



Wilderness Trust's US\$100K Impact Challenge for Conservation

Do you have any ideas for innovative ways to help boost human-wildlife coexistence in Africa's wilderness areas – or know of a project that needs help implementing these solutions? Perhaps the [Wilderness Impact Challenge](#) can help... with a prize of US\$100,000 on offer?

The leading safari operator Wilderness is looking to support solutions to some of Africa's pressing conservation challenges, and its latest initiative opens up the discussion to anyone with innovative ideas that could make a big difference.

Based on Wilderness' three pillars – Educate, Empower and Protect – this year's Wilderness Impact Challenge is inviting proposals that focus on improving human-wildlife co-existence and strengthening wildlife security. Open to entrants from across the world, it seeks ideas such as early-warning systems, eco-friendly barriers and community-driven conflict resolution.

Entries close on 28 February, though, so get your suggestions in (or encourage those you feel this could benefit to do so). Finalists will be announced on 14 March and the winner later that month. (Image credit Teagan Cunniffe / Wilderness)

[Learn more here](#), or [watch an overview here](#).

Every picture tells a story

When Prague-based photographic tour operator Roman Baláz got in touch, we asked him to share six of his favourite images, and tell us what they mean to him...

(All pictures below copyright Roman Baláz)



Silhouette

During the migration in the Maasai Mara in July 2024, my guide Antony and I set off early with the goal of photographing the wildebeest at sunrise. The cool morning air was filled with a sense of anticipation as we made our way to a vantage point overlooking the plains. In the faint pre-dawn light, the silhouettes of the herd were already visible. Numbering in their thousands, they were on the move, their synchronised steps stirring up a veil of dust that sparkled in the warm sunlight.

As the sun began its slow ascent, the scenery transformed into a golden dream. The first rays of light broke through the morning mist, illuminating the dewy grass and casting long, dramatic shadows. The scene was magical, their pounding hooves mixing with their deep calls to create a wild symphony. We positioned ourselves carefully, to capture the movement of the herds and also the interplay of light and shadow that brought the moment to life.

Photographing the wildebeests during this golden hour was an unforgettable experience. It wasn't just about taking pictures; it was about feeling part of something far greater – a timeless migration that has shaped the rhythm of life in the Mara-Serengeti for generations. That morning, as the sun rose higher and the plains came alive, I realised that every photo I take is a story of resilience and instinct – and the raw beauty of Africa.



River crossing

After 12 long days and countless hours of waiting – seven-to-nine hours each day at the same spot – and just when it seemed our efforts might go unrewarded, we finally witnessed a moment of African theatre that can only be experienced here in the Mara, in the heart of the wild.

Before our eyes, two worlds collided: the unfiltered beauty of nature and the relentless struggle for survival that defines this breathtaking yet unforgiving land. In the scene, a crocodile, perhaps waiting patiently for this moment for an entire year, unleashed its primal instinct as a predator. Meanwhile, a zebra – emblematic of determination and hope – fought to cross the Mara River, a vital lifeline yet a perilous passage.

The photograph I captured is testament to the cycle of life, the power of nature and the daily reality of a land that reveals its true essence in moments like these. It's a memory of a place where beauty and brutality coexist, where every sunrise brings a new story. It is also proof that patience and immersion in this world, even for a fleeting instant, offer a reward that is unparalleled.



Leopard

For 11 years, a leopard named Shujaa has roamed the Maasai Mara. He is unbelievably large, almost the size of a jaguar, and reigns over his territory so firmly that no other leopard dares set foot there. I had one goal: to photograph him up close, and at sunrise – an ambition I had just 14 days to fulfill. Each day, my guide and I observed him, from a distance and sometimes quite near, yet the ideal frame remained elusive.

Shujaa revealed himself in many different ways: lounging in the branches of acacias, blending into the dense undergrowth, or striding across the savanna with a regal confidence. But whenever the early morning light cast its warm glow, he would sense our presence and retreat into the shadows. We kept telling ourselves that tomorrow would bring another chance, yet time was slipping away.

Then, on the thirteenth day – just when I began to worry we might never succeed – we finally caught the moment we'd been waiting for. Shujaa emerged from the valley where he'd spent the night, just as the first golden rays lit up the horizon. For a brief instant, he

as the first golden rays lit up the horizon. For a brief instant, he paused in the dawn light, allowing me to capture every detail of his formidable size, the intricate rosettes of his coat and the commanding aura that sets him apart.

That one morning was worth all our patience. In that split second, my camera preserved the essence of the Maasai Mara's true king — a majestic, untamed spirit shining in the glow of the rising sun.



Lioness with cubs

One sunny morning, we waited at a spot where we knew a lioness was hiding her three cubs, which were just three weeks old. After several hours of patient observation, the lioness decided to move her cubs to a safer location. We followed her at a respectful distance, photographing the entire journey across the open savannah, which lasted about two hours. Throughout the move, she carefully surveyed her surroundings, ensuring her little ones stayed out of harm's way.

It was a rare privilege to watch and document this intimate moment of maternal care in the wild. Such experiences are precisely what makes the Maasai Mara a place you find yourself returning to over and over again.



Cheetahs growing up

In the Maasai Mara there is a remarkable cheetah named Nashipaj, who managed to raise four cubs all the way into their 'teenage'

who managed to raise four cubs all the way into their 'teenage' phase. One morning, we found them just as they were waking up. Nashipaj went out to hunt, leaving the cubs on their own – and in that moment, I managed to capture a beautiful photo of all four of them together.

The savannah was bathed in the soft, orange glow of the rising sun. The cubs started off by lazily stretching, clearly enjoying a few moments of peace without their mother's watchful gaze. Then one cub pounced on another, trying to nip at its tail. The others quickly joined in, and the tranquil dawn turned into a wild game of chase. They raced around in the tall grass, eventually gathering together on a small mound. Just as the sun's first rays cut through the grass, they sat close together, momentarily resting and curiously surveying the surroundings.



Rhinos on the move

Sadly, only around 80 rhinos remain in the Maasai Mara. Rangers guard them around the clock, protecting these magnificent creatures from poaching and other threats. Thanks to their efforts, it is still possible to admire these iconic animals in these grasslands.

One afternoon, my guide Antony and I came across a female rhino accompanied by her inquisitive calf. It was fascinating to watch the young one take cues from its mother, carefully mimicking her every movement and reacting to her subtle signals. According to the ranger who was with us, this particular female is one of the older matriarchs in the area. Despite her experience, she remained ever vigilant, simultaneously exuding a calm yet protective presence for her calf.

Then, unexpectedly, the mother and calf suddenly began running towards our vehicle. It was both exhilarating and slightly alarming, but I managed to keep my camera steady and capture a series of shots as they approached. Just when it felt like they might keep coming, they veered off as if sensing we posed no real threat. In that instant, I held my breath – keenly aware of how rare and fragile these encounters are.

As they wandered off into the distance. I was left with a profound sense of awe. It struck me to imagine a Mara teeming with more rhinos, as it once did, rather than just the few dozen that remain. The work of the rangers suddenly seemed even more vital, ensuring these animals have the best chance possible for survival. The photographs I took of that mother and her calf will forever remind

me of the beauty and vulnerability of nature – and of our shared responsibility to protect it.

Roman Baláz is the founder of [Private Safari Travel](#) and [Foto Safari Afrika](#). He also established the [Roman Wildlife Foundation](#) which supports conservation projects across Africa.