



BENIN

Pendjari

National Park

4,800 km²

African Parks Project since 2017

Government Partner: Government of Benin

Government of Benin, National Geographic Society,
The Wyss Foundation and The Wildcat Foundation
were major funders in 2017





Pendjari

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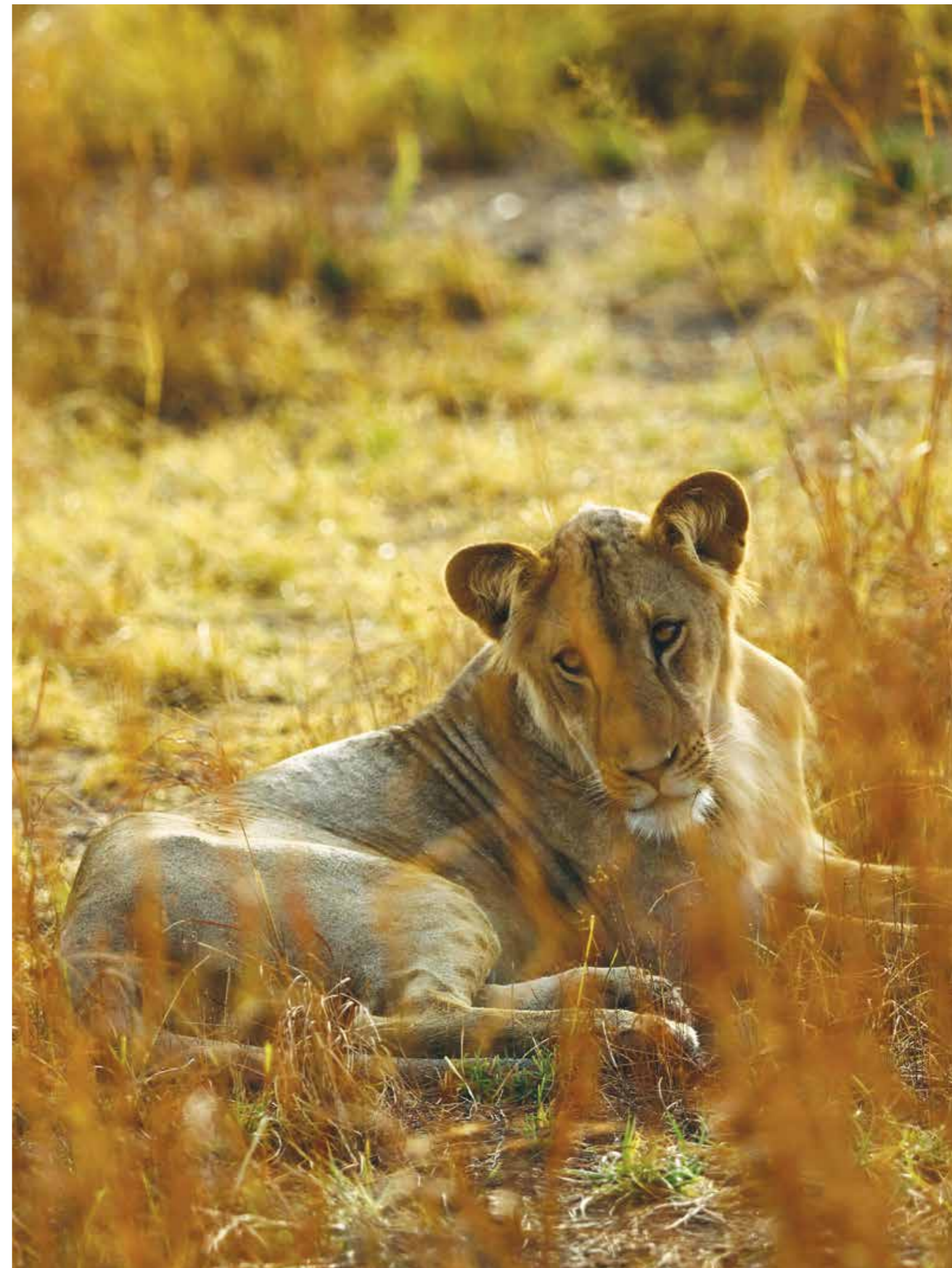
BENIN – Pendjari National Park is one of the most recent parks and the first within West Africa to fall under our management. Pendjari which is situated in the northwest of Benin and measures 4,800 km². It is an anchoring part of the transnational W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) complex, spanning a vast 35,000 km² across three countries: Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. It is the biggest remaining intact ecosystem in the whole of West Africa and the last refuge for the region's largest remaining population of elephant and the critically endangered West African lion, of which fewer than 400 adults remain and 100 of which live in Pendjari. Pendjari is also home to cheetah, various antelope species, buffalo, and more than 460 avian species, and is an important wetland. But this globally important reserve has been facing major threats, including poaching, demographic pressure on surrounding land, and exponential resource erosion. But the Benin Government wanted to change this trajectory and chart a different path for this critically important landscape within their borders.

In September 2016, after a visit to Akagera National Park in Rwanda, which has been managed by African Parks since 2016, the Benin Director of Heritage and Tourism (APDT) approached African Parks to explore opportunities to revitalise and protect this landscape, and help the Government realise the tourism potential of Pendjari under their national plan “Revealing Benin”. We visited the park that same month, and at the beginning of 2017, the government issued an emergency plan and allocated US\$2 million to begin work right away, even before a mandate was signed. On 24 May, African Parks signed a 10-year management mandate, with the right to renew, and the Benin Government committed US\$6 million over five years, matching the Wyss Foundation's start-up funds of US\$10 million. At the end of 2017, the National Geographic Society also committed US\$7 million, forging a ground-breaking partnership with all parties and thanks to the progressiveness of the Benin Government, a lifeline was thrown to this little-known but globally important protected area.

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

The W-Arly-Pendjari complex is home to approximately 1,700 elephants, which is the largest and most viable remaining population in all of West Africa. Ten elephants were fitted with GPS satellite collars to improve our understanding of their transboundary movements to Arly National Park outside of the park, as well as to allow us to deliver a more focused and effective deployment of law enforcement teams for better protection. To aid in

developing a comprehensive strategy for the management of the West African lion population in the park, a camera-trapping protocol was put in place in collaboration with Wild Cru, and a wider monitoring programme for lion habitat-use was prepared. An ultra-light aircraft was purchased and assembled, and we began regular aerial surveillance over the park. Discussions also began with several of the national universities to review the collaboration protocols for a research and training programme, which will be operational in 2018.



Pendjari is home to a population of 100 of the last remaining 400 critically endangered West African lions. © Jonas van de Voorde

LAW ENFORCEMENT

A new Law Enforcement Strategy was developed and gradually implemented. It included managing the operations from the new operational base inside the park, allowing for the centralisation of management and the deployment of the ranger teams. It also included the introduction of small, four-man teams to increase their mobility on foot and who were not confined to permanent posts to increase their coverage. The first operations room was put in place to allow for real-time tracking of field teams. New equipment was also delivered and utilised by the ranger teams.

African Parks initiated the creation of a 'Special Brigade' for Pendjari, that allowed for a selection of young men from the local communities to be trained as rangers under African Parks' protocols and standards. A Forestry Officer was selected by African Parks to manage a Special Brigade and to allow for the full application of Beninese law. A new training camp was established in the heart of Pendjari and the first 31 candidates successfully underwent special training and became rangers, beginning their patrols in December, and to good effect. In just one month, the rangers conducted 82 patrols, making up a total of 4,281



100
critically endangered
West African lions
live in Pendjari

patrol man-days. They made 31 arrests and confiscated 210 kg of bushmeat and 516 kg of fish. Thanks to a strong collaboration with a tribunal in Natitingou, the closest town to the park, 100 percent of presented suspects were prosecuted.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Working with the communities who live around Pendjari, of which there is an estimated human population of around 40,000 people, is integral to the work we do, and especially in the first year or two of assuming management of a park, this community engagement is critical for the long-term success of the park. From day one, the Pendjari team developed a strong relationship with the Village Association of Faunal Reserves Management (AVIGREF) which was essential for efficient communications and for sharing information between the new park management and the local communities. Meetings were held in each of the 23 villages to explain African Parks' mandate and vision for the park, as well as the importance of our strategy in helping local communities benefit from effective management and from the park's resources as much as possible. This relationship was further developed with



Ranger recruitment and training was essential in 2017. © Stefan Heunis

collaboration on community awareness, community project preparations and environmental education programmes. In total, 1,124 school pupils and their teachers visited the park through the environmental education programme, and 30 schools were supported by Pendjari overall. Further discussions were held with AVIGREF on the future utilisation of natural resources and community development programmes all of which will be a priority in 2018. Projects for income generating activities surrounding the park, such as honey productions, were also developed for implementation in 2018.

PARK MANAGEMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

While African Parks signed the management mandate on 24 May 2017, there was a three-month transitional period with the Wildlife Authority, and full responsibility only began on 29 August. We slowly started to develop a new team and by the end of 2017, there were 74 employees. All administrative procedures were put in place according to African Parks Standard Operating Procedures and all staff were trained by the close of the year. After assessing the previous park management footprint, we decided to move the operations to the heart of the park to allow for full control over the area. There, we constructed a much-needed ranger training camp and built a garage, law enforcement offices and an armoury that were all operational. A borehole and solar system to supply the whole operational base was put in place; and construction began on a new airstrip. Material for three, 40-metre masts and equipment was purchased for the installation of a digital VHF communications system that will be installed in 2018. To allow access to some of the more remote areas of the park, a new 35 km of roads network was graded, and the main tourist circuits were cleared and repaired prior to tourist season for an overall improved experience.

TOURISM

Sustainable tourism development is a top priority and part of the wider strategy of the Government of Benin. In a national plan to showcase Benin to the world, and to invite the world in, the Republic of the Presidency of Benin launched "Revealing Benin", consisting of 45 projects, six of which are for tourism, with one of those being to rehabilitate and revitalise Pendjari National Park. The park saw close to 6,000 visitors over 2017, 38 percent of whom were international, and a figure that has steadily been increasing over the past few years. While visitation is on the rise, much infrastructure and development of new products and a widening of the tourism offering are badly needed. African Parks' first step was to purchase Pendjari Lodge in October, immediately beginning improvements to the structure. A new safari vehicle was introduced and was used for game drives; and walking tours and boat safaris were tested. The main park entrance was refurbished and refresher training was held for the community tourist guides.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2018

- Develop and implement a three to five-year law enforcement strategy
- Implement a fully operational communications system that includes VHF radio frequency throughout the park, and VSAT connectivity at the operational base
- Place 10 lion collars and 10 elephant collars with a fully functioning monitoring system to track movements
- Prepare and sign a new MOU with AVIGREF
- Develop and implement a tourism strategy with revenue targets



One of 10 elephants that received a GPS collar with support from the Elephant Crisis Fund. © Stefan Heunis