

CHARTING A COURSE FOR NATURE

CEO'S LETTER & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | PETER FEARNHEAD

I have been asked many times how Covid-19 has affected conservation and my answer remains the same: conservation was in crisis before this pandemic, it has remained so throughout, and will continue to be once we emerge from it. Covid-19 just shone a spotlight on the extent of the crisis.

2020 was supposed to be the super-year for biodiversity. And in a twisted way it might prove to be just that. While Covid-19 caused the cancellation of global events that would set targets to shape the next 10 years for the environment, instead, Covid-19 and the global economic lockdown brought our connectedness and dependability on nature into painfully clear focus – at a truly universal level. It has elevated the existing scientific proof of the link between the rise of infectious diseases with our destruction of habitats and our consumption of wildlife. It also demonstrated that the funding and actions needed to protect nature and prevent pandemics and other human-made catastrophes are far less costly than living through future ones. This is why 2020 may prove to be the turning point.

2020 also marked the 20th year since our founding, and while we had planned some celebrations, these were quickly replaced with some serious introspection and strategic planning. First, we needed to ensure that we were well equipped to deal with the immediate challenges brought about by the expected decline in operational revenue arising from the extended closure of tourism operations. Once this was done, we turned our attention to reflect on how we started, what we have learnt throughout our journey, and where we go from here. African Parks came into existence 20 years ago to answer the challenge of protected areas failing across Africa. Little did we know then that our public-private partnership model would hold as strong as it has and address some of the most pressing challenges we face today, including climate change, pandemics, security, and justice.

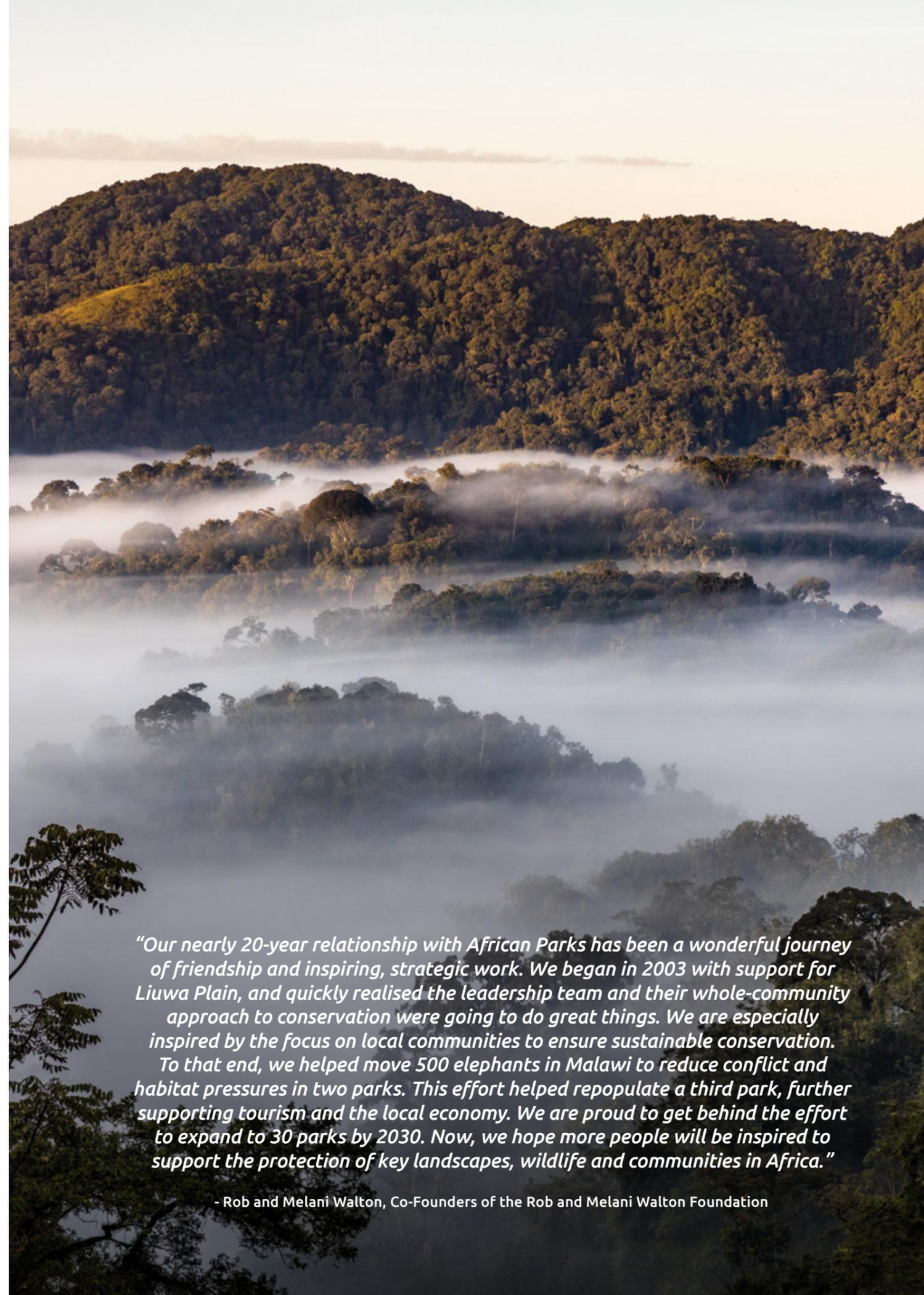
To put that in perspective, not one of our 3,219 full-time staff lost their job because of Covid-19. When you consider the multiplier effect and the conservative estimate that one job supports on average seven and a half people, this impact is immense. Every park under our management remained fully operational, and poaching levels were kept at a minimum. The parks continued to serve as centres of

security, where wildlife populations increased, schools and clinics functioned, social enterprises were invested in, and people not just persisted, but thrived. These results were in stark contrast to a recent report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and others that more than half of the protected areas in Africa were forced to cut back on protection measures, and more than 25% of rangers lost their income. It is because of the resilience of our model, our full accountability, strong governance, and long-term funding solutions made possible by many of our funders, that the landscapes managed by African Parks remained protected, while delivering life-altering benefits to thousands of people.

Which is why we need to do more. To that end, we have recast our vision for the next decade and set our 2030 target to manage 30 parks measuring 30-million hectares across 11 biomes, significantly contributing to the global vision of protecting 30% of Africa for nature. In addition, we want to support 10 more protected areas spanning a further five-million hectares that will be managed by select partners through our new incubator programme. We have delineated a roadmap to guide these efforts, by identifying 161 key protected areas throughout sub-Saharan Africa that must be secured, irrespective of by whom, as the foundation of a continental conservation strategy. You can read more about our findings in "Casting Our Vision" on page 16.

This annual report covers the impacts you helped to make in an unprecedented year, and which are only possible because of the partnerships we have with host Governments and the shared clarity of vision for each. Today, I am cautiously optimistic that protecting nature is taking on new meaning for decision-makers, the voting public, and for neighbouring communities that during this economic collapse are surviving off the very nature we are protecting. What I am most certain of is that our role at African Parks, our mission, and the need to scale urgently, is more important than ever. Thank you for standing with us, for being our partners, for your unwavering support now, and into this next chapter, as we chart a course to protect nature upon which our collective future depends.

Sincerely,
Peter Fearnhead, CEO



"Our nearly 20-year relationship with African Parks has been a wonderful journey of friendship and inspiring, strategic work. We began in 2003 with support for Liuwa Plain, and quickly realised the leadership team and their whole-community approach to conservation were going to do great things. We are especially inspired by the focus on local communities to ensure sustainable conservation. To that end, we helped move 500 elephants in Malawi to reduce conflict and habitat pressures in two parks. This effort helped repopulate a third park, further supporting tourism and the local economy. We are proud to get behind the effort to expand to 30 parks by 2030. Now, we hope more people will be inspired to support the protection of key landscapes, wildlife and communities in Africa."

- Rob and Melani Walton, Co-Founders of the Rob and Melani Walton Foundation



OUR GROWTH - Despite these crazy circumstances, we continued to grow our conservation footprint by bringing two new protected areas under our management. One of these is Rwanda's Nyungwe National Park, which is one of the oldest Afrotropical rainforests in Africa, provides 70% of Rwanda's water and contains 25% of Africa's primate species. The other is Benin's W National Park, an anchor of the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex, one of the largest intact wild ecosystems in West Africa and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We were also able to strengthen and expand two existing mandates: for Odzala-Kokoua National Park in the Congo Basin (the world's second-largest tropical rainforest), where we re-affirmed our 25-year mandate with the Government and which now also includes the Lossi Gorilla Sanctuary; and for Chinko in the Central African Republic, where we signed a 25-year agreement with the Government to expand the area under protection to 5.5-million hectares, making this one of the largest contiguous wilderness areas under management in Africa. Thanks to them, and to

all our Government partners, we now have 19 parks under management in 11 countries, ensuring that 14.7-million hectares of some of the world's most critical ecosystems are being effectively conserved.

OUR COMMUNITY - While tourism came to a sudden halt in early March and with it an immediate loss of 10% of our annual budget, we made quick financial decisions to adjust accordingly and were able to continue our day-to-day operations without disruption. In keeping with the extremely important role we play for some of Africa's most vulnerable communities, our teams mobilised and distributed over 65,000 masks to staff and community members. More than 5,000 litres of soap, 285 litres of bleach, and 630 handwashing stations were assembled and distributed to health centres, clinics, schools, and other community centres. Awareness and sensitisation campaigns to help prevent transmission and contain the spread of Covid-19 reached at least 135,800 people in those local communities around the parks under our management.

Our regular community interventions continued with the building and revamping of schools, providing educational scholarships to hundreds of children, guaranteeing free access to students to visit the parks for environmental education, and conducting family-planning workshops. Livelihood projects proved to be essential, supporting fisheries and beekeeping co-operatives and sustainable farming practices, as well as providing access within parks to harvest natural resources, drilling boreholes to provide safe drinking water, and delivering green energy through subsidising solar lights and lamp kits for rural communities. Four of the 19 parks we manage have at least 90,000 people legally living within them, and every park has communities numbering in the thousands living around them. Providing real, tangible benefits to these communities is critical for the long-term future of each and every one of these landscapes.

For the month of June, we collaborated with Prints for Wildlife, in which 120 world-renowned photographers came together to donate their

photography to raise funds for African Parks in response to Covid-19 and the fall-out for tourism. More than 6,000 prints were sold to people from around the world, raising over US\$500,000 for African Parks. In October, 1,000 of our rangers took part in the Tusk Trust Wildlife Ranger Challenge and raised US\$250,000 to outfit 1,000 non-African Parks rangers with gear — boots, a pack, shirt and field trousers, simple but critical items needed to go out on patrol. Together, our rangers ran 21,000km, nearly the full perimeter of Africa, and they did so in solidarity with rangers around the world.

WILDLIFE - We managed to keep poaching at an all-time low across the parks and saw a continued increase in key wildlife populations. Majete maintained its 17-year track record of not having lost one rhino or one elephant to poachers, while rhino populations grew in Akagera, Majete and Liwonde, with new calves. Lions are thriving in Zakouma, Akagera, Pendjari, W, Majete and Liwonde, and camera-trap data confirmed their presence in an area in Chinko where they have not been seen since 2016.



In Garamba, elephant poaching has been reduced by 97% since 2016, and in further signs of recovery, not one elephant was known to have been lost to poaching over the year and 39 elephants under the age of one were counted. Odzala continued to serve as a significant stronghold for endangered species, with approximately 7,270 forest elephants, 7,575 western lowland gorillas and 827 chimpanzees within the park.

Our Pendjari and W teams completed a large elephant-and antelope-collaring exercise totalling 39 individuals — the first for W, which will give us clearer insight into the transboundary significance of that entire complex. Red-necked ostriches were translocated to Ennedi. In December, with support from the Community Resource Boards and Zambian Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW), we reintroduced a founder population of cheetahs to Bangweulu Wetlands in a hopeful move to expand the range of this vulnerable species and increase tourism. While all of these highlights are single-species focused, they are the result of securing entire systems, which create favourable conditions for all wildlife to thrive and play their part in ecologically healthy landscapes.

IN MEMORIAM - The pandemic struck us at our core with the tragic loss of Jonathan Chisaka, our Bangweulu Wetlands Park Manager, who passed away on 18 July. Jonathan left a distinguished conservation legacy in Bangweulu and was a deeply admired leader among the community. Similarly, Kunda Mwape, our accountant in Liuwa Plains, passed away on 21 July. Kunda was an integral part of the Liuwa team and had a contagious energy about him – he will be deeply missed by all his colleagues. Francis Mbilizi, Chairman of African Parks Malawi Board, passed away on 1 August. Francis was a long-standing Board Member of African Parks in Malawi, serving on the Majete Board from 2009 and then as Chairman of African Parks Malawi, from 2015 until his untimely passing. An academic and an extremely accomplished individual in both Government and the private sector, he was instrumental in helping guide African Parks in Malawi for over a decade. There were others who sadly passed away in 2020, the details of which are mentioned on page 20. These untimely losses affected us all, and we pay our deepest respects to their families.



↑ Extensive camera trap surveys in Chinko, CAR, revealed a growing population of lions © Thierry Aebischer



LOOKING AHEAD - Given that 2020 was our 20th anniversary, and we are closing in on our goal of managing 20 parks, it was fitting to look inward, and to cast our vision for our next 10 years. Our immediate target is to manage 30 parks by 2030, across 11 biomes, measuring 30-million hectares. In order to further scale up our impact, we have launched an incubator programme with select partners, whom we will support with expertise so they can manage an additional 10 protected areas, spanning a further five-million hectares. We spent a good part of the Covid-19-induced lockdown analysing the entire protected area landscape of Africa. Of the 8,496 registered protected areas in Africa, only 1,050 are larger than 50,000 hectares. Of those, we identified 161 as being the most significant in terms of viability, biodiversity, and ecosystem services and which are still sufficiently intact to make them worth saving. Of the 161, African Parks estimates that just 69 are adequately managed and protected to a level where they have a reasonable chance of surviving into the future. The remaining 92 are experiencing major threats and require an urgent management solution.

It is this need that is shaping our thinking for the future. You can read more about this on page 16.

WITH GRATITUDE - Despite the challenges presented by this pandemic, we made important strides throughout the year. I speak for everyone at African Parks when I say that it is an honour to be working with every single Government partner who has entrusted their national parks into our safekeeping. We recognise consistently that it is because of them first and foremost that our work is possible. This was also a year that might have resulted in a decrease or a loss of funding, but thanks to the resilience of our funding partners, not only were we able to sustain all the parks in the portfolio, but we were able to grow our conservation footprint. It is because of our committed funders that we are able to continue to enact proven solutions to conserve Africa's biodiversity. On behalf of everyone at African Parks, thank you all for standing with us, for helping get us to where we are today, and for seeing us into this next chapter of contributing to the vision of ensuring 30% of Africa is protected for people and wildlife.