

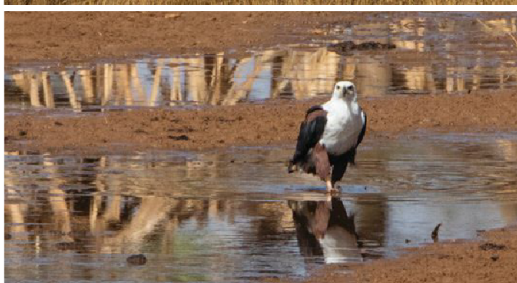
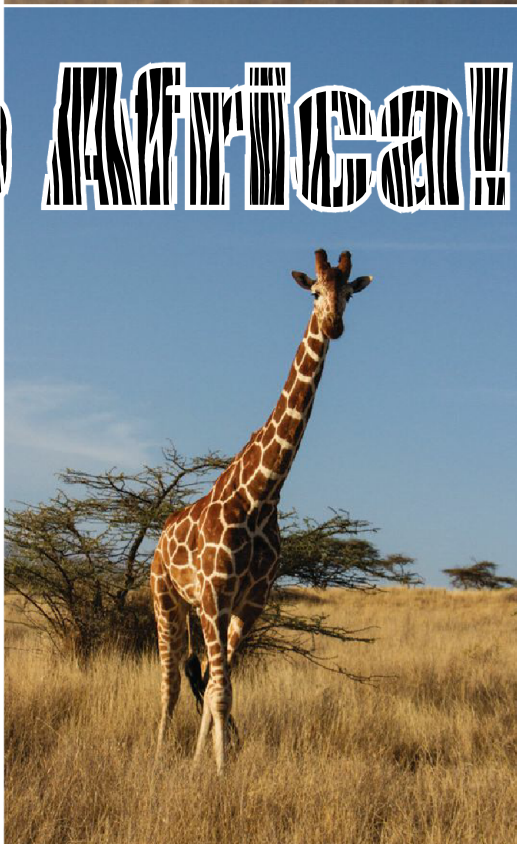


Back to

Africa!

Story & Photography by Brenda Fishbaugh

This was my sixth time in Africa and third trip in five years to Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, one of the leading organizations working to save rhinos from poaching. Rhinos are being killed for their horn, which is used in traditional Asian medicines because it is mistakenly believed to have healing properties. Located in central Kenya, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is working to protect rhinos by providing a safe sanctuary for them and providing the food sources they prefer. Elephants and rare Grevy's zebra also are protected by armed guards and patrolling airplanes and radio collars. This huge effort is funded in several ways, with the American Association of Zookeepers (AAZK) "Bowling for Rhinos" fundraiser providing substantial support, as well as money raised through tourism and donations. →



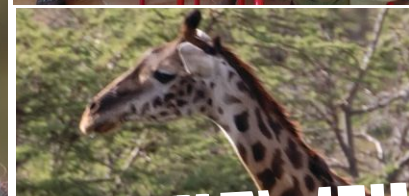


Every time I'm in Kenya, I see and experience new things. One highlight of this trip was seeing the birth of a wildebeest calf. The herd kept moving so that lions couldn't move in, and the calf's entire leg was sticking out of mother as she walked with the herd! She lay down for two minutes as the herd circled her, the calf popped out and a couple of minutes later, they were all on the move again. The calf fell and got back up, but stayed with the herd, even with its umbilical cord still attached. A very amazing experience!

My husband Steve and I were in Kenya for 19 days and traveled to five different camps. Each ecosystem has a different animal population and offers diverse animal experiences. At Richard's River Camp in the Masai Mara, we took a hot air balloon ride at dawn, flying over a lion and her cubs, a giraffe running and Masai warriors out tending their goat herds.

Also in the Masai Mara, we found a leopard high up in a tree, preparing to dine on an antelope. Leopards drag their kill up a tree to keep lions from stealing it. It was extraordinary to see her eating while above us.

Photography is a hobby of mine, and I took a large 600mm lens that allowed me to get close-ups of birds and photos →

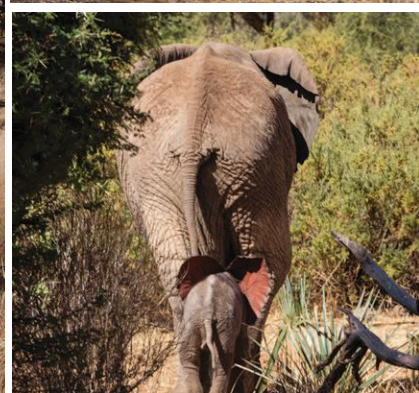
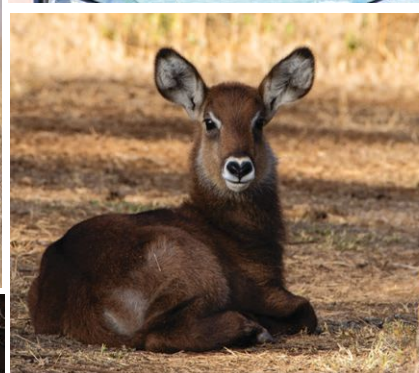


of the more shy animals. All photos in this article were taken by me, except photos with me in them.

Rhinos are mostly a solitary animal, and this makes them much easier to kill than elephants, which travel in herds. There are two rhino species – the rare black rhino and the more common white rhino. To complicate matters, both species are basically the same color. Lewa tracks their rhinos with a chalkboard as rhino life is tenuous ... they hope for a birth to offset the natural deaths and those lost to grisly poaching.

On this trip, I had the thrill of touching a rhino for the first time. Not naturally friendly creatures, they are very shy. Several orphaned rhinos whose mothers were killed by poachers are being bottle-raised by Lewa rangers until they are old enough to be released back into the wild. It was such an honor to touch these almost extinct animals.

When we were in Ol Pejeta reserve, we got to see the last male Northern →



white rhino ... insane! He's the last male and he hasn't bred successfully. I also touched one of the four Northern white female rhinos left in the world. Just two are in Kenya and were raised in a zoo in Czech Republic, so the rhino females are accustomed to human contact. This experience was humbling and very sad; humans have killed so many rhinos for some crazy belief about a magical horn. As a result, your kids might not get to see this sub-species.

The natives in this area of Kenya, the Masai, are slowly taking interest in something besides their beloved goat and cattle herding. New agriculture was sprouting up all over with the introduction of high-tech drip irrigation. The Masai still wear their colorful native dress – their attire in these photos isn't a "dress up for the tourists" kind of thing.

Looking back on this trip to Kenya, I'm encouraged by the improvements that have occurred over the five years we've been visiting. Lewa has joined efforts

with their neighboring conservancy, Borana, giving rhinos a much larger territory to roam. Tracking info gathered from guards and elephants and lions with collars allows for conflicts between villages to be dramatically reduced. Lewa sponsors schools and we've seen a dramatic increase in the quality and number of schools, but so much more is needed there. The medical clinic has expanded and the quality of care is much better. The tents, camps and food quality for tourists has improved in almost every camp we visited. Upscale camps encourage more tourists, which will bring more revenue to the area as well as more interest in preserving the wildlife there.

Thanks for reading this article and taking a look at photos of my beloved Kenya and her wildlife. In appreciation, I'd like to send you a bracelet made by Kenyan women. Email Brenda@EyePro.net with your mailing address and I'll send you a hand-beaded bracelet that supports Kenyan women and the Northern Rangelands Trust in Kenya. ■

