



2022

IMPACT REPORT



Contents

01	Chairman's Report
03	Vision & Mission
05	2022 Achievements
06	Rescue & Rehabilitation
08	Wildlife Disease & Forensics
11	Wildlife Research & Species Protection
14	Conservation Education
16	Rocket Stoves & Illegal Timber Reduction
18	Human Wildlife Conflict
20	Rural Livelihoods
23	Financials
24	View to the Future



Chairman's Report

2022 has been another challenging year during which time VFWT has efficiently managed testing conditions to grow the organisation and continue making a difference in conservation in and around Victoria Falls and the KAZA region. Much of this is due to your help and support and we are truly overwhelmed with your generosity.

Our teams were in the field, the classroom, the community and the urban centre working tirelessly to improve livelihoods, prevent human wildlife conflict, research and identify scientific outcomes to diseases and wildlife crimes, preserve wildlife habitat and educate children about the necessity and value of conservation for their futures. Investigators throughout the region were trained on court procedures for wildlife crimes, 4300 rocket stoves were distributed, and a variety of wildlife was rescued. The team have been amazing!

We had new opportunities for our rural communities involving long-term livelihood projects centring around livestock. We were thrilled to finally restart our conservation education programme once schools reopened and we could take on new staff. And finally, we kicked off a major new project distributing rocket stoves: this will curb the illegal offtake of timber in the Victoria Falls urban centre.

Our laboratory recently managed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the KAZA

Secretariat and the KAZA member states to enhance regional disease and forensics testing. Enabled by grant funding, the laboratory will acquire new equipment that will expand our testing capacity into new wildlife disease and forensics areas.

As we look to 2023 we are excited that our organisation has another ambitious year planned. We have new projects that will assist in capacity building for those charged with protecting the area's National Parks and fighting wildlife crime. Our teams are looking at new and improved technologies for wildlife protection and research and are exploring ways of implementing these given connectivity constraints. Finally, we look towards helping our communities organise their structures, and to collaborating with them to improve their livelihoods through their livestock.

We hope you will continue to join us in helping all our small acts to make a big difference! From the wildlife to the people, you help us impact the lives of a great community, and a special place in the world.

Thank you,

Bruno De Leo

Chairman

Zimbabwe Board of Trustees





Our Vision

Local and international communities across Southern Africa working together through effective management, to ensure natural ecosystems are sustained to the benefit of all.

Our Mission

To actively advance and promote environmental conservation and the sustainable use of indigenous resources in Southern Africa.

Our Approach

Our approach reflects the realities of living on the front lines with African wildlife. Wildlife conservation involving rescue & rehabilitation, research & forensics, species protection and fighting wildlife crime is integrated with empowering communities. One is dependent on the other and both are necessary if we are to protect our majestic wildlife.

Our Activities

1. Conservation, Rescue & Rehabilitation
2. Wildlife Research & Species Protection
3. Wildlife Disease & Forensics
4. Community Outreach and Education





2022 Achievements



Rhino darted for notching,
and some dehorning

42

Rhino fitted for transmitters

6

Rhino translocated to a new
founder population

2



3925

**Laboratory procedures
and tests performed.**



Children participated in
the conservation
education.

561

4300

**Rocket Stoves
Distributed**



Vulture nest sites
identified

132

6

Elephants collared



Doses of rabies vaccination
administered

1500

531

**Direct beneficiaries from
maize & millet seed**



Rescue and Rehabilitation

2022 was one of our busiest years ever for snare removals. From elephant to hyena, warthogs to waterbuck, zebras, giraffe, lion and buffalo, impala, kudu, and even baboons, the teams saved a myriad of species from unimaginable suffering, and often death. We removed more than 42 snares and foreign objects from wildlife in the Victoria Falls area. This unfortunately doesn't include the number of call-outs the team responded to where we could not locate the animal, or sadly it was too late to save it.

“ *Our teams worked tirelessly and responded to every single incident, no matter the hour.* ”

High Care Rehabilitation Centre

Our High Care Rehabilitation Centre was busy this year. We took in everything from hornbills to aardwolf, baby baboons to baby bushbabies, and a wide range of other creatures. With over 100mm in 24 hours, the first rains in November were heavy and caused chaos, especially with burrowing animals. Many new baby creatures in the Victoria Falls urban area were washed down storm drainage systems and separated from their mothers. Just as one porcupine was about to be released after eight months of care, another porcupette arrived as an orphan from the storm. On the same day a baby warthog showed up in hypothermia also having been washed down a storm drain. The two babies were both without their mothers, and needed constant care, but sadly were not ideal roommates! At the time of this report both the baby porcupine and warthog are flourishing and will soon be released back into the wild.





Since 2018 the VFWT has removed just over 150 snares in total.
Thank you for helping us give these animals a second chance.



In the Field

One of our significant rescue and rehabilitation efforts was that of a big male elephant in the Matetsi Safari area. When we first darted him to remove the truck brake drum lodged on his leg, we were dismayed that the drum could not be budged. Four days later the team managed to locate the bull again. We darted him, and using a generator and an angle grinder, cut the brake drum off the leg and treated the injuries. It was an enormous undertaking for the team to lug all the equipment in and save this animal in such a remote location. We were overjoyed when he was able to saunter off after the drugs were reversed, finally free of the painful brake drum.

In another incident a sub-adult elephant in a herd was spotted in the Zambezi National Park with a wire snare wrapped around its neck, cutting deep into its skin. ZimParks called us to perform a rescue operation. Our darting team and veterinarians immediately mobilized to the area where the herd had been seen. The elephant was darted and immobilized successfully but some of the herd refused to leave their family member. With the clock ticking and pressure mounting the team used the roaring sound of the vehicle engine to drive the elephants off so that they could commence the rescue operation without interference or risk. The wire snare was removed, the wounds cleaned and treated, and when the elephant woke up he promptly joined his waiting family!



Wildlife Disease & Forensics Laboratory

The Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust Wildlife Disease & Forensics Laboratory made major strides in 2022. With the generous support from the Oak Foundation, the laboratory is in the process of expanding its technical and diagnostic capacity. Recent equipment additions will see these functions expand in 2023 into bacteriology and additional molecular genetics work.

Development of ID Booklet on Wildlife Morphology

In an effort to enhance the technical knowledge of ecologists and investigators, VFWT in collaboration with Speak Out For Animals (SOFA) is developing a booklet on wildlife identification. The booklet is centred on protected species of wildlife in Zimbabwe and provides references for morphological identification of wildlife products. Each species will be broken down on specific characteristics for differentiation and what laboratory testing procedures are available by species as well as what legal statutes apply.

Development of SNP Panel for Lion Identification

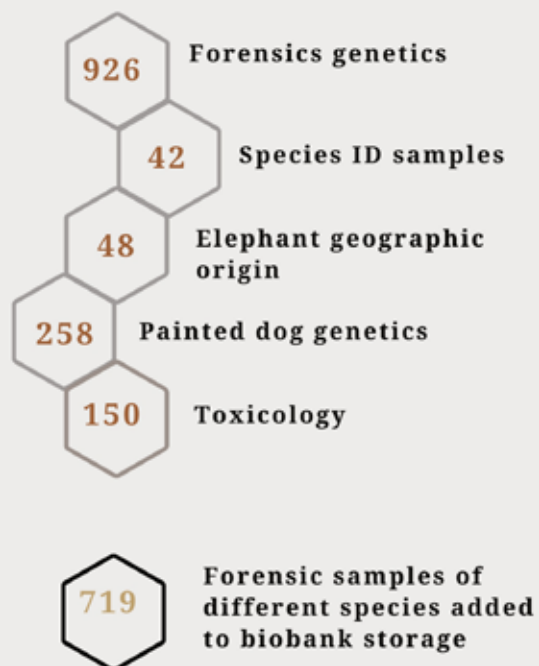
Deciding where best to focus resources can sometimes be a challenge in wildlife forensics. There are thousands of species, and each test for each species needs to be set up, validated and have reference samples available. To make the greatest impact, we focus on species that are facing increasing threats from the illegal wildlife trade. In 2022, the forensics section began setting up a new test for lion genetics with input from our forensics collaborator TRACE. With 592 samples run to date, the test is in the process of being developed and will enable the identification of different lion parts, where they came from, and possibly even allow identification of individual lions. This will greatly assist wildlife authorities when it comes to their investigative casework.





2022 Laboratory Achievements

Forensics:
Casework and Outcomes



Diseases:
Testing and Numbers



Training on Morphological Identification of Ivory

One of the major challenges investigators face in the illegal ivory trade is identifying what species of animal a sample originates from, especially if it is carved or made into an artefact. Further complications arise with other non-ivory products being made to look like ivory. The criminal sentencing for ivory possession without the correct permit depends on what species it comes from. To improve the capacity of investigators, laboratory technicians and officers in wildlife authority, VFWT in collaboration with UK NGO TRACE, US Fish & Wildlife Service and other team leaders from the region assisted in two training events. One session was held during the African Wildlife Forensics Network meeting in South Africa in July where about 25 people from both Anglophone and Francophone laboratories were trained. The second training session was held in Namibia in September where wildlife investigators and CITIES officers from the four surrounding countries of the KAZA region were trained. The training focuses on using physical characteristics (morphology) to differentiate types of ivory, and court case reporting based on scientifically published information.



Support to KAZA AHSWG on Epidemiology

VFWT is an active member of the Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) Animal Health Sub-Working Group (AHSWG). This organization works with the partners in the five member states to improve wildlife and animal health. In 2022, VFWT facilitated an epidemiologist position to further the activities and aims of the working group.





Wildlife Research & Species Protection

Rhino Conservation

Annual efforts to protect our endangered rhinos continued. A total of 37 new calves were darted, ear-notched and had health checks. This enables the calves to have a healthy start in life and allows them to be monitored. A total of ten adult rhinos were de-horned, thus protecting them against poachers by reducing their value. The development of a SNP panel lab test for black rhino is planned for 2023. A SNP panel test will enable identification of different rhino species and where they come from. Collection of genetic samples is underway with 88 collected so far. The next step is to set up and validate different genetic markers specific to black rhino.

VFWT assisted with the translocation of two white rhino to a new founder population adjacent to Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe. Founder populations are set up in new areas that are well protected and are devoid of rhino. This enables overall population growth and expansion of the total habitat area. The Hwange white rhino translocation has been enabled by breeding successes in other areas of the country - areas which have been effective in curbing rhino poaching, and as a result are now able to contribute some animals to help establish new populations in new locations.

Lion Conservation

It was a tough year for lion conservation in 2022. We had lions hit by vehicles (including a train), snared, trafficked, and killed by other lions. That said, the population has managed to stay largely intact, though spatial movements from satellite collars show that the males' territories have been highly disrupted. This has caused many prides to fragment, especially when cubs are born as the females split off to protect their cubs from a new dominant male. VFWT deployed another five satellite collars on lions in 2022.

At the end of 2022 the lion research team managed to deploy a satellite collar on an adult female lioness in a pride that has a territory adjacent to the boundary of Zambezi National Park and the urban area of Victoria Falls. As the rainy season began in earnest and the prey base dispersed, this pride began to expand their territory into the urban centre of Victoria Falls. Fortunately, with the downloads from the satellite collar we have been able to update people as needed, and both people and the lions have been kept safe.



Elephant Conservation

The elephant conservation & research project is a joint collaboration with the Connected Conservation team. In 2022 VFWT assisted in deploying six satellite collars on elephants that were identified as problem animals. All these elephants were males and darted and collared in the urban centre (conflict zone) of Victoria Falls where they posed a safety concern or were already causing problems. A key part of the monitoring of this project includes checking on the distance and time between when that elephant returns to the “conflict zone”. So far, only one elephant out of the many that have been collared over the last three years has returned to the conflict zone within the year, and all have stayed more than 1km away from the identified conflict area.

Working together to assist rural farmers, Connected Conservation enabled several farmers to grow chilli crops and VFWT provided concentrated chilli powder to other small-scale farmers to incorporate into chilli bricks, chilli string and chilli rope fences to protect their maize and millet from crop-raiding elephants. Successful training with communities also facilitated better understanding of the drivers of human-elephant conflict; the main hot spot areas that elephant frequent; and ways and means to prevent the conflict such as using chilli as a tool when elephant are nearby.

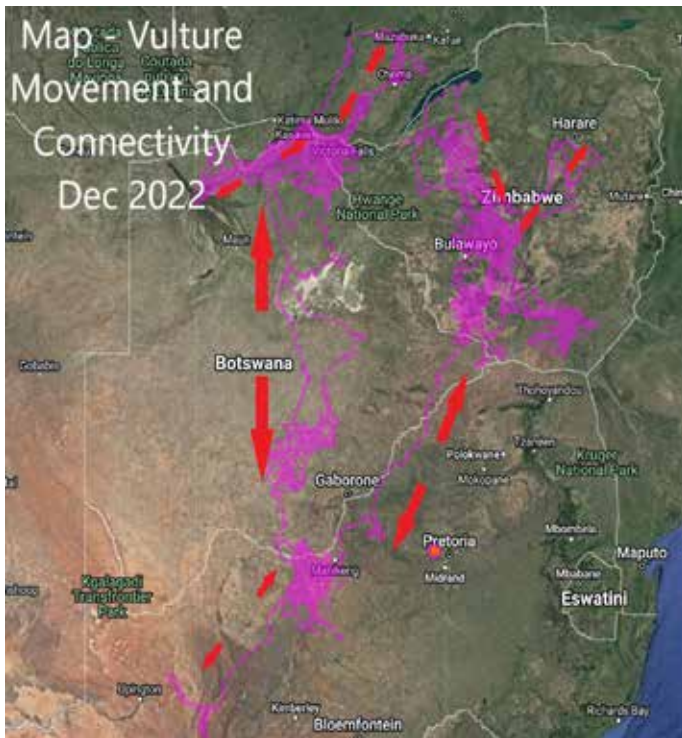
Vulture Conservation

It is paramount to the long-term conservation of vultures that we work to protect their habitat and mitigate poisoning. The four species of vultures found in northwest Zimbabwe have significant breeding colonies established along the Zimbabwe and Botswana border.

This population is one of the largest colonies of critically endangered white-backed vultures in Southern Africa. However, it is facing threats that this project aims to address. The two main threats are 1) vulture breeding habitat is being lost due to elephant destruction of trees used by nesting pairs, and 2) poisoning of animals either by poachers for illegal wildlife trade, or as retaliatory action after human wildlife conflict incidents.

VFWT’s approach consists of developing a body of data through annual nest site assessments and by tracking. It then deploys mitigation actions to protect breeding habitat and counter poisoning.

Annually VFWT collaborates with partners in Botswana to undertake a nest site survey of the colonies to get accurate numbers of breeding birds. Our findings show that there was at least a 15% decline in breeding pairs and active nests from 2020 to 2021, underlining the threat these birds are under.



<< Tracking white-backed vultures: VFWT in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority welcomed Vulpro from South Africa who helped in deploying tracking devices on eight white-backed vultures from Victoria Falls. One of these trackers was deployed onto a rehabilitated white-backed vulture and the resultant spatial data provides scientific evidence on rehabilitation success. The seven tracking devices deployed onto wild vultures will provide data on nest site areas, and potential poaching hot spots. The data will also provide an early warning system for poaching incidents. This helps alert the wildlife authorities in a timely manner to respond, limiting spill-over to other animals and allowing improved investigation opportunities.



<< Our project mitigates elephant impact on vulture nest sites by installing protective wire mesh around the base of identified trees (outside of breeding season), as well as increased monitoring of key vulture breeding colonies during breeding season. These breeding colonies represent over 120 nest sites.



What we're up against: Sadly, the largest threat facing our vulture populations in northwest Zimbabwe remains the use of toxins to poison other wildlife species for the illegal wildlife trade and as a result of retaliatory poaching. There were two notable incidents in 2022, both in Botswana near the border with Zimbabwe. The first incident occurred in August, in the height of breeding season and 50 birds were found dead on a buffalo carcass laced with poison. Some of the parts of the vultures had been removed, likely for traditional medicinal resale. The second incident occurred in the same area and 43 birds were poisoned from a zebra carcass in November 2022.



Community Outreach

Conservation Education

It gives us great pleasure to include this valuable project in our 2022 impact report as for the last two years we have had to put our conservation education program on hold due to the pandemic. Since schools reopened in March 2022 this department has made great progress.

Welcome our new Conservation Education Officer! Nancy Matowe joins our team with five years teaching experience, including the establishment of eco-clubs and curriculums to enhance learners' knowledge and experience. Nancy immediately worked on developing new lesson plans in line with the primary school curriculum and has established a strong network with local teachers, headmasters, and the Ministry of Education.

Weekly Conservation Education Interaction: VFWT firmly believes that hands-on experiences make a vital impact on the way children understand and experience conservation. Therefore, every Friday morning a school group comes out to VFWT and participates in a fun activity to meet some of the rescue and rehabilitation cases, including Judge our vulture ambassador.

The team discusses challenges the children may face living alongside wildlife, and offers ways to safely co-exist with wildlife. We also highlight channels they can use to report any wildlife conflicts. The students enjoy a hot lunch and are given some take-home interactive booklets before being transported back to their respective schools.

Eco-clubs share conservation messages and improve pass rates! VFWT has historically partnered with five rural schools to establish eco-clubs and support hands-on learning outside the classroom. However, with two years of very little school education due to the pandemic, there was concern about how well the learners would perform in their exams. The good news is the pass rates of the schools increased after eco-clubs were implemented. This success indicates that eco-clubs have given students the chance to gain hands-on practical experience on taught concepts, ultimately leading to improved knowledge retention. This is remarkable against a background of high staff turnover and a high rate of student absenteeism owing to social constraints and resource scarcity.



“ *Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.*

Benjamin Franklin ”



In the field



Out of more than 150 schools in the district, Lesedi Primary (one of the five eco-club schools working with VFWT) attained 90.91% in 2022 from 64% in 2021 in terms of its pass rate. Improvement was mostly in the areas of social science (63,3%) and agriculture (54,4%), which again provides an indication that the eco-clubs have played a role in advancing knowledge and information retention.

Rocket Stoves and illegal timber reduction

Zimbabwe's Forestry Commission and EnviroWatch conservatively estimate that more than two tons of wood are being illegally collected from Victoria Falls forests per day! The illegal wood is primarily used for cooking and its use has been exacerbated by the rise in unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because often people are not able to afford electricity for their cooking, even if they have access to it.

Traditionally, women endure the burden of wood collection and cooking. This limits their ability to generate income for the family as they must venture further and further to collect wood. Indoor cooking with wood charcoal is prominent throughout Africa. It is a significant contributor to respiratory health problems, and women bear the brunt of associated diseases.

Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust has partnered with Harare-based My Trees to supply Victoria Falls' high-density areas with 4300 rocket stoves. Replacing open fires, these stoves reduce the need for solid fuels by more than 66% because they efficiently use branches, twigs, small wood scraps, or just about any small combustible material. In addition, they very effectively reduce harmful wood smoke.

Since the introduction of these rocket stoves we are seeing a significant reduction in timber extraction from our forests and a huge enhancement in the quality of life, primarily for women. The lifespan of each stove is approximately ten years, and My Trees provide the training to maintain the stoves.

Each rocket stove can save between 5-6 tons of carbon emissions per year. This initiative earns carbon credits that are financed through investment portfolios tailored specifically to capitalise on the unique carbon reduction opportunities in Zimbabwe. Income through these carbon credits will be distributed amongst VFWT, My Trees, and the carbon accrediting agency. The ongoing carbon credit income will help grow and fund this project in perpetuity.

Since this is a new project, we will meet with participants to discuss challenges, suggestions, and gather feedback. We will also be monitoring the fuel effectiveness, wood collection rates, and other resulting livelihood improvements. The program will also be auditing changes to CO2 emissions throughout.



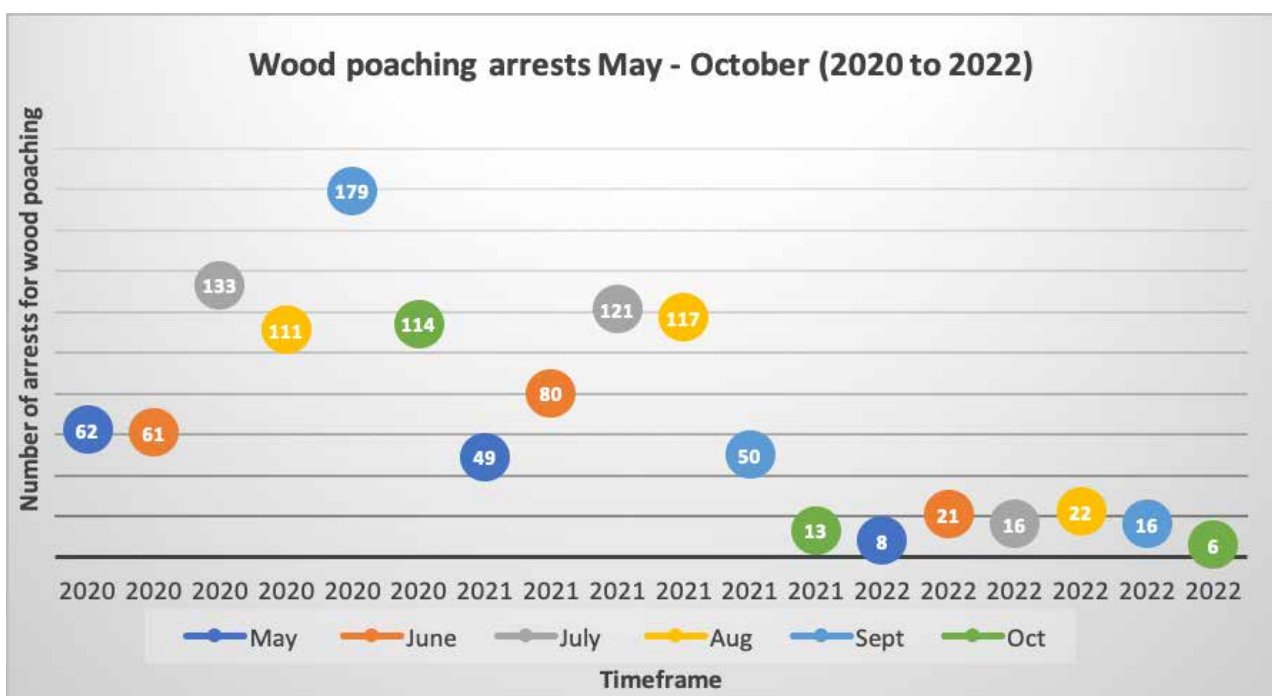
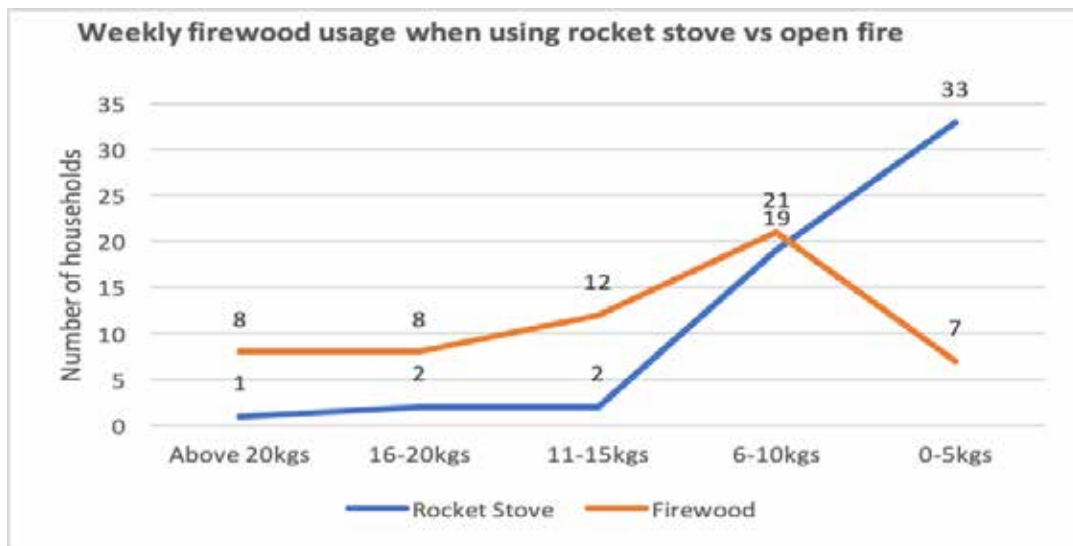
What is a rocket stove?

A rocket stove is an efficient and hot-burning stove using small-diameter wood fuel. Fuel is burned in a simple combustion chamber containing an insulated vertical chimney which ensures almost complete combustion prior to the flames reaching the cooking surface.



Findings from the monitoring to date:

- Open Fires Waste Wood:** On an open fire, most households used between 5kgs and 10kgs per day depending on the family size. This translates to between 35kgs and 70kgs per week.
- Rocket Stoves Save Time:** The community now fetches firewood in the form of twigs near their houses as compared to when they used to travel for 3km or more to fetch timber for open fires.
- Positive Community Buy-in:** The number of households collecting a small quantity of wood per week (<5kg) has increased almost 5-fold!
- Rocket Stoves Save Forests:** The number of households collecting a large quantity of wood per week (>20kg) has decreased to almost zero!
- Less arrests:** Average monthly wood-poaching arrests between May to October dropped from 110 per month in 2020 to just 15 per month in 2022!
- As predicted, the majority of the arrests for the illegal wood collection were women (84%).



Human Wildlife Conflict

Human Wildlife Conflict (HWC) remains one of the largest factors contributing to declining numbers of wildlife species worldwide. Urban sprawl and competition for water and grazing resources threatens wildlife, and crop raiding wildlife can decimate small-scale farmer livelihoods, leaving whole families in perilous positions. While HWC occurs throughout the year, typically the rainy season is when it is at its peak: elephants find the lush green crops of March and April a tempting easy supplement to their diet; and plentiful water encourages game dispersal into human settlements (both urban and rural), attracting opportunistic carnivores that then kill livestock and pose a threat to humans.

In the field

Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust's Community Guardians responded to several hundred incidents in 2022 and had great success in preventing and mitigating conflict. On known carnivores that have satellite collars, the team was able to receive an early warning when the lions were moving into rural settlements and warn livestock farmers to take preventative measures. As a result, no lions were terminated as 'problem animals' in 2022.



222

Human Wildlife Conflict incidents reported: 46% elephant; 19% hyena; 30% lion; 4% other species

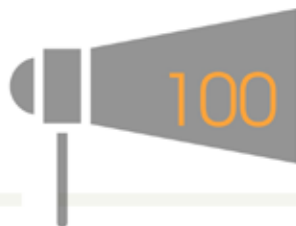


Mobile predator-proof bomas (kraals) deployed in rural communities; 0 livestock lost to predation from carnivores whilst kept in the mobile predator proof bomas

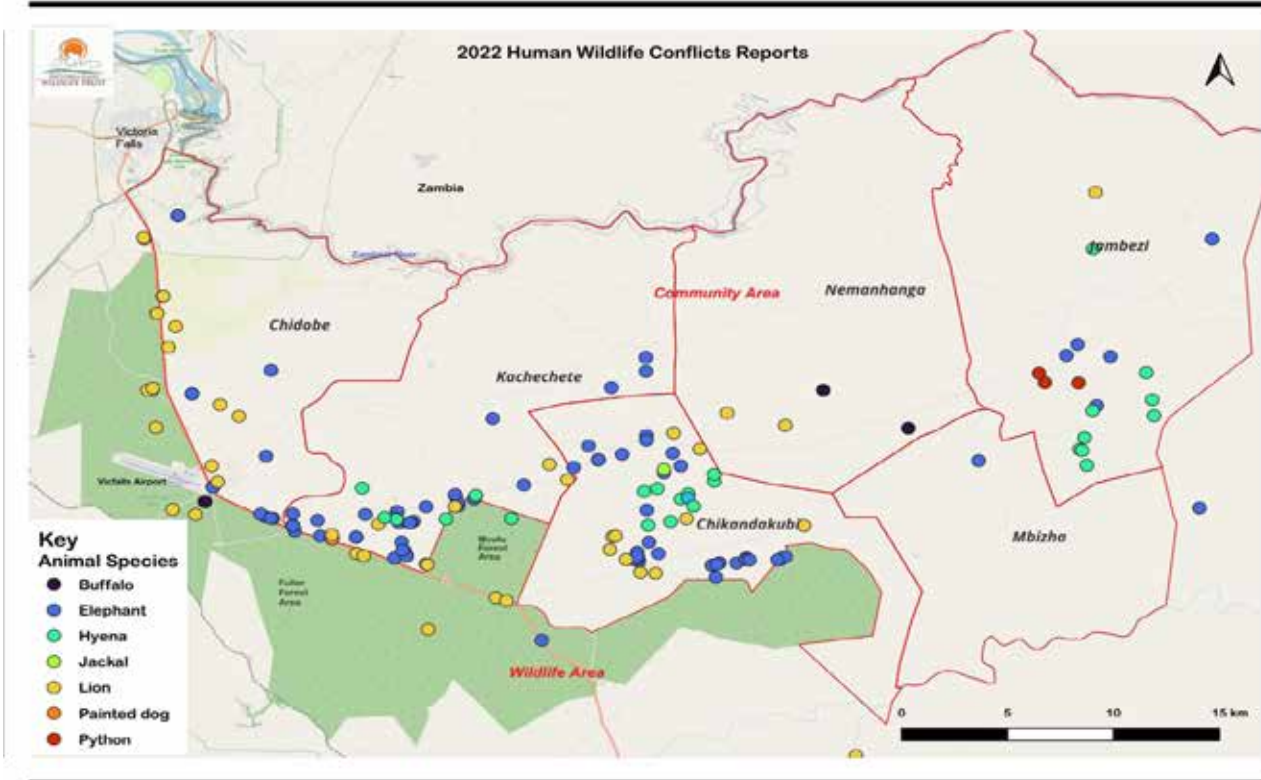


1200

Over 1200 head of livestock participating in the **Herding for Hope** project



Wildlife chases undertaken with **non-lethal mitigation**



By understanding the HWC “hotspots” as per the map above, VFWT is able to respond more rapidly to conflict incidents by employing Community Guardians in those areas. The mapping also means we can focus prevention efforts on those areas that need it the most. Utilizing chilli in bricks, string, and chilli guns to deter elephant; and mobile predator-proof bomas (below) to prevent carnivore conflict, the Community Guardians reduce economic losses of crops and livestock for rural communities.



Rural Livelihoods

Finding long-term sustainable solutions is critical to ensuring conservation success. Enhancement of the livelihoods of local communities is one such solution.

Rural livelihoods are enhanced by:

- a) *Preventing human-wildlife conflict*, thereby preventing crop and livestock raiding and retaliatory measures such as poisoning, and removing the need to supplement subsistence through poaching.
- b) *Ensuring that communities benefit from wildlife* e.g. by providing employment in the tourism industry.
- c) *Providing guidance* that leads to sustainable agricultural best practice.

Partnering with Herding for Hope: In 2022 VFWT worked with local small-scale farmers and Herding for Hope (H4H) to conduct a feasibility study and theory of change for improving rural livelihoods and livestock. As Victoria Falls lies in an 'Arid Region IV' area, the land is not ideal for agriculture however most small-scale farmers have some form of garden and subsistence agriculture they rely on for food. Furthermore, culturally, the number of livestock owned is seen as a sign of wealth and most villages keep livestock as both a source of milk, and as their 'savings account'. This results in a large number of cattle in the communal areas which, due to poor agricultural practice, roam free on the rangelands. This has a devastating impact, resulting in overgrazing. Furthermore, with the focus on quantity rather than quality, the cattle are generally in poor health. The feasibility study involved discussions with communities, showing them the benefits of keeping fewer livestock for a shorter period of time and deriving an income from a beef-value-chain with the local Victoria Falls market.

The study outcome is that there is enough critical mass of interested small-scale farmers for us to pursue this project in 2023. The aim is to develop improved agricultural practices to enhance the health of the farmers' animals, the rangelands and the entire ecosystem.

The goal over time (10+ years) is that as less livestock are kept and higher incomes derived, overgrazed rangelands will be regenerated to natural forest and peoples' livelihoods will improve.



Seed Distribution: Recently, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust concluded our seed distribution exercise which is part of maintaining sustainable livelihoods for the rural communities around the Hwange West areas. Pearl millet and maize seeds were given to households that are an integral component of the predator-proof mobile BOMA system so that they can plant those seeds in the fertilized crop fields where BOMAS are deployed. Many thanks to our partners for their support in this community outreach program.

>> Millet mini-value chain: Cattle health and community livelihoods have also been enhanced by working with local partners on another initiative. In 2022, VFWT together with the Victoria Falls River Brewery, has developed a mini value chain for some of the area's rural small-scale farmers. The Victoria Falls River Brewery purchases millet from some of the farmers, providing them with much needed income. The brewery then uses the millet for a small percentage of the grain used in fermenting a craft beer that is sold to the local public. The brewery then kindly donates all its fermented grain back to VFWT. VFWT collects the grain, dries it, and distributes it back to those communities with livestock bomas. Here it is used as supplementary feed providing much needed nutrition for livestock.

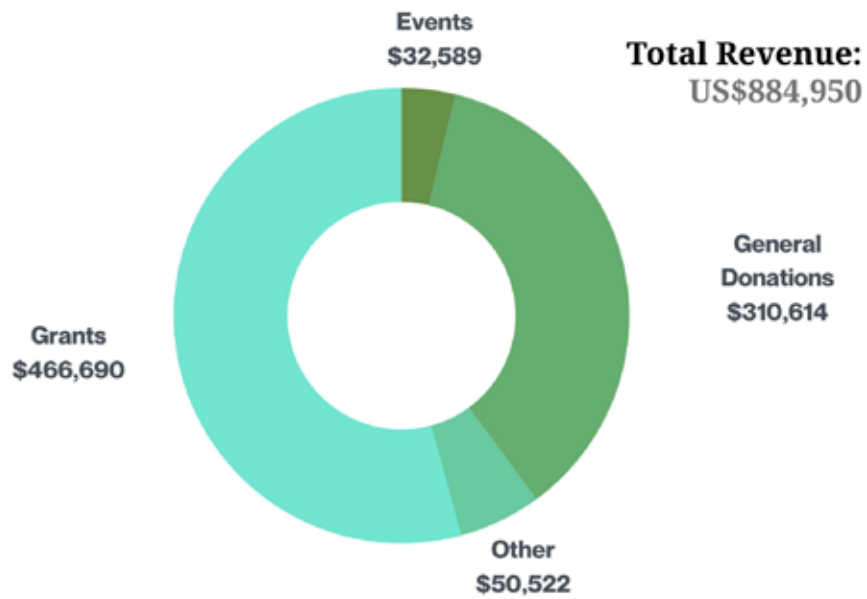


<< Vaccinations: Over 1000 doses of distemper vaccine and 1500 doses of rabies vaccine were given to dogs in the rural community by the VFWT in 2022. Many of these dogs interface significantly with wildlife and to keep our communities, animals and ecosystems healthy, diseases like rabies must be kept at bay. Fortunately, through the generosity of our supporters, we have been able to provide ongoing vaccinations against these diseases for the past eight years.

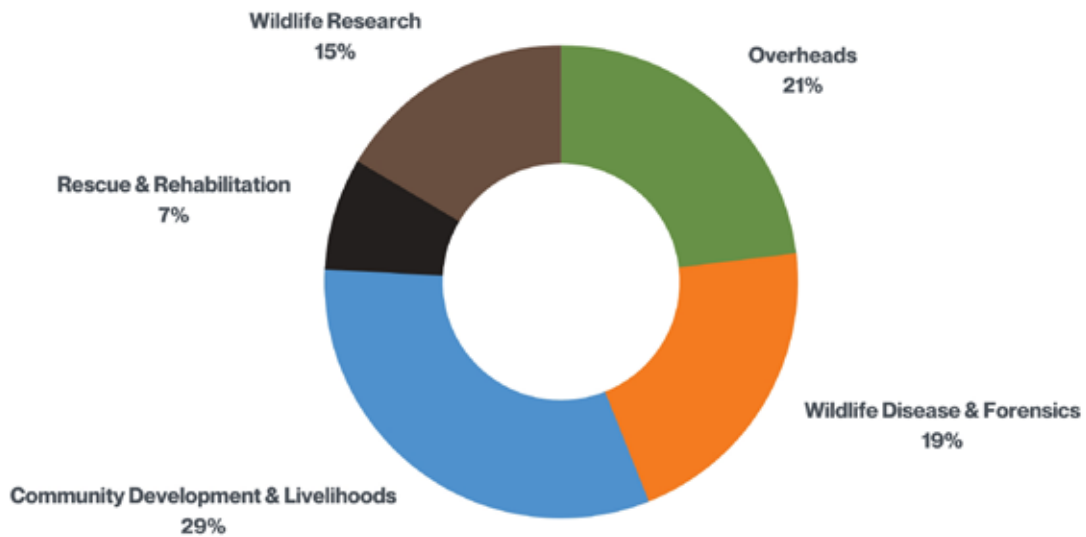


Financials

Revenue | 2022



Expenditure by Project | 2022





View to the Future

As we forge ahead into 2023 we are excited about scaling up some of our existing projects and looking at new collaborations, partnerships and projects that will make an impact in conservation in our region and the entire KAZA TFCA landscape. Our Community Development Projects are our biggest projects in terms of finance and team members. We are looking at expanding these even further, to try and enhance rural livelihoods and develop value chains with the small-scale livestock farmers through Herding for Hope.

In order to improve capacity with the wildlife authorities we work with, and to combat illegal

wildlife trafficking, we will be working with international collaborators to provide a criminal database tracking and network system, where we will train investigators on how to use the system. Our teams will continue to support wildlife crime investigations with training on diseases and poisonings regionally as well as testing of wildlife forensic samples. In that vein, the laboratory will begin to develop a new genetics panel to test black rhino samples – assessing geographic origin and relatedness. We are excited for the growth and opportunities that 2023 have in store and look forward to sharing our work and impact with you!



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