VICTORIA FALLS
WILDLIFE TRUST

2025 Impact Report

Contents

Photo: Faizel Kara | **Front Cover Photo:** Oscar Whitfield

Chairperson's Report

In a year marked by uncertainty across the conservation sector, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the many partners, supporters and donors who have continued to stand alongside the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust. Your commitment has enabled us not only to sustain our work, but also to grow and strengthen our impact.

Thanks to your support, 2025 has been a year of meaningful progress. Our Wildlife Disease and Forensics Laboratory has continued to grow as an important scientific resource for Zimbabwe and the wider region. With new forensic tests and expanded capacity, our team is helping law enforcement agencies identify illegally traded wildlife products, strengthen investigations, and support the prosecution of wildlife crime. These scientific advances are an increasingly powerful tool in protecting threatened species.

At the same time, we have launched new initiatives focused on strengthening the protection of critical ecosystems, including our continued work supporting the safeguarding of Zambezi National Park. Through close collaboration with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and other partners, we are building capacity and enhancing resources that will help protect one of the region's most important conservation landscapes and the wildlife that depends on it.

Conservation success also depends on strong and resilient communities. In 2025, we expanded skills development programmes that provide practical training and livelihood opportunities for local communities. By supporting entrepreneurship, especially among women, and strengthening economic resilience, these initiatives help ensure that conservation creates tangible benefits for the people who live alongside wildlife.

Internally, we have continued to invest in our greatest asset — our people. By strengthening our multidisciplinary team and expanding our infrastructure, we are building the long-term capacity needed to deliver sustainable conservation solutions grounded in science, collaboration and community engagement.

Every wildlife rescue, scientific breakthrough and community partnership achieved this year reflects the support and trust of our donors. Your partnership allows the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust to remain innovative, responsive, and committed to protecting wildlife and supporting communities across this remarkable region.

On behalf of the Board and the entire VFWT team, thank you for your continued belief in our mission and for walking this journey with us.

Bruno De Leo
Chairperson
Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust
Zimbabwe Board of Trustees

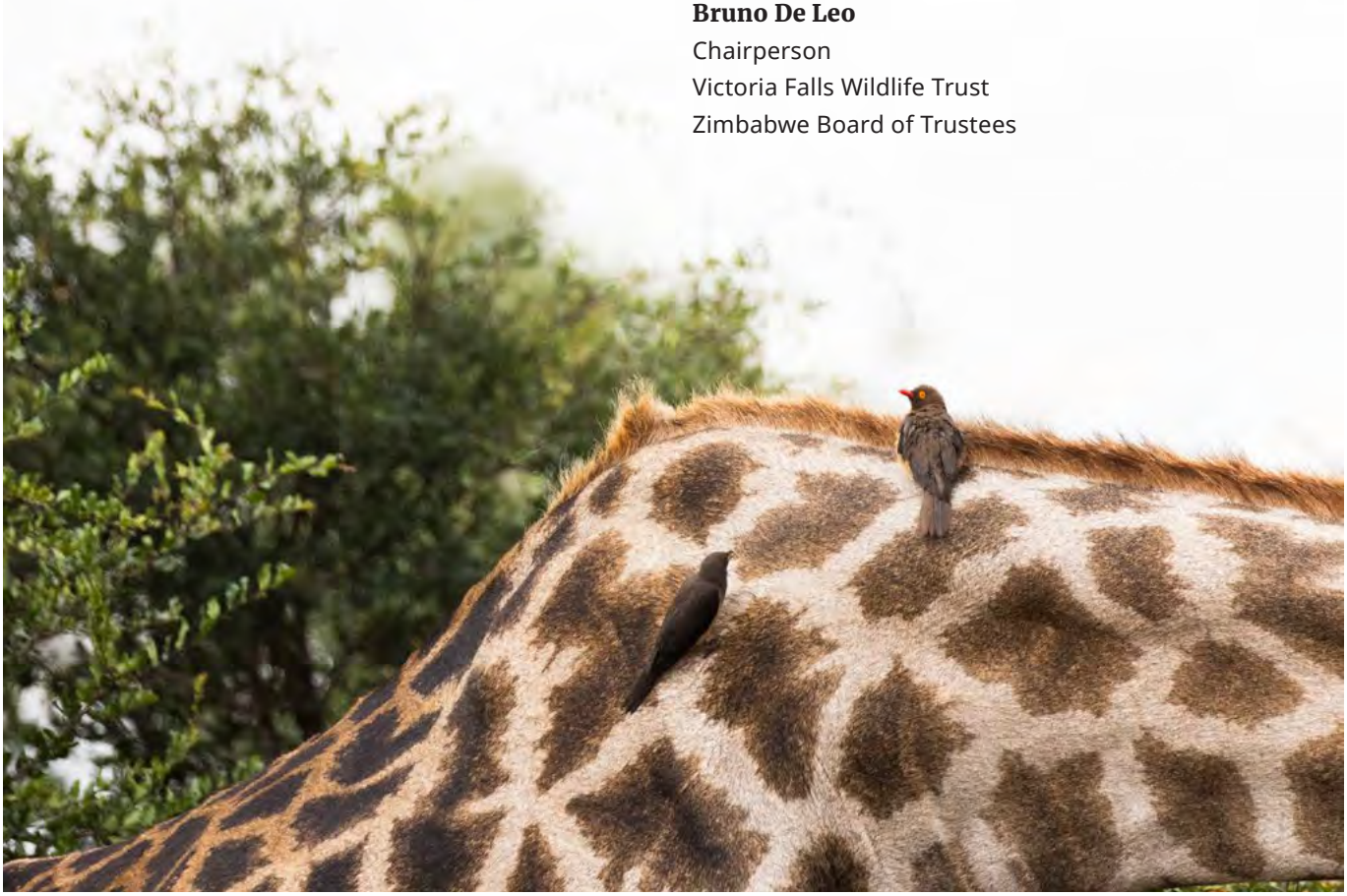


Photo: Mana Meadows

Our Vision

Local and international communities across Southern Africa working together through effective management to ensure natural ecosystems are sustained for the benefit of all.

Our Mission

To actively advance and promote environmental conservation and the sustainable use of indigenous resources in Southern Africa.

Our Approach

Our work is grounded in the realities of living alongside African wildlife. We focus on wildlife conservation through rescue and rehabilitation, research and forensics, species protection, and combatting wildlife crime. These efforts are deeply connected to community empowerment, recognising the essential link between our ecosystems, health, habitats, and people. Each component plays a vital role in safeguarding our magnificent wildlife for generations to come.

Our Activities

- Conservation, Rescue and Rehabilitation
- Wildlife Research and Species Protection
- Wildlife Disease and Countering Wildlife Crime
- Community Outreach and Education
- Countering Wildlife Crime
- Securing Zambezi National Park

Photo: Mana Meadows

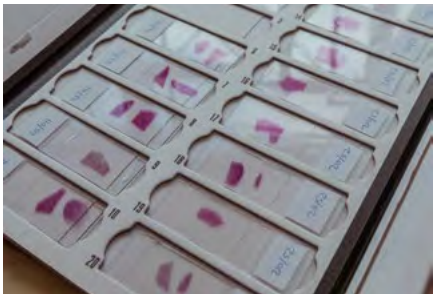
2025 Achievements

2025 Highlights at a Glance: A year of measurable impact across wildlife, science and communities

Communities & Education

- **2,788** Human Wildlife Conflict patrols conducted covering 22,346 km
- **75%+** top exam performance
- **20** women trained in sisal and palm product production and financial literacy.

Forensics & Disease



- Progress towards **international accreditation**
- **PELTS international mission** participation in Angola
- **MoU signed** with Zimbabwe Republic Police

Countering Wildlife Crime

- **35** illegal wildlife trade cases digitised
- **17** investigators certified in wildlife crime scene investigation & **14** investigators and rangers trained on human rights
- **19** cases monitored from investigation through prosecution

2,196
cattle in **13** bomas participating across **7** wards

6,476
laboratory procedures

35
wildlife forensics species ID cases

0
livestock losses in mobile bomas

1,676
people reached through conservation education

32
snare removal operations

21
High-Care Wildlife Rehab Centre cases treated

4
national rhino operations

Rescue & Rehabilitation

- **21** High-Care Wildlife Rehab Centre cases treated
- **32** snare removals
- **30+** human-wildlife conflict responses

Zambezi National Park

- Government-approved **implementation plan**
- **20** rangers trained

Species Protection

- New **veterinary insights** into rhino pathology
- **Drone-enabled** lion monitoring
- **92** vulture nests monitored

"Building science-led conservation systems that protect wildlife and support communities."

Illustration: Farai Wallace

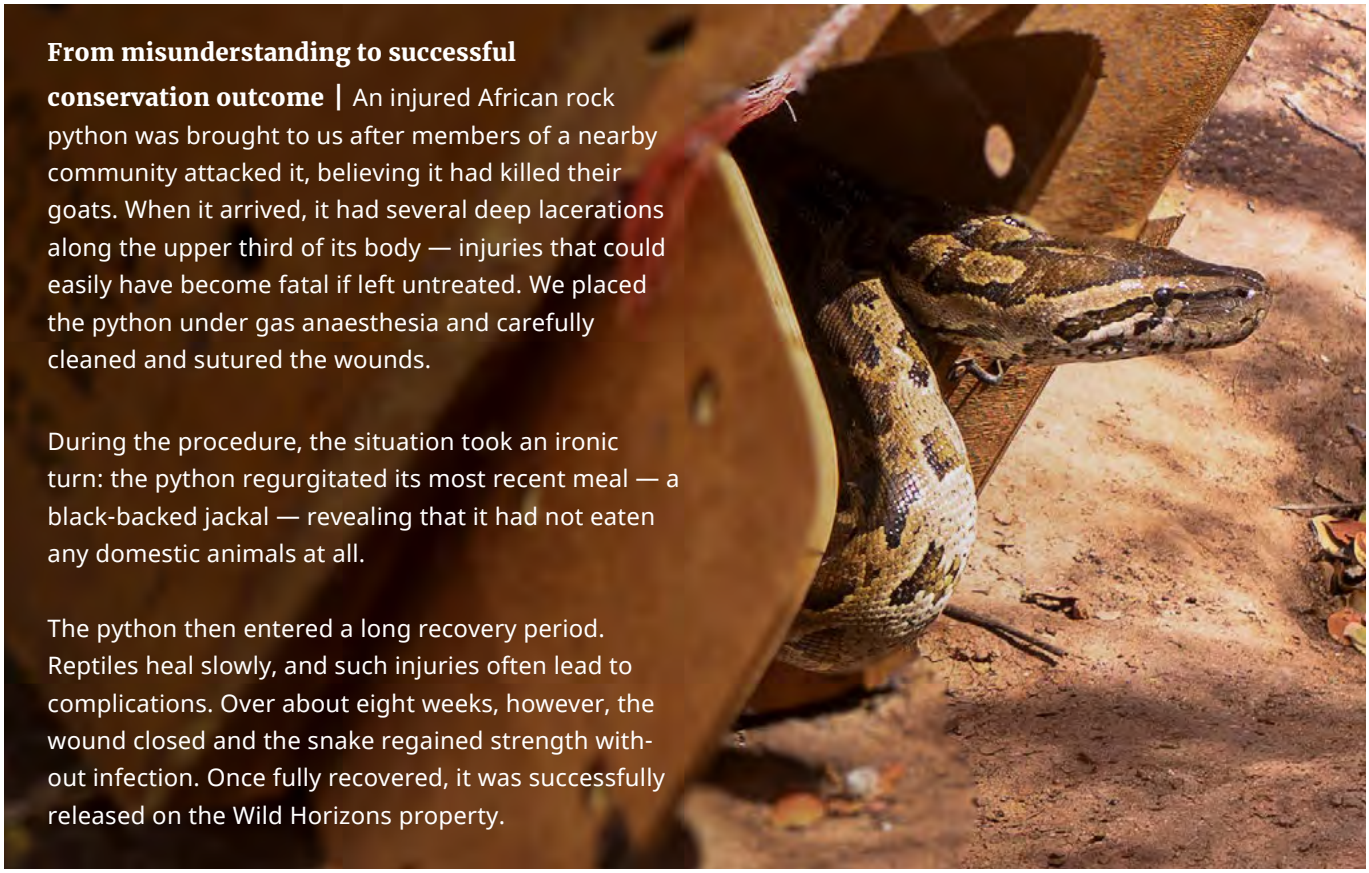
Rescue & Rehabilitation

During 2025, the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust Rescue and Rehabilitation team responded to a wide range of wildlife emergencies across Victoria Falls, Zambezi National Park, Matetsi Units, Hwange National Park, and surrounding concessions. Interventions addressed injuries caused by snaring, vehicle collisions, disease, natural trauma, orphaning, and escalating human-wildlife conflict.

The work was conducted in close collaboration with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks), local authorities, conservation partners, tourism lodges, and communities. Increasing pressure at the wildlife-human interface, combined with persistent poaching threats, continued to place heavy demands on emergency response capacity.

Challenging Beginnings, Successful Releases

Laughing dove chicks often arrive in our care after being blown from nests in urban areas, usually at a fragile fledgling stage. Hand-rearing doves is challenging, as their early survival depends on highly specific, nutrient-rich crop milk produced by parent birds — difficult to replicate artificially. Despite this, over the course of 2025, we were able to raise five chicks to strong young adults and release them back into the wild.



From misunderstanding to successful conservation outcome | An injured African rock python was brought to us after members of a nearby community attacked it, believing it had killed their goats. When it arrived, it had several deep lacerations along the upper third of its body — injuries that could easily have become fatal if left untreated. We placed the python under gas anaesthesia and carefully cleaned and sutured the wounds.

During the procedure, the situation took an ironic turn: the python regurgitated its most recent meal — a black-backed jackal — revealing that it had not eaten any domestic animals at all.

The python then entered a long recovery period. Reptiles heal slowly, and such injuries often lead to complications. Over about eight weeks, however, the wound closed and the snake regained strength without infection. Once fully recovered, it was successfully released on the Wild Horizons property.

Rescue & Rehabilitation **Highlights 2025**

1. WILDLIFE RESCUE, REHABILITATION AND CLINICAL CARE: VFWT had 21 cases through the High Care Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in 2025. Clinical interventions ranged from minor wound treatment to complex immobilisations, surgical procedures, prolonged rehabilitation, and, where recovery was not possible, ethical end-of-life decisions.

SPECIES ASSISTED

15 Birds

1 Reptile

5 Mammals

OUTCOMES

Successfully treated and/or released **13**

Currently in rehabilitation **3**

5 Losses

Species affected by snares included: Elephants (adults and calves), buffalo (bulls and cows), giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, warthog, baboon, impala, and hippopotamus.

32 snare removal operations

2. SNARE REMOVAL AND ANTI-POACHING RESPONSE: Snaring in 2025 was lower compared to previous years; however, it remains one of the most significant threats to wildlife welfare and survival. We responded rapidly to reports of snared animals, often operating under dangerous field conditions. In several cases, snares were removed before skin penetration, preventing severe injury and likely death. Other animals presented with advanced injuries, including deep lacerations, infections, and limb compromise, underscoring the importance of early reporting and rapid response.

3. HUMAN–WILDLIFE CONFLICT MITIGATION:
VFWT attended to 30+ urban and high-risk wildlife call-outs involving elephants, buffalo, baboons, and warthogs entering schools, tourist areas, and residential areas.
Buffalo interventions: Multiple immobilisations and translocations were conducted. All buffalo translocated from Victoria Falls town returned within weeks, demonstrating that translocation alone is not an effective long-term conflict mitigation tool.
Elephant interventions: These included herding animals away from infrastructure, treatment of severe wounds and sepsis, and immobilisation to prevent escalation of human safety risks.

30+ urban and high-risk wildlife call-outs

4. ORPHAN RESCUE AND HIGH-RISK ANIMAL MANAGEMENT: VFWT assisted with the rescue, assessment, and management of at least seven orphaned or dependent animals. These operations required careful coordination and close collaboration with ZimParks and partner organisations.

1 One elephant calf transferred to Wild Is Life Elephant Rescue Centre

3 Three orphaned lion cubs captured and translocated to reduce human safety risks

1 A baboon infant successfully reunited with its troop

SNARE REMOVALS

Although removing snares can be exciting fieldwork, it is often emotionally challenging. Snares are one of the cruellest forms of human impact on wildlife — simple, cheaply made wire traps that capture and kill indiscriminately. Working with snared animals brings us face to face with the horrific suffering they endure and while the goal is always to help and give the animal another chance — the process can be deeply sobering.

▼ **Where Risk Meets Relief |** Removing snares from buffalo is particularly challenging. They are incredibly dangerous, fast, and far less tolerant of human presence than most species. Approaching them safely often requires creativity, using horses and careful positioning to get close enough to dart. Following quietly behind a horse to dart a buffalo is both nerve-wracking and exhilarating. Once the snare is removed and the animal runs off strongly, there is a sense of relief. Still, uncertainty remains — we can only hope the animal fully recovers, knowing the lasting effects of snares can sometimes claim lives long after intervention.

Photo: Graham Cochrane

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

VFWT's Rescue and Rehabilitation Programme will continue to play a critical role in wildlife welfare, conservation, and human safety in the region. Key priorities moving forward include:

- Strengthening rapid response capacity for snare and emergency cases.
- Expanding rehabilitation facilities and long-term care options.
- Developing more effective, preventative human–wildlife conflict mitigation strategies.
- Enhancing community awareness to promote early reporting of injured or snared animals.
- Continuing close collaboration with ZimParks and conservation partners.

Photo: Mana Meadows

KAZA Epidemiology, Carnivores and Elephants

VFWT works at an international, regional level to try and conserve biodiversity and protect the health of animals and people. This is done through working with the Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) Sub-Working Groups, which set strategy and action plans for priority species and work to harmonize conservation and One Health activities.

In 2025, the KAZA Carnivore Sub-Working Group collectively worked to reshape the strategy for endorsement by member states. This includes identifying carnivore corridors and prioritising them for future planning and implementation. The Elephant Sub-Working Group also met to review the existing action plan, identify priorities, and assess which activities were already being implemented at partner level.

The Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust facilitates an epidemiologist for the KAZA Animal Health Sub-Working Group, which focuses on understanding, preventing, and mitigating diseases at the livestock-wildlife interface across the region. With technical support from our epidemiologist, the first phase of the KAZA State of Livestock project was completed during the reporting period.

This phase involved compiling and analysing existing datasets on livestock numbers across the KAZA landscape to assess the current understanding of livestock distribution and density, including cattle, sheep, and goats. The analysis identified key gaps in available data across the region.

These findings will inform the design of the project's second phase, which will focus on targeted data collection to address these gaps. Improved livestock distribution data will support regional planning efforts, including better management of human-wildlife conflict, more informed land-use and development decisions, and strengthened approaches to transboundary animal disease surveillance and control.

Wildlife Disease & Forensics Laboratory

In 2025, VFWT's Wildlife Disease and Forensics Laboratory significantly expanded its impact as a national and regional leader in wildlife health and forensic science. The following achievements reflect sustained donor investment in scientific excellence and its growing role in protecting wildlife.

PROGRESS TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL FORENSIC ACCREDITATION | VFWT is preparing for formal assessment by the Society for Wildlife Forensic Science (SWFS), an important step toward international recognition. To support this process, we hosted leading experts from the TRACE Wildlife Forensics Network, who provided technical guidance to ensure our systems meet global standards. This progress would not be possible without sustained donor investment in scientific capacity.

VFWT'S GROWING REGIONAL ROLE IN COMBATING WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING | In 2025, VFWT was invited to join a Portable Enforcement Lab for Testing Seizures (PELTS) mission in Luanda, Angola, alongside international partners including TRACE, SANBI, Malawi Central Veterinary Laboratory and UNODC. During this mission, the team analysed a major wildlife seizure containing:

- 29 pieces of elephant ivory
- 5 rhino horns
- 5 pangolin scales
- 8 large cat teeth

Our work helped:

- Confirm species identification
- Determine the geographic origin of elephant ivory
- Strengthen evidence for law enforcement authorities

Photo: Sarah Kerr

MOU WITH ZIMBABWE REPUBLIC POLICE | Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust (VFWT) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). This agreement significantly strengthens VFWT's mandate and capacity to receive, analyse, and provide forensic support for wildlife-related samples from all provinces in Zimbabwe, and ensures close collaboration with Zimbabwe's law-enforcement authority.

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION | The laboratory successfully processed 35 species identification cases submitted by the ZRP Minerals and Fauna Unit and the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority. This increase in cases submitted, compared to previous years, reflects sustained engagement with investigative authorities.

EXPANDING SKILLS AND CRITICAL DIAGNOSTIC CAPACITY IN ZIMBABWE | Our four laboratory technologists, having gained considerable experience over the last two years, are now seeking to expand their academic qualifications and undertake research relevant to Zimbabwe's animal disease surveillance and control. They continue to build internal capacity through training and practical experience. Notably, the VFWT Laboratory is currently the only animal diseases laboratory in Zimbabwe able to conduct histopathology — the microscopic evaluation of diseased animal tissues — an essential component of disease surveillance.

ONGOING MONITORING | The VFWT facility is well positioned to respond to emerging global disease threats, including highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and peste des petits ruminants (PPR). Its location at the wildlife–livestock interface, and within the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA), enables both targeted and passive surveillance. This work will continue to develop as resources allow.

Photo: Matt Blair | Conservation Connect Films

LION TB PROJECT | The Hwange lion tuberculosis (TB) project concluded fieldwork at the end of the year. We sampled 50% of the remaining Nehimba pride, which was our focus. In total we sampled 14 lions in Hwange National Park, none of which tested positive for *Mycobacterium bovis*. Further PCR testing of samples from the two original mortalities suggests *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* as the likely cause. Confirmation through sequencing is in progress.

LABORATORY METRICS FOR 2025

Test	Total
Total number of case submissions	282
Total number of specimens received	1839
Blood Chemistry	169
Haematology	196
Cytology	552
Pathology — Post-mortems (includes 12 elephant)	49
Pathology — Histopathology sections	557
Parasitology	104
Serology	769
Species ID casework	103
Species ID for rhino horns (PELTS)	5
Species ID for pangolin scales (PELTS)	5
Species ID for large cat fangs (PELTS)	8
Geographic origin for elephant with Loxodonta localizer (PELTS)	29
Forensic genetics	902
Disease PCR	463
Bacteriology	974
Toxicology	49
Total specimens outsourced	128
Total samples stored	1181
TOTAL LABORATORY PROCEDURES	**6476**

Photo: TRACE / Simon Dures

Countering Wildlife Crime

Launched in July 2025, the Countering Wildlife Crime (CWC) Project strengthens wildlife crime investigations, improves case monitoring, and supports successful prosecutions across north-west Zimbabwe. As a new initiative, the project's first year focused on building the systems, skills, and partnerships necessary for effective and sustainable wildlife law enforcement. Through support from the Alinea Network, the project gained traction and supported the team in developing systems, processes and a strong foundation for countering wildlife crime.

A major priority has been establishing a data-driven approach to wildlife crime investigations. The project introduced a centralised intelligence database and began digitising both historical and current wildlife crime cases. To date, 35 illegal wildlife trade cases have been captured in the system, creating a foundation for identifying crime patterns, trafficking routes and links between suspects.

The project has also strengthened investigator capacity and legal processes. Six investigators were trained in digital data capture and evidence management, while 19 wildlife crime cases are currently being monitored from investigation through prosecution to ensure strong case preparation and improved court outcomes.

In November 2025, TRACE delivered a 10-day Wildlife Crime Scene Investigation training for 17 investigators from ZimParks and the Minerals, Flora and Fauna Unit. The training combined classroom instruction with practical field simulations, covering evidence collection, chain of custody, crime scene documentation and courtroom presentation. Legal guidance from VFWT ensured investigators understood evidence admissibility and data protection requirements under Zimbabwean law.

Early results already demonstrate impact. A Victim Impact Statement used in a warthog poaching case resulted in USD 1,000 in court-ordered compensation, while a cross-border investigation involving Zambia led to five-year prison sentences for ivory possession and generated new intelligence on trafficking routes.

Countering Wildlife Crime
Highlights 2025

35 illegal wildlife trade cases captured in centralised database

6 investigators trained in digital data capture tools

17 investigators certified in wildlife crime scene investigation

19 cases monitored from investigation through prosecution

2 cross-border coordination meetings

4 multi-stakeholder coordination meetings

"Our partnership with VFWT has shown the value of supporting organisations and systems that strengthen the full chain of response to wildlife crime, rather than focusing on isolated interventions. VFWT brings a grounded understanding of the complexity of the landscape in which it operates and the importance of connecting systems, people and institutions in a coherent way. By building capacity across that response system, including safeguarding, data analysis and legal support, VFWT is helping create a more resilient foundation for stronger investigations, more effective case progression, and lasting impact for both people and wildlife."

Jack McMahon | *Director of Operations, Alinea*

Rangers from local anti-poaching units sharing their certification on Wildlife Crime Scene Awareness.

Wildlife Research & Species Protection

Photo: Matt Blair | Conservation Connect Films

Lion Conservation

EYES IN THE SKY: TECHNOLOGY SUPPORTING LION CONSERVATION | Spending a day searching for lions often means long hours driving through sand, rocks, and thick bush — following tracks and hoping for a glimpse of a pride resting in the shade. When we do find them, it's always a special moment, but the work has only just begun.

We carefully record pride size, ages, behaviour, and body condition, and photograph each individual so that we can track them over time. Recently, a donated drone has transformed the way we work in the field. While we still spend long days out in the bush, the drone allows us to locate lions more quickly and observe them from above without disturbing them. It helps us collect accurate data and enables faster response when animals may be injured or at risk. For us as researchers, this technology has been a game changer — helping us better understand and protect lions while working more safely and efficiently.

Lion Conservation **Highlights 2025**

Collaring & Monitoring
- **5** new GPS collars deployed
- **8** lion prides monitored

Conflict Mitigation
- **4** conflict-prone lions fitted with GPS collars for real-time monitoring and early warning

Targeted Protection
- **4** vulnerable lions collared in high-poaching-risk areas

Data & Collaboration
- Lion sighting reporting system established
- **5** tourism partner organisations actively contributing data

WHEN SAFARI GUIDES BECAME LION CONSERVATION PARTNERS | Safari guides spend more time in the bush than almost anyone else, regularly encountering wildlife during their daily game drives. We recognised that their observations could play an important role in helping us monitor lions across this large landscape.

We introduced a simple digital reporting system and invited guides to share their lion sightings. The response has been exceptional. Eighteen tour guide companies are now contributing observations that help us track pride movements, breeding activity, and cub survivability. This partnership allows us to capture information we might otherwise miss, turning everyday sightings into meaningful conservation data. It is a strong reminder that effective conservation depends on collaboration between researchers, tourism partners, and local communities.

Elephant Conservation

ELEPHANT DISEASE REAPPEARS | After an absence of more than four years, more cases of the bacterial septicaemic disease, (caused by the enigmatic bacteria *Bisgaard taxon 45*) were again diagnosed in elephants, mostly juveniles. Fortunately, case numbers were lower than those recorded during the 2020 dry season. However, the risk of significant mortality remains, and the situation will continue to be closely monitored.

Photos: Mana Meadows

Photos: Mana Meadows

Rhino Conservation

In 2025, VFWT provided veterinary support for four major rhino operations across three important conservation areas in Zimbabwe: Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve, Gonarezhou National Park, and Matopos National Park.

VFWT supported two operations involving 40 rhino calves — 30 white rhino and 10 black rhino. Each animal was safely immobilised for ear notching, microchip implantation, and biological sample collection, providing critical data for long-term monitoring and genetic research. Later in the year VFWT assisted with the translocation of a landmark reintroduction of white rhino into one of Zimbabwe's most well-known national parks. In a separate operation, VFWT supported the immobilisation of over 20 rhinos for anti-poaching dehorning, with three calves ear-notched to support future monitoring and identification.

RARE DENTAL CONDITION DOCUMENTED IN A RHINO CALF | During follow-up monitoring of an ear-notched rhino calf, veterinarians observed an unusual dental abnormality involving the eruption of cheek teeth. Grass became trapped around the erupting teeth, causing severe damage to the surrounding gum and bone. Despite investigation and monitoring, the condition proved fatal. A review of available veterinary literature found no previously documented cases of this pathology in rhino, making the case an important addition to veterinary knowledge of the species.

INNOVATIVE TREATMENT FOR A WHITE RHINO BULL | VFWT assisted in the treatment of a white rhino bull suffering from severe eye inflammation caused by a parasitic worm species normally associated with horses and donkeys. Repeated immobilisation for treatment was initially considered necessary. However, with the help of visiting animal trainers from the United States, the rhino was gradually trained to accept daily eye treatment without sedation, using small food rewards as positive reinforcement. This collaborative and innovative approach resolved a serious welfare issue while avoiding the risks associated with repeated immobilisation.

SUPPORTING RHINO PROTECTION IN MATOPOS
Veterinary-supported dehorning remains an important part of rhino protection in Matopos National Park, where poaching pressure remains high. Removing the horn reduces the incentive for illegal killing and supports the survival of vulnerable populations.

However, during the 2025 operation, one adult white rhino female was lost to poaching, highlighting the continued risks faced by small and isolated rhino populations and the need for sustained protection, monitoring, and veterinary support.

LOOKING AHEAD

VFWT remains committed to supporting Zimbabwe's rhino conservation efforts through veterinary care, population monitoring, translocations, and genetic research. As several rhino populations remain small and increasingly isolated, genetic monitoring and the strategic movement of breeding animals will become increasingly important. VFWT is well positioned to assist with these efforts, helping ensure resilient rhino populations for the future.

Photo: Matt Blair | Conservation Connect Films

Vulture Conservation

WHY THIS WORK MATTERS | Watching vultures soar together as they locate a carcass is always a remarkable sight and a reminder of how interconnected our ecosystems are. As natural scavengers, they rapidly remove carcasses, helping prevent the spread of disease across wildlife, livestock, and human populations. These birds are essential to healthy ecosystems.

Yet their populations are under increasing threat, and declines can have far-reaching consequences across entire ecosystems. Protecting vultures is therefore not only about biodiversity, but about safeguarding environmental and public health.

This work drives our daily efforts — to monitor nests, investigate cluster alerts, and protect critical habitats — while engaging young people and local communities to ensure these species continue to thrive.

A VIEW FROM ABOVE: MONITORING THE NEXT GENERATION | This year our team used drones to monitor 92 vulture nests across five National Parks and Safari Areas, helping us better understand breeding success and the health of nesting sites.

During these surveys, we sadly recorded more than 15 vulture deaths linked to poisoning, often associated with human-wildlife conflict. Because vultures feed on carcasses, poison can spread quickly through populations, making rapid early detection critical.

By sharing our findings with regional partners and wildlife authorities, monitoring efforts were strengthened across the region. This vigilance proved crucial when a poisoning incident involving four lions and 11 vultures was detected and quickly contained through coordinated action — demonstrating the importance of research, technology and collaboration in turning knowledge into rapid conservation action.

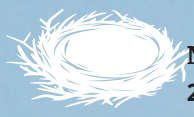
THE SENTINEL NETWORK: WHEN VULTURES HELP PROTECT COMMUNITIES | One of the most powerful tools in our vulture conservation work is a GPS tracking network that monitors the movements of tagged birds across the landscape. When several vultures gather — or "cluster" — in one place, it often signals a carcass on the ground. Each cluster becomes an important piece of intelligence, helping us understand what is happening in the ecosystem.

This year we deployed 13 new tracking devices, bringing our active network to 17 tagged vultures. By following their movements, our team investigated 119 cluster alerts, which led to the discovery of 44 wildlife carcasses. These early detections allow us to respond quickly to potential threats such as poisoning, disease outbreaks, or poaching, often before they can spread further.

In one case, clusters led us to elephant carcasses near farming communities where testing confirmed anthrax. Because the issue was identified quickly, veterinarians were able to launch an emergency response, vaccinating 510 cattle in the surrounding area. For our team, this moment demonstrated the true value of the sentinel network. By tracking vultures, the ecosystem's natural scavengers, we can detect environmental threats early, protect wildlife, and help safeguard the livelihoods of local communities.

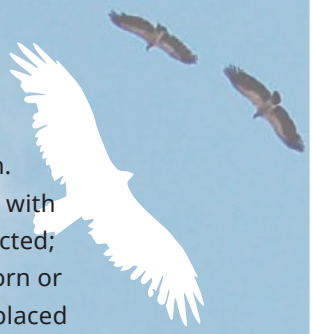
Vulture Conservation **Highlights 2025**

Breeding colony monitoring:
92 vulture nests monitored.



Nest identification:
20 new vulture nests identified.

Habitat protection:
147 nesting trees across three vulture colonies monitored for elephant damage and overall health.
50 nesting trees protected with mesh wire: **20** newly protected; **20** maintained (repair of torn or damaged wire); and **10** replaced due to stolen wire.



Vulture movement ecology:
13 new GPS devices deployed on white-backed vultures (with eight currently active) bringing the total to **17** devices actively deployed and monitored on white-backed vultures.

Cluster investigations:
119 clusters investigated leading to the identification of **44** wildlife carcasses within the operating landscape.

Vulture disease surveillance:
Blood samples, breast feathers, and oral and cloacal swabs collected from **12** white-backed vultures for lead and avian influenza analysis.

Securing Zambezi National Park

In 2025, VFWT worked with government partners to agree on an implementation plan for the Securing Zambezi National Park project. With the support and trust of our donors, we designed a conservation security initiative that is both locally grounded and nationally approved.

Over the course of the year, the project progressed through key milestones: securing government authorisation, building operational partnerships, and raising the initial funding needed to begin implementation. This early investment from supporters made it possible to move from planning into action, demonstrating how philanthropic commitment can unlock long-term conservation capacity on the ground.

The first step was people. In the program's inaugural phase, 20 rangers were trained to prepare for the realities of protecting wildlife in challenging environments. The curriculum included first aid, operational security, safe weapons handling, and working in landscapes where dangerous game is present. Rangers were also trained in the core disciplines that underpin effective conservation protection: fieldcraft, patrolling, navigation, communication, and tactical awareness.

Equally important, the training emphasised human rights and professional conduct, ensuring that rangers are not only capable guardians of wildlife, but also trusted stewards of the landscapes and communities they work alongside.

We look forward to fully expanding this project in 2025 with the development of a secure operations and training facility for both the senior management team and rangers. Significant investment will be made in building capacity of the rangers and operations team on using a range of technological tools to improve efficiency and strengthen security across the park.

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK | Stretching just over **550 km² along the upper Zambezi River,** just upstream of Victoria Falls, Zambezi National Park is one of Zimbabwe's **most biologically rich and strategically important protected areas.** It forms a key ecological link within the **Kavango–Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA)** — the largest transboundary conservation landscape on Earth, spanning five countries: Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Photo: Matt Blair | Conservation Connect Films

Conservation Education

In 2025, VFWT's conservation education initiatives reached more than 1,600 children and community members, strengthening environmental awareness while supporting academic success. Eco-Club participants continued to excel, consistently achieving top national examination results and demonstrating the programme's role in building confidence and opportunity.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH CONSERVATION EDUCATION | Since the introduction of Eco-Clubs, learner performance in National Examinations has consistently outperformed that of non-members, contributing positively to overall school pass rates. In 2025, Brightness, an Eco-Club member from Monde, achieved 8 units (a top-tier result), ranking second in the entire district. Despite a challenging background, she demonstrated strong commitment to both her studies and Eco-Club activities, often supporting her peers during sessions. Her achievement reflects the broader impact of conservation education — building confidence, strengthening academic outcomes, and creating opportunities for young people to succeed.

Conservation Education Highlights 2025

• In 2025, **45** conservation education sessions were delivered across **27** rural schools, **8** urban schools, and **11** community groups.

• A total of **1,676** participants were reached through conservation education and awareness initiatives, including **1,011** children and **665** community members, including engagement in the elephant interaction programme.

• Over **75%** of Eco-Club and Conservation Club members achieved **10** units or fewer in the National Examinations (where lower scores indicate stronger academic performance; exams are graded out of **45** units) — demonstrating consistently high achievement among programme participants. Alex from Victoria Falls was the top performer with **7** units.

Human Wildlife Conflict

Addressing human-wildlife conflict requires strong community participation and local leadership. VFWT recognises that effective wildlife conservation must also safeguard rural livelihoods, and that communities need to see tangible benefits from wildlife-based opportunities.

We work in close collaboration with Rural District Councils, traditional leaders, and local communities to develop coordinated responses to conflict. These partnerships strengthen decision-making, promote transparency, and support more effective collective action in reducing conflict incidents. Our long-term goal is to support communities to take increasing ownership of human-wildlife conflict mitigation. By building local capacity and leadership, communities will be better equipped to coexist with wildlife and manage their natural resources, including developing community-led initiatives such as local guardians or volunteers to respond to conflict.

INTRODUCING MIMI, OUR FIRST FEMALE COMMUNITY GUARDIAN | VFWT expanded the Community Guardian program into two additional wards after monitoring revealed increasing hyena conflict in areas previously outside the programme's reach. Missozi Mwanza ("Mimi") became the first female guardian to join the team, challenging perceptions that conflict mitigation is work only for men. Working closely with village leaders, she has mobilised farmers to strengthen livestock management practices, particularly daily kraaling and improving traditional livestock enclosures. Her work has highlighted that many livestock losses occur when animals are left outside kraals or kept in weak structures. By raising awareness and supporting farmers to adopt better husbandry practices, Mimi is helping communities reduce livestock losses and strengthen their ability to protect their livelihoods.

"By building local capacity and leadership, communities will be better equipped to coexist with wildlife and manage their natural resources."

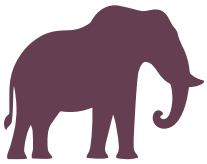
Photo: Matt Blair | Conservation Connect Films

VFWT Eco-herders stand on the front line of coexistence — herding cattle, safeguarding herd health, and reporting dangers that threaten livestock, people and wildlife.

CHILI STRINGS BRING RELIEF TO FARMERS IN HWANGE WEST | In Hwange West, a simple, low-cost solution is helping farmers protect their crops from elephants. Chilli strings — cloth soaked in chilli and hung around fields — have reduced crop-raiding incidents from 27 in 2024 to 19 in 2025. What began as a small trial has become a shared, community-led practice, with farmers working together to install and maintain the deterrents across neighboring fields. As confidence in the method has grown, farmers no longer need to guard their fields overnight, reducing risk and fatigue while allowing more time for other work and to spend with their families. As one farmer explained, "The only things that I worry about now are adequate rains and pests such as fall armyworm and locusts. The chilli strings have removed the burden of guarding crops overnight."

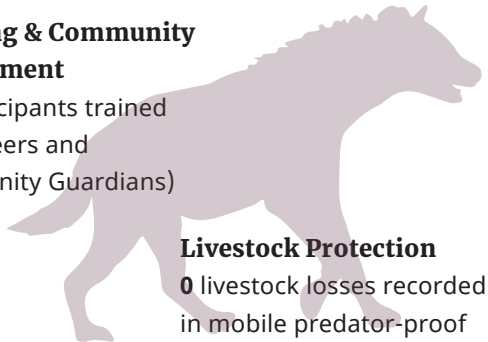
THE POWER OF FARMER-TO-FARMER LEARNING IN JABULANI VILLAGE | In Mvuthu village, farmers participating in the Herding for Health pilot began working collectively by combining herds for grazing, fertilising fields with livestock dung, and using mobile bomas for night kraaling. Despite grazing in predator rich areas they recorded improved crop yields and no livestock losses to predators. Seeing these results, VFWT facilitated farmer-to-farmer exchanges with neighboring Jabulani village, where livestock depredation had been increasing. Learning directly from fellow farmers encouraged Jabulani farmers to adopt similar practices, including collective herding and safer grazing strategies. As participation grew, cooperation strengthened and livestock losses declined, demonstrating how farmer-led knowledge sharing can accelerate practical solutions to human-wildlife conflict.

Human-Wildlife Conflict Highlights 2025



Incident Monitoring
260 human–wildlife conflict (HWC) incidents reported

Training & Community Engagement
49 participants trained (volunteers and Community Guardians)

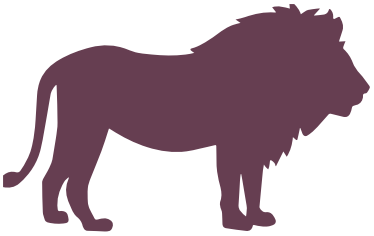


Livestock Protection
0 livestock losses recorded in mobile predator-proof bomas (Jan–Dec 2025)

Early Warning Systems
56 early warning alerts issued

Patrol Effort
- **2,788** patrols conducted
- **22,346** km covered
- **8,705** km² monitored

Conflict Prevention
33 lion chases conducted to avert conflict



Mitigation Measures
- **6** strategies implemented:
- Mobile bomas
- Strengthened kraals
- Early warning systems
- Predator lights
- Community Guardians
- Eco-Herders

Community Development & Livelihoods

In 2025, VFWT's Community Development Programme advanced holistic landscape restoration while strengthening livelihoods through integrated, non-lethal interventions. Key activities included multi-stakeholder platforms, participatory three-zone mapping, rotational grazing, and professional herding to improve rangeland management. Strategic partnerships with Commonland, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and Maliasili supported capacity building and knowledge exchange.

The programme also enhanced community resilience through DAP-and Rotary-funded water infrastructure, improving food security and reducing human-wildlife conflict. Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)-supported training further empowered communities — especially women — with technical and financial skills to diversify incomes, contributing to sustainable livelihoods, improved biodiversity, and strengthened coexistence between people, livestock, and wildlife.

Community Livelihoods **Highlights 2025**

Grazing & Livestock Management

- **10** Grazing Area Committees established (managing 13 bomas across 243 km²)
- **2,196** cattle in **13** bomas participating across 7 wards
- **186** cattle managed under pilot herding systems in two wards (**33** farmers)

Skills & Training

- **86** farmers trained in hay bale and nutritional brick production
- **20** women trained in sisal and palm product production and financial literacy

Water & Infrastructure

- **3** boreholes drilled, refurbished, or solarised
- **2** livestock water troughs constructed
- **2** fodder/vegetable gardens established

Animal Health

1,629 cattle treated (dipped and vaccinated against major diseases)

Coordination & Governance

1 multi-stakeholder landscape management working group established

Alice Tshuma, Musenyika Village

▲ **WATER IS LIFE |** For years, families in Musenyika Village in Hwange District relied on an aging and unreliable borehole, forcing women and children to walk up to 4.5 kilometers each day to collect water. This reduced time for school, weakened household health and food security, and placed strain on livestock.

With support from Australia's Official Development Assistance through the Direct Aid Program (DAP), VFWT drilled and commissioned a new borehole which now provides clean reliable water to 52 households. The intervention also included a livestock drinking trough and the establishment of a two-hectare community garden, improving water access for both people and animals while strengthening local food production.

Having a reliable water supply has already transformed daily life in the village. Children are now able to attend school more consistently, while residents spend less time collecting water and more time focusing on farming and family wellbeing. A woman-led nutrition and fodder garden involving 25 households is producing drought-tolerant crops for both food and livestock feed, improving nutrition and resilience to climate shocks. As the first harvest approaches, families are preparing to sell surplus produce, creating new sources of income and strengthening long-term livelihoods in the community.

As one young resident, Alice Tshuma, explained, "Now water is nearby, we no longer travel far. I can go to school every day and the garden will provide vegetables for the family. We look forward to selling the excess vegetables, which will give my parents more income." Her experience reflects a wider change for children in the community, particularly for girls, whose access to education has improved as water availability has eased household burdens.

HERDING FOR HEALTH | The Herding for Health initiative, implemented by the VFWT, supports rural farmers to adopt regenerative livestock management that improves livelihoods while restoring the landscape. By combining traditional knowledge with practical scientific approaches, farmers organise through Grazing Area Committees and trained eco-herders to manage livestock more effectively.

Herds are rotated between crop fields in the dry season and rangelands in the wet season, while improved veterinary care, supplementary feeding, and coordinated grazing strengthen herd health and productivity. These practices reduce livestock losses to predators, restore degraded grazing areas, and enable farmers to produce wildlife-friendly beef linked to tourism markets in Victoria Falls, creating new income opportunities.

Following a successful pilot phase, the program has transitioned to full community ownership, demonstrating its sustainability. Farmers now contribute financially to pay eco-herders and support operational costs, and are investing in shared infrastructure such as calf corrals to strengthen herd management. Additionally, livestock are kraaled on crop fields during the dry season, improving soil fertility and increasing agricultural yields.

For farmers like Hlengiwe Sibanda from Kachechete Ward, these changes are already delivering results. Hlengiwe harvested vegetables from her crop field worth USD 30, helping to cover her children's school fees, and earned an additional USD 15 through baking using skills gained in financial literacy and food processing training. With other women in her group, she plans to scale production and increase household income.

Through Herding for Health, villagers like Hlengiwe Sibanda (above) from Kachechete Ward are restoring their land, strengthening livestock production, and building more resilient and self-sustaining rural livelihoods.

Financials

Income:

Grants	US$ 554,447
Tourism	US$ 76,059
Events	US$ 45,009
Unrestricted	US$ 368,030
Other	US$ 109,450
Restricted	US$ 236,050
Total Consolidated Income	**US$ 1,389,045**

Expenses:

Wildlife Research:	9%
Rescue and Rehab:	5%
Community Development & Livelihoods:	19%
General Operating Expenses:	18%
Capital Expenditure:	13%
Countering Wildlife Crime:	14%
Wildlife Disease & Forensics Laboratory:	12%
Other:	10%

Illustration: Farai Wallace

Looking Ahead

Looking ahead to 2026, we do so with deep gratitude for the donors and partners whose commitment has brought the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust to a strong and hopeful position. Your support has enabled us to grow our capacity, strengthen partnerships, and build the foundations necessary for long-term conservation impact. As we move into the coming year, we remain focused on translating that investment into tangible results for wildlife, ecosystems, and communities across the landscape.

A major priority in 2026 will be scaling our Securing Zambezi National Park initiative. With donor support, we will open a new operations room that will serve as a coordination hub for protected area management. Alongside this, we will install and expand digital technologies and resources to enhance monitoring, decision-making, and rapid response capabilities for park management teams. These investments will strengthen our collective ability to safeguard this globally important landscape and ensure conservation actions are informed, efficient, and effective.

Our Wildlife Disease & Forensics Laboratory will also undergo important upgrades in 2026. The facility will be renovated to align with international standards for wildlife forensic science, strengthening our ability to support wildlife crime investigations and contribute credible scientific evidence to enforcement efforts. In parallel, the laboratory will pursue innovative genetics work to support black rhino conservation, applying advanced techniques that will inform management decisions, strengthen breeding programs, and help secure the long-term viability of this iconic species.

Complementing this work, our Countering Wildlife Crime programme will deepen collaboration with partners across both the local and transboundary landscape, bringing together law enforcement agencies, conservation organisations, and government partners to more effectively disrupt wildlife trafficking networks.

In 2026 we will also expand efforts that directly benefit the communities who share this landscape with wildlife. Programmes focused on reducing human-wildlife conflict will strengthen livestock protection measures, helping families safeguard their animals while reducing retaliatory harm to predators. Our work with women's groups will focus on building practical skills and improving access to markets so that sustainable livelihoods can grow and thrive. These initiatives help ensure that conservation delivers meaningful benefits for local people and fosters long-term coexistence.

Our research teams will also address emerging challenges, including recent losses of lions and vultures across the landscape. The end of 2025 saw a significant decline in vulture populations during the breeding season, alongside increasing regional lion losses. Working with partners, we will conduct in-depth assessments to understand the drivers of these declines, alongside scientific surveys to better understand the use and movement of lion products and other wildlife products.

Finally, we will continue investing in the long-term strength of our organisation. Plans for the coming year include constructing a new veterinary surgery to enhance our capacity to care for wildlife and respond to emergencies. At the same time, we will invest in strengthening our own team through training, mentorship, and thoughtful succession planning to ensure that VFWT remains resilient and effective for years to come.

None of this progress would be possible without the partnership and generosity of our supporters. We are deeply grateful for the role you play in helping turn ambition into lasting conservation impact.

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Photo: Oscar Whitfield