WILDLIFE WORKS

trunk to tail

The elephant population across the world has faced dramatic decline in the last several decades from poachers, human-elephant conflicts and profiteers. Jet Linx Fort Worth pilot Richard Love has partnered with Wildlife Works in its efforts to protect and care for the largest mammals on land.

Photos by Kenny Viera

Photo by Jaunty Vibe

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The majestic African elephant, standing at an average of 11-feet tall and weighing around six tons, is the largest land mammal on earth. Although these highly-intelligent creatures possess a demanding presence as they roam the African drylands, they are considered vulnerable and at risk of extinction.

Their unique ivory tusks, used for foraging food and fighting off predators, are a valuable commodity to some and have been targeted by poachers for years. Between slow reproduction and high poaching rates, these animals struggle to sustain their current population numbers. On the following pages, read how one company and its dedicated team are devoting their lives to protect elephants and other wildlife of the Kenyan bush.

WORKING FOR WILDLIFE

Although humans pose as the greatest threat to African wildlife, they are also their biggest advocates. In 1997, Mike Korchinsky, a consultant from San Francisco, embarked on a safari through Kenya where he discovered not only the beauty of Africa, but also the poaching and violence that threatened the land and its wildlife. After his return, Korchinsky sold his lucrative consulting firm and started Wildlife Works, a revolutionary conservation company that manages projects to help protect thousands of acres of land and the wildlife that inhabits it. Wildlife Works believes that if people want to have magnificent animals in the world, there must be a balance between local communities, wildlife, the land and its shared resources. Korchinsky's ideology is, "If you want wildlife, you have to make sure it works for local communities."

Wildlife Works' first conservation project was the Kasigau Corridor in Rukinga, a wildlife sanctuary and a vital elephant migration corridor between Tsavo East and Tsavo West National parks in Kenya, Africa. When Korchinsky and his team first discovered Rukinga, the land was barren, wildlife was depleting, and poachers came and went as they pleased. Wildlife Works saw a need for change and partnered with the local community. They invested in job creation projects that provide locals with long-term careers – an alternate source of income to poaching, forest clearcutting and other illegal activities. These jobs support education, farming, an eco-friendly factory and wildlife protection.

In a place where both animal and human survival are at odds, Wildlife Works has established a market-based solution for the local community while also conserving wildlife. Since Wildlife Works established the Kasigau Corridor, they are now the third largest employer in their county, have completed 15 school projects that benefit over 8,500 children, and protect over 500,000 acres of dryland forest. These efforts have given over 11,000 wild elephants a place to migrate and roam – including 2,000 that call Rukinga their home. The corridor protection area is also home to Grevy's zebras, lions, leopards, cheetahs and wild dogs. >>

AN EYE IN THE SKY

To help increase elephant security in the Kasigau Corridor, Wildlife Works formed the Elephant Protection Trust (EPT) to help raise funds necessary to support their rangers. The EPT's mission is to build a future where elephants and all wild animals can live in peace with humankind. With a high concentration of elephants in the corridor and lacking law enforcement presence, a crucial component to the protection of these animals are the rangers that patrol the corridor. Wildlife Works employs over 100 local rangers who endure physical and medical training. Stationed deep in the forest, unarmed and unafraid, rangers get to know the area's vast land and are prepared for any threat to wildlife. With expansive land to patrol, the rangers must rely mostly on aerial surveillance. Keith Hellyer, an anti-poaching pilot for the EPT, patrols the elephant habitat with his Magni M24 Gyrocopter – an economical aircraft used for daily operations. His overhead presence has proven to be an effective way to reduce poaching crimes.

Hellyer has devoted his life to conservation efforts and his dedication to the EPT has been a key part to their success. His passion for wildlife preservation started when he was a child. Born and raised on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, he grew up seeing whales, otters, deer, bears and other wild animals. Then after a family vacation to Kenya, he discovered just how much he enjoyed wildlife and knew that he would return someday. "The wildlife and the beauty of the bush [Kenya's terrain] is hard to say goodbye to, so I made the full-time move to Kenya as soon as I could," recalled Hellyer. "I was lucky enough to land a job at a safari camp, which was a great foot in the door for starting a career in wildlife conservation."

After spending time at the safari camp and learning how to fly a gyrocopter to spot animals, he soon realized that this would be an effective tool for wildlife conservation. Hellyer was approached by Wildlife Works to join their team and assist in their anti-poaching efforts. "After a few weeks of flying for their rangers, we noticed the impact that the daily flights had and the little victories we were making for elephant protection. We then started to make the aerial patrols part of the full-time Wildlife Works operations," exclaimed Hellyer.

Surveillance days start early for Hellyer and his team, starting with a phone call from the head of security to see if there have been any reports through the night. Then it's wheels up at sunrise to locate elephant herds dispersed throughout the 500,000-acre corridor. The team collects as much demographic information as they can, including numbers of males, females and juveniles. In addition to elephants, they also focus their efforts on other species like lions, zebras and cheetahs. Apart from locating wildlife, they also look for any signs of poaching or other illegal activity and relay it to their team of rangers on the ground. "There have been a lot of security incidents over the five years that I have been here, too many, but we have come a long way since the first year," said Hellyer, adding, "Each year, we are losing less and less wildlife due to everyone's hard work and coordination."

Kenya's wildlife faces poaching threats daily, sometimes ending tragically, but Hellyer believes it's important to focus on the positive outcomes. "We once spotted an elephant with a large wound caused by an attempted poaching hunt using a poison arrow – a very quiet way to kill wildlife. We managed to keep eyes on the poor elephant from the air and coordinated with Kenya Wildlife Service veterinary team to remove the arrow, clean the wound and give the elephant a second chance at life." >>

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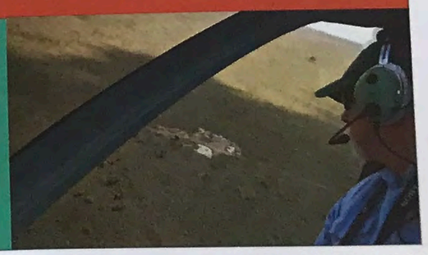
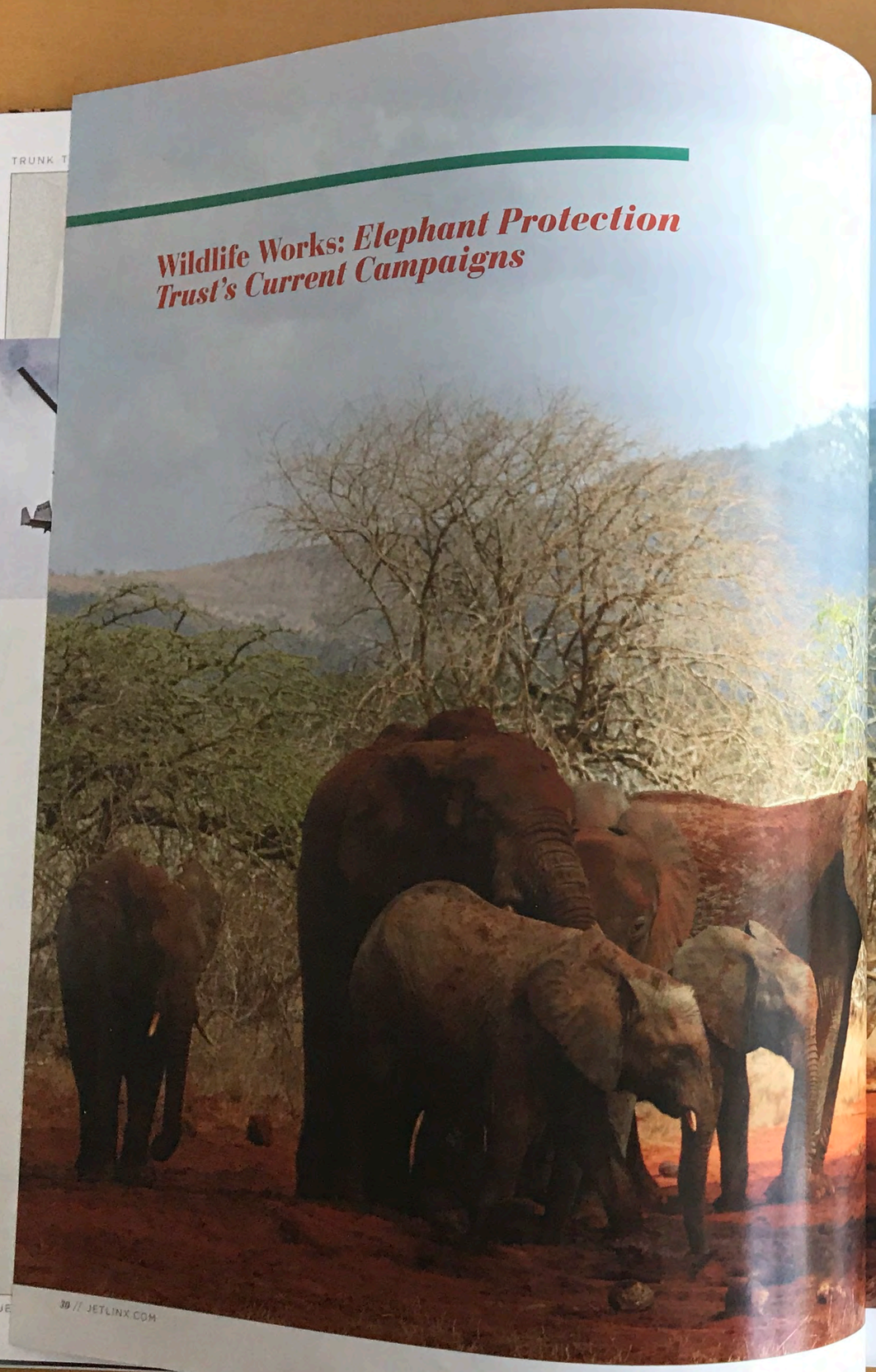
>
> KEITH HELLYER, PILOT,
> ELEPHANT PROTECTION TRUST



HIGH ABOVE. OPPOSITE PAGE: The Gyrocopter is a unique, economical aircraft used for daily wildlife patrols flown by Keith Hellyer and his team. THIS PAGE, LEFT: Hellyer, an anti-poaching pilot for the EPT, surveys the vast Kenyan bush. RIGHT: Richard Love, pilot for the EPT and Jet Linx Fort Worth, has a bird's-eye view during a patrol on his recent trip to Kenya.

Wildlife Works: *Elephant Protection Trust's Current Campaigns*



Purchase of 200-hour Magni M-24 Gyrocopter for Aerial Surveillance

GOAL: $60,850

An M-24 Gyrocopter with a low 200 hours of engine time has been secured for purchase by the Elephant Protection Trust at a discounted price of $60,000 (compared to the market value of $80,000).

The original M24 Gyrocopter, flown by Hellyer and his team at the EPT for the last four years, has now reached its engine limit and requires a complete rebuild. The engine, rotor blades, propeller, body frame and electronics all need to be refurbished, which will be a long and slow process. In the meantime, aerial surveillance efforts are still required to continue and at the same time the reach of the project's impact needs to be expanded. The acquired gyrocopter would be used for aerial surveillance of 45 hours a month.

Annual Aerial Surveillance Budget

GOAL: $92,880 PER YEAR

The EPT continues to search for funding for 2019 aerial surveillance and beyond. The funding would allow aerial surveillance of 60 hours a month, totaling 720 hours a year with two aircraft and two pilots, ensuring consistent aerial monitoring of elephant movements over the corridor.

The overall expected outcome is to increase security within the project area. This will reduce poaching of elephants and other wildlife, and the destruction of their habitat. By anticipating elephant movements through monitoring, the project will ensure protective measures are put in place and there is a deterrent to potential threats.

LEARN MORE ABOUT WAYS TO HELP AT **ELEPHANTPROTECTIONTRUST.ORG.**

I HOPE THAT SOMEDAY... IT IS JUST A MATTER OF MANAGING THESE ELEPHANT HERDS **TO MAKE SURE WE HAVE THEM IN OUR FUTURE.**

RICHARD LOVE, PILOT,
ELEPHANT PROTECTION TRUST AND
JET LINX FORT WORTH

FOR THE LOVE OF ELEPHANTS

Aerial surveillance is necessary in preventing elephant poaching and other wildlife crime. To help with these efforts, Hellyer has enlisted the help of volunteer copilots to assist with daily patrols. “Our goal is to fly 60 hours a month. This seems to be the optimal number of hours to help deter illegal activities and to respond to security issues faced around the project area,” stated Hellyer. “We have a handful of dedicated pilots come out and help keep us in the air.”

Richard Love, pilot for Jet Linx Fort Worth, volunteers his time each year to assist Hellyer and his team with aerial operations. “Richard was a great addition to the Elephant Protection Trust team,” said Hellyer. “He came out during the height of the 2017 drought, which killed a large number of elephants and caused a lot of human-wildlife conflict. Richard put in a lot of long hours in the hot, dusty Tsavo environment. He also located elephants that were advancing on local farmland, which helped our rangers prevent conflict before the elephants put themselves and people in harm’s way.”

Love’s passion for wildlife started at an early age when he lived on a ranch in West Texas. “One of my most favorite memories growing up was driving through our pasture while a herd of antelope would race alongside our truck,” Love reminisced. “Through the years, that herd was eventually decimated by poaching. After that, I couldn’t tolerate the practice. When I found out what was happening to elephants in Africa, I knew I wanted to get involved.”

In 2017, Love connected with Hellyer’s team and has made two trips to Kenya. Each trip, he volunteered two weeks of his time and flying expertise, spending hours each day conducting gyrocopter patrols over the Kasigau Corridor. “As long as we keep an eye in the sky, we will continue to see less poachers. I haven’t personally seen a poacher while volunteering, but that’s a good thing,” said Love. “I hope that someday poaching becomes nonexistent and that it is just a matter of managing these elephant herds to make sure we have them in our future – for our children and our grandchildren.” Love plans on returning again this year and for many years to come. “The fact that Richard came back again this year, shows he shares our commitment to this place and the wellbeing of its wildlife – it means a lot,” shared Hellyer.

Both Hellyer and Love hope to not only maintain the current work that they are doing, but also expand their conservation reach and extend their efforts to other areas. “This requires a lot of dedication, financial commitment and a spotlight on the issues faced,” said Hellyer. “We need to keep wildlife corridors open and safe for migrating animals, so they don’t suffocate like a wildlife island in a sea of human development.”

WORKING FOR WILDLIFE. TOP: The Gyrocopter is used to prevent poachers from invading the elephant corridor and to collect wildlife demographic data. ABOVE: Elephants have longer pregnancies than most other mammals. Their regeneration rate averages only five to six percent annually. Compared to their eight to nine percent poaching rates, Elephants have a net loss in population numbers. Photo by Lynn Von Hagen. INSET: Love joins Hellyer each year to assist in daily patrol operations.