in to provide the longer-term support needed to fill these funding gaps.

> **WE ARE LUCKY TO HAVE PARTNERS LIKE YOU WHO BELIEVE IN THE IMPORTANCE OF SPECIES CONSERVATION IN AFRICA.**
>
> Philipp Henschel PhD, Regional Director, West and Central Africa, Panthera

# THE IVORY TRADE

## By Jophie Clark

Despite these challenging times, it is very fortunate that there have been no indications of a significant increase in elephant poaching. However, in places where elephant numbers are already critically low, even the loss of a few individuals can be disastrous. There have been reports of poaching in Botswana and in Tete Province in Mozambique, but the scale of this is unclear. While any amount of elephant poaching is regrettable, these regions fall within large transnational elephant ranges, so the populations there are more resilient than isolated ones.

Ivory trafficking also remains at a low level compared to its peak in 2011-2017. Our partners and associated law enforcement agencies have kept up the pressure, with significant arrests and prosecutions. In June, long-term investigations led to the arrest of two high-level wildlife traffickers in Vietnam. In Zimbabwe, a Chinese national was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment for the unlawful possession of ivory and rhino horns. This is believed to be the first conviction and custodial sentence for a wildlife crime imposed on a foreign national in Zimbabwe.

In Malawi, Yunhua Lin, the Chinese head of a notorious wildlife trafficking network, has been linked to an orphanage exposed as a center of child exploitation and abuse, where children are also groomed as wildlife traffickers. Lin was sentenced in 2021 to 14 years in a Malawian prison for wildlife crime and money laundering, but was able to continue his criminal activities from behind bars and was even allowed out by corrupt prison guards. He was unexpectedly pardoned earlier this year by the Malawian president for his wildlife offences, but is still in custody facing corruption charges. The ECF is a lead funder of the long-term investigations into the Lin network.

The Lao-China Railway - Luang Prabang Station.

Sustained law enforcement activity in Nigeria has deterred traffickers, who appear to have shifted their operations to Mozambique and Angola. While large-scale shipments into China have been restricted by effective law enforcement, there are concerns that the resurgence of outbound tourism following the relaxation of COVID restrictions may lead to an increase in purchases of ivory trinkets. A particular concern is the China-Laos railway line which opened at the end of 2021. Reports indicate a rise in Laos of in exclusive retail outlets catering to organized Chinese tour groups, selling ivory and other illegal wildlife products.

Although these activities remain relatively limited and are not driving increased trade from Africa, they do warrant monitoring. With your generous donations, our partners are working alongside Laotian authorities to close down these outlets, and supporting law enforcement in Vietnam, which remains a major transit country for ivory and other wildlife products trafficked from Africa to China.





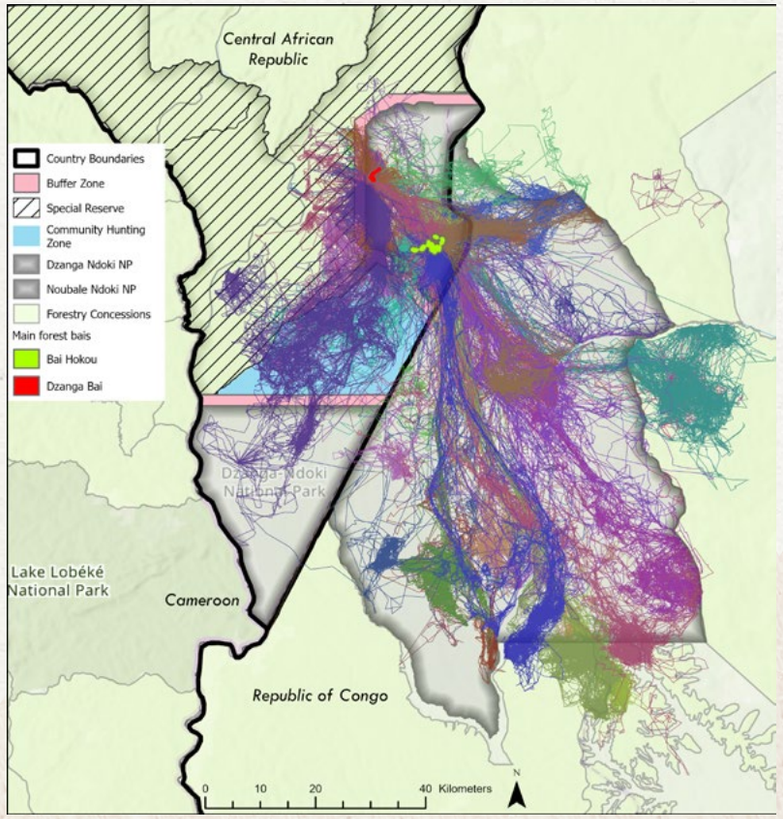
# TRACKING: GIVING A VOICE TO ELEPHANTS

## By Dr. Chris Thouless

GPS tracking gives elephants a voice. Through the paths they follow, the choices they make, and the challenges they face, we gain a deeper understanding of their lives. As part of Save the Elephants, which has spent three decades tracking elephants, we are supporting an exciting new project - the Continental Elephant Tracking Initiative (CTI).

The CTI grew from a powerful yet simple idea - that tracking elephants becomes far more meaningful when the data is saved and each tracked path tells a story about that elephant and its environment, yet too often the data is not used again once it has served its immediate purpose. Many of our partners already use satellite tracking as a conservation tool, but by uniting elephant researchers and conservationists - sharing ideas, mapping techniques, and analytical tools - we can transform individual studies into a continental understanding of how elephants move and why, and the challenges they face.

Through the CTI, we are building a network of ECF partners and other collaborators across Africa, promoting best practice in deploying tracking collars, data management, reporting, and mapping, while providing technical support to those who need it.




Tracking data demonstrates how far forest elephants travel to reach the mineral-rich 'bais' of the Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas Complex, Central African Republic.
© Save the Elephants/ WWF Continental Tracking Initiative

The CTI's deep analysis and cutting-edge mapping techniques have already uncovered new insights, including the following.

In Dzanga Sanga, Central African Republic, tracking data has revealed how far forest elephants travel for mineral-rich pools known as baïs - even crossing over from Congo. Their deep loyalty to these baïs, while remarkable, makes them more vulnerable to poaching.

In northern Angola, we identified key crossing points where forest elephants were being struck by vehicles on a road cutting through their range. Pinpointing these spots between natural habitat and farmland will help to design fencing to keep both elephants and people safe.

In Kassangor, South Sudan, tracking data captured a moment of crisis - the time and location of major human-elephant conflict - by showing tracks that appeared when a group of elephants separated from each other and increased their speed. This information helped to identify where to build alternative water sources for elephants, to help reduce conflict.

In Zimbabwe, elephants outside Matusadona National Park unexpectedly avoided a seemingly good corridor. When the data was examined, our partners discovered the reason - a previously unknown illegal goldmine. Authorities shut it down.

By fostering data-driven collaboration, the CTI is helping to shape the long-term future for elephants in these landscapes, revealing the factors that influence elephant movements and decisions, and helping define their needs.

ECF-funded water holes in Kassangor, South Sudan. As the rains arrive, these waterholes will fill, helping to ease pressure over water access between wildlife and cattle during the dry season, and hopefully helping reducing human-elephant conflict. © Benoit Morkel/African Parks

**329**

**TRACKING COLLARS FUNDED BY THE ECF**





# SUPPORTING GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

## By Dr. Chris Thouless

Thanks to your support this year, we have deepened our commitment to engaging with and empowering small local and community-based partners - people who live alongside elephants and protect them every day.

In South Sudan we have recently welcomed Sudd Conservation & Community Development as a new grantee. Partnering with the Lion Recovery Fund, we have funded training and equipment to assess wildlife in Panyijiar County, a first step towards future conservation initiatives.
© Sudd Conservation and Community Development.

In South Sudan, where elephants have suffered some of the heaviest losses in the past decade, scattered and elusive herds wander the war-torn landscape trying to escape poachers and find safety beyond the flooded Sudd swamps they once found refuge in. In addition to our support of African Parks in the region, we are funding three small community groups that are working to locate the refugee elephant herds. Their discoveries will hopefully guide larger partners to safeguard the most important areas and work alongside the community groups to protect the last elephants of the lower White Nile.

While emerging community conservation groups like those in South Sudan have the passion and courage for safeguarding elephants, they need funding, equipment, and mentoring. With your help, we are providing all of this to help these groups grow stronger and meet ECF's modest reporting and accountability standards. We are also nurturing a spirit of peer-to-peer learning, where more experienced ECF partners share their knowledge and experience with newer community-led initiatives.

Our vision, as we continue to expand our network of ECF partners, is to create a more dispersed network of support, with regional hubs and grantees supporting each other, without relying solely on the ECF. This model is already taking root in the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) landscape, in southern Africa, home to the largest elephant population on the continent. There, your support is helping EcoExist, which provides technical support to an intergovernmental agency - the KAZA secretariat - and is working with a variety of partners across the landscape.

Your support is as important as ever. Every new partnership, every piece of equipment, every ranger patrol made possible by your generosity brings us closer to a continent where elephants and people can thrive together.

> **The ECF's generous support for mentorship and fieldwork empowered SCACD to become the first conservation NGO operating in South Western Sudd, laying the foundation for lasting community-conservation and wildlife protection.**
>
> Puot Mabor, Sudd Conservation and Community Development

© Jane Wynyard



ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND END OF YEAR REPORT 2025

# SAVING ELEPHANTS AND THEIR LAST WILD SPACES

## By Dr Lucy King

Few conservation challenges are as tangled and persistent as human–elephant conflict. When elephants search for food and people try to protect their crops and homes, their needs collide - sometimes violently - and often elephants end up carrying a disproportionate share of the blame. Beneath these clashes lies a complex web of colonial injustices, historic land disputes, marginalization of rural communities, gender inequity in decision-making processes, and persistent, grinding poverty.

To secure a future for elephants we must ensure they have enough space, safety and intact ecosystems to live out their wild lives. Yet elephants do not live in isolation: their habitats overlap with people, and communities living next to elephant refuges face real socio-economic challenges. In recognition of this, many of our partners are investing in land use planning to determine where elephants should be allowed to exist in peace - and where they should be excluded from - ultimately creating safe spaces for both elephants and people.

A giant in the crops in Zah Soo National Park in Southwestern Chad. In the dry season, elephants venture into farmland in search of food. These moments bring real hardship for communities, and underline the urgency of solutions that protect both crops and wildlife. © Martin Reilhac / Noé

In Botswana, ECF grantee Ecoexist has been leading the charge to promote formal land use planning to protect the Okavango Delta - a UNESCO World Heritage and Ramsar site. Using data from more than 15,000 elephants that live around the delta, alongside existing land use and projected human population growth, it applies a model called LUCIS (Land Use Conflict Identification Strategy). This tool helps communities and local governments identify where to protect elephant habitat with access to Okavango waterways, and where it is safe to invest in agriculture and development.

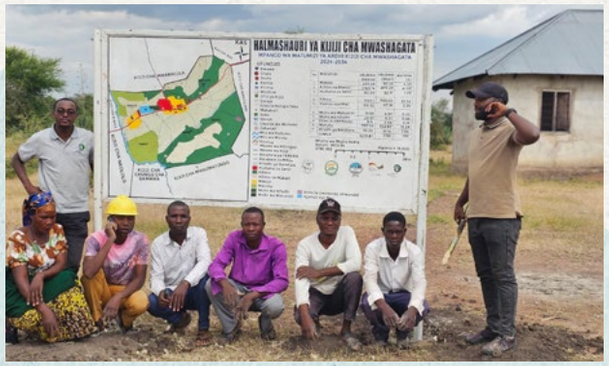
Meanwhile, ECF grantee African Parks - which looks after around 1,000 free-roaming elephants in Matusadona National Park in Zimbabwe - has completed two years of intensive participatory negotiations with the surrounding communities and Nyaminyami Rural District Council. Funded by an ECF grant, the process produced a new land use map for the area outside the park that designates formally supported farming zones, sites for community development, and secures natural corridors for elephants to move between the park and neighboring protected areas.

Large-scale land use planning is costly, but it can be effectively applied at the village level too - where wildlife-inclusive plans make a big difference to household income and food security. In northern Tanzania's Serengeti District, the ECF has supported partner Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) to work with 32 villages next to the UNESCO World Heritage National Park. Through intensive negotiations communities now have a clearer understanding of where farming is safe and where it should be avoided to prevent conflict with elephants.

Ecoexist Trust field team, Mojita and Maipelo, replacing old and damaged corridor signs.
© Ecoexist Trust

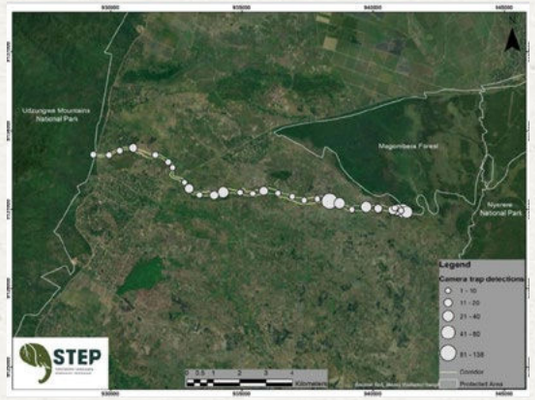
The University of Zimbabwe developed the Nyaminyami Land Use Plan over two years, consulting 1,696 people including villagers, councilors, NGOs, government agencies, the Rural District Council and the Rural District Council and local chiefs in the process.
© Matusadona Conservation Trust

The benefits are already visible. By leaving space for elephants and avoiding farming in these areas, trees have been preserved for shade, beekeeping and firewood resources, and human-elephant conflict has reduced. This reduction in tension is improving relations between the communities and park management, and helping to attract the right kind of livelihood development in the form of local community development banks to support small business development.




Serengeti Land Use Plans 2024-2034.
© Frankfurt Zoological Society

With so little wild habitat left, our conservation partners often have to be highly inventive to preserve space for elephants to move between rapidly expanding communities. Our partner STEP - Southern Tanzania Elephant Project - has done a remarkable job in securing a sliver of a corridor for elephants, sandwiched just 150m wide and 12km long between the Nyerere National Park and the Udzungwa mountains.




Camera trap detections of elephants using the Nyerere-Udzungwa Wildlife Corridor between Novemeber 2023 and February 2025. © Southern Tanzania Elephant Project

An elephant raiding suburban trash bins and gardens in Victoria Falls town. As human habitation and tourism expand into ancient elephant corridors, encounters like this are becoming more frequent and dangerous for both people and wildlife.
© Lucy Osborn / Connected Conservation

More than 300 farmers agreed to give up a fraction of their farms to create this corridor, allowing elephants to move safely between the protected areas and reducing crop-raiding. We are so impressed by this extraordinary effort and the corridor is now nearly fully fenced. Our latest ECF grant to STEP will support a team of 14 community members from the surrounding farms as corridor scouts. They are already reporting a boom in biodiversity and, of course, elephants adapting to their new corridor haven.

Ultimately, elephants will only survive if the communities that live alongside them want them to survive too. At the ECF, we have been directing your generous donations into every layer of this complex challenge of human-elephant conflict, from shaping regional land use policies in Botswana, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, to working at household level with partners like Conservation and Tourism Society in Livingstone, Zambia, who train hundreds of families to cope with elephants roaming their town at night.

From the Zambezi river banks to the wild hills in Mozambique, from the deep forests of the Congo to the arid surroundings of Zah Soo National Park in Chad, we invested your precious donations into every aspect of the conflict-to-coexistence conundrum in 2025. There is, however, still so much more to do. To keep pace with the threats, we need to triple our efforts and our investments to safeguard the wild spaces that elephants depend on. Once lost, it is very hard to reclaim space for wildlife. That is why we hope you will continue to stand with us, helping to grow our community-based conservation efforts into 2026 and beyond.

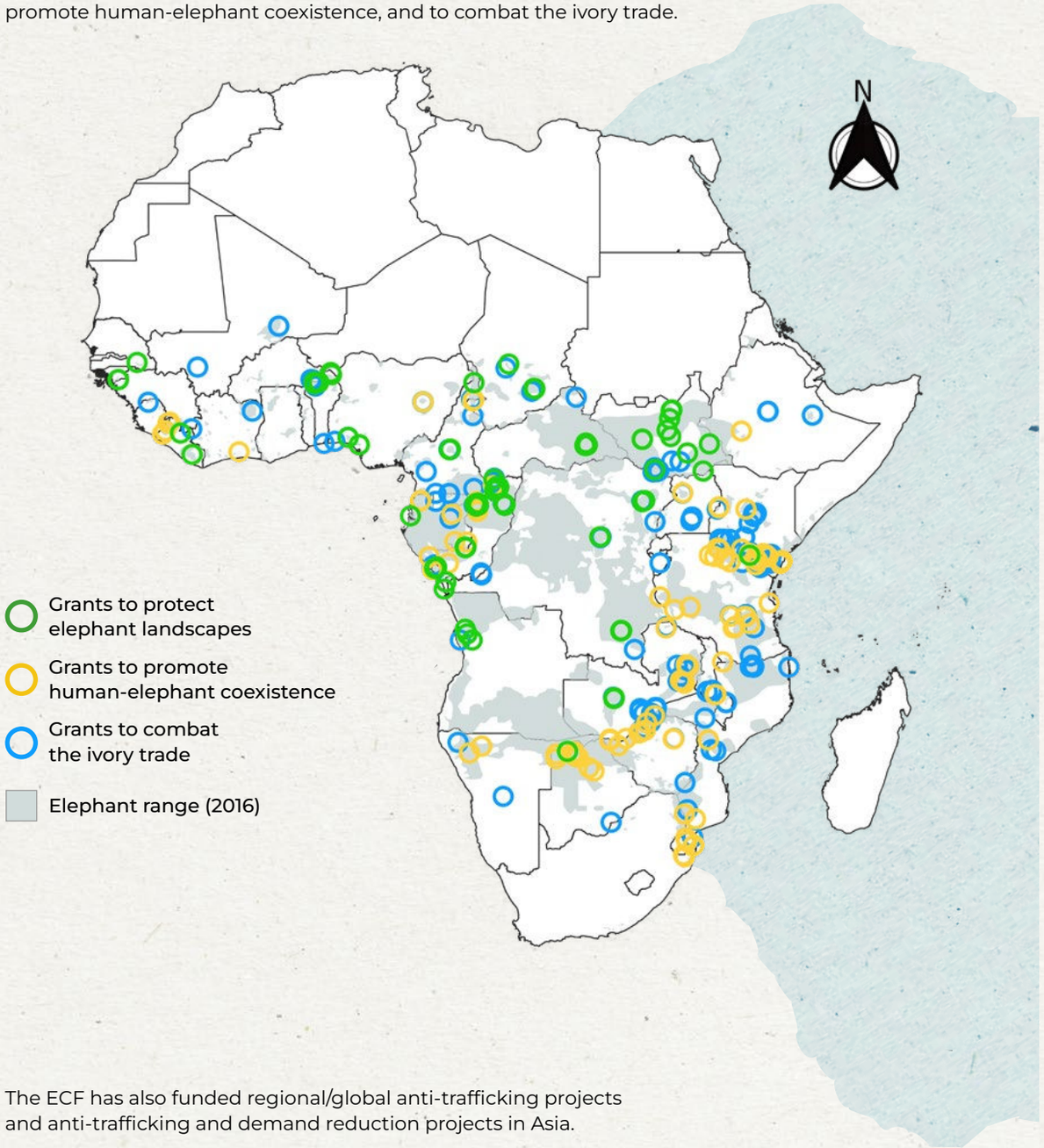
**Proper land use planning can help prevent such conflicts by ensuring settlements are established in safe, designated zones. We are truly grateful for the Land Use Planning Program, and we hope it'll be fully implemented to help address these challenges in our community.**

Faustino Mawadze Council Chairperson and Councillor for Ward 9. Nyaminyami Rural District Council, Zimbabwe

© Jane Wynyard

# ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND INVESTMENT MAP 2013-2025

Between 2013 and 2025, thanks to our generous donors, the ECF has invested more than $41.3 million in 44 countries to protect elephant landscapes, promote human-elephant coexistence, and to combat the ivory trade.




The ECF has also funded regional/global anti-trafficking projects and anti-trafficking and demand reduction projects in Asia.





# OUR DONORS

We would like to thank all our donors and funders who have supported the Elephant Crisis Fund, for your incredible generosity and loyalty. It is your support that has made all our work possible, and we know you share our vision of a future where elephants are no longer under threat. Your trust and partnership is greatly appreciated. We would particularly like to thank the following generous people and organizations for donations made between November 2024 and October 2025:

## FOUNDERS CIRCLE | $200,000 AND ABOVE

Anonymous (2)
Beagle Charitable Foundation
Dry Creek Foundation
Heidi Charleson
M. Piuze Foundation
The Nancy P. and Richard K. Robbins Family Foundation

## CONSERVATION VISIONARIES | $100,000 - $199,999

Tom and Julie Hull

## BENEFACTORS | $20,000 - $99,999

Anonymous (2)
Briar Patch Fund
Esmond B Martin RGS prize
Estate of Muriel M. Peters
Jan Hatzius and Linda Eling Lee
March Conservation Fund
Mary S. Boardman Fund for Conservation
Mays Family Charitable Fund
Oakland Zoo
Plum Foundation
Stephen Pratt
The Maue Kay Foundation
The Overbrook Foundation

## AMBASSADORS | $5,000 - $19,999

Anonymous (2)
Beverly Archer
Gail Odell
Glen Apseloff
Glenda and Henry Corning
Heath Thomson and Nicole Perlroth Thomson
Huronicus Fund
Jennifer McNeil
Kellan Wolverton Kilbourne Memorial Fund
Leslie Scott
Linda Polishuk
Lisa Climo
Pat Price
Quinn Morgan and Upacala Mapatuna
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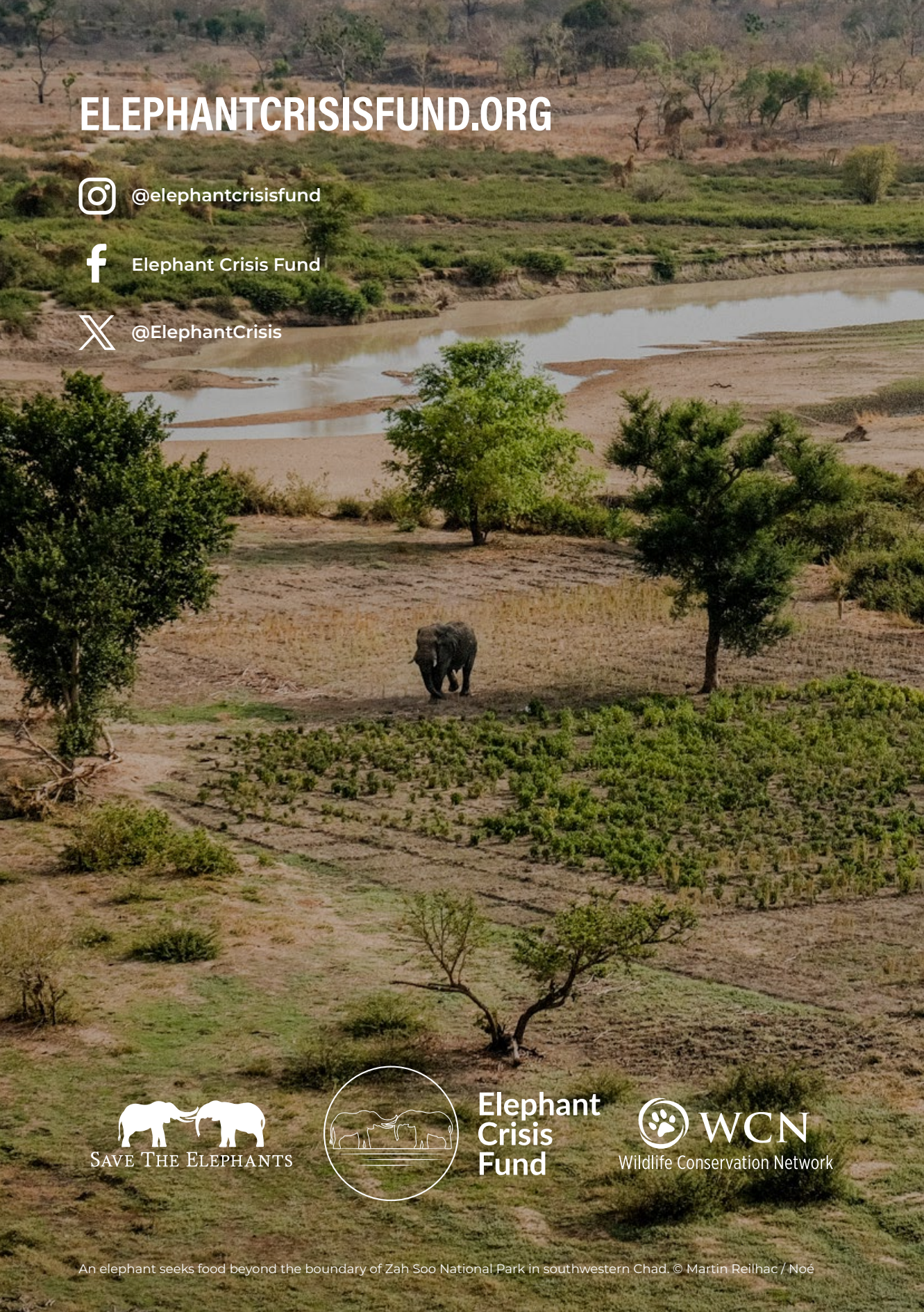
The Abraham Foundation
The Nancy, Jeffrey, & Sharon Morris Charitable Fund
The Walt Disney Company
Victoria Sujata Foundation

## SPONSORS | $2,000 - $4,999

Anonymous
All About Animals, Inc.
Ann Bujas, in memory of Priscilla “Peaches” Curtis
Barbara Bommarito
Beverly A Grahmann
Briar Fund
Bruce and Trish Campbell
Carol and Christopher Kronenwetter
Claire Cressia
Elizabeth and Matthew McClure Philanthropy Fund
Frederick Domer
Gordon Andersson
James T. Nystrom Foundation
Jennifer and Kurt Denlinger Family Foundation
Joyce Kaneshiro and James Poley
June Heilman
Lisa Ching
Melling Family Foundation
Meryt and Peter Harding
Michele Crerand
Nelson Family Trust
Pat Gilbert
Ralph L. Spencer
Shirley Woo and David Rosenfeld



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SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

Elephant Crisis Fund

WCN
Wildlife Conservation Network

An elephant seeks food beyond the boundary of Zah Soo National Park in southwestern Chad. © Martin Reilhac / Noé