

WENDY HAPGOOD

LAMBERT VET SUPPLY PRESENTS

Saving the Wild

FROM

NEW YORK

TO

ZULULAND

A wildlife conservation charity based in New York is saving and restoring habitat in South Africa, creating space for wildlife and staving off extinction. **ONE ACRE AT A TIME.**

PHOTOGRAPHY SHANNON WILD

An African sun sets low and red on a river draped in the shade of acacia trees. Sunlight glistening on the water breaks suddenly as the ears of two hippos emerge, twitching an almost impossible full circle. A quick snort for air and the pair retreat back into the cool dark water while above, hundreds of black and white cormorants settle in noisily for the night. The fading light moves leopards to stir, and by morning, the only trace of their hunt is oversized paw prints in the sand.

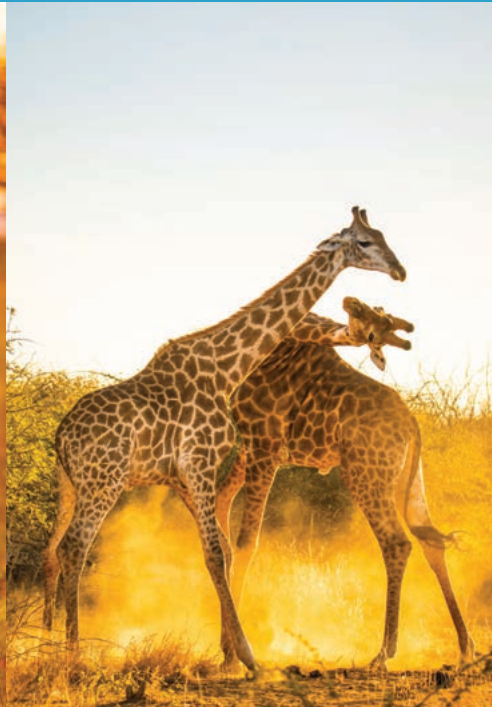
It is a beautiful scene that almost wasn't. The land along the Mzinene river in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province was imminently destined to become a pineapple farm. This fate would have seen the entire 1,235 acres slashed and burned to make way for agriculture, a scene repeated across the region in vast fields of sameness. The wonderful diversity of the wild, lost to a sea of pineapples. This was the unknown future that silently threatened the river, its forests, grasslands, hippos, zebras, hyena, wildebeest, honey badgers, baboons, crocodiles, mongoose and countless other species that already called this land home. Until, that is, a small group of committed people eight thousand miles away in New York answered a call for help.

Wild Tomorrow Fund (WTF) is a registered New York charity founded in 2015, whose mission is to save wildlife and wild places in Southern Africa. Founder John Steward was an advertising executive who, while volunteering in South Africa five years ago, witnessed first-hand the

OPPOSITE, Rehabilitated black backed jackals were released this year. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, Ukuwela will expand habitat for the critically endangered black rhinoceros; Giraffes will be reintroduced to Ukuwela; Ukuwela is already home to a family of zebra.



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challenges faced by rangers and the precious wildlife in their charge. The urgent crisis of rhino and elephant poaching had pushed already shoestring budgets at wildlife reserves to breaking limits. Returning to New York, John decided to dedicate his life to saving wildlife by raising funds for conservation.

While the poaching of elephants and rhinos makes the headlines, it is habitat destruction and fragmentation that is the major cause of species extinction globally. "To effectively ensure the long-term survival of a species in the wild, you have to protect its habitat," says Shannon Wild, an acclaimed wildlife photographer and cinematographer. "We can save as many animals as we like, but if we have nowhere to put them, it is for nothing." Her work shines a light on the beauty of animals that already call this region home, and she believes it is everyone's responsibility to protect them.

When WTF received the call for help, it seemed an almost impossible request

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, A family of rescued and rehabilitated mongoose was released this year at Ukuwela; The Mzinene river winding through Ukuwela; Hope for the future: a baby white rhino; African elephants will soon roam again on this new habitat.

PHOTOGRAPHY SHANNON WILD; WILD TOMORROW FUND (RIVER, SUNSET)

for a young charity given the land's million dollar price tag. But John would not give up easily. He believed in the generosity of New Yorkers like the Hendon family, seasonal residents of Amagansett, New York. "If the land had become a commercial farm, all of the animals would have lost their homes if not their lives. Buying the land would fix the problem," says Seth Hendon, now Chairman of WTF. Because of the generosity of the Hendons and other donors, a seemingly impossible conservation dream was realized within a year. A deal was negotiated that allowed a down-payment to save the land, with five years grace to fundraise to complete the purchase. The land is now named Ukuwela, which means "to cross over" in Zulu—a reference to the future—and will see elephants and rhinos able to cross the river into their new habitat.

WTF's next challenge is to purchase a second million dollar land parcel to the east. This would create a wildlife corridor connecting eastward to a UNSECO World Heritage park on the "Elephant Coast." This will stitch together vast and previously disconnected wildlife reserves, creating a habitat lifeline for elephants, rhinos, lions, giraffe and other threatened species.

"Being able to protect that land is incredible; it is a huge win already," says Shannon, "but knowing that it is in this prime position to be able to extend out and allow animals to migrate across other properties—that would be beyond incredible." Fighting extinction, acre by acre.

Visit wildtomorrowfund.org; shannonwild.com and watch on [youtube.com/watch?v=y5er2RXg3C8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5er2RXg3C8). 🐾

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, Sunset at Ukuwela; At least six individual leopards are known to roam Ukuwela; Lions need protected space to be able to increase their population. By connecting with neighboring wildlife reserves, lions will soon roam again across Ukuwela.



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AND FRAGMENTATION THAT IS THE MAJOR CAUSE
OF SPECIES EXTINCTION GLOBALLY.

