



Reteti Elephant Sanctuary

ANNUAL REPORT | 2024

AFRICA'S FIRST COMMUNITY-OWNED
ELEPHANT SANCTUARY, SITUATED IN
NORTHERN KENYA

WE RESCUE, TO RELEASE



PHOTO BY THIGE NJUGUNA

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

It is with great pride and gratitude that I invite you to reflect on our achievements throughout 2024. It was another incredible year for us, marked by unwavering commitment, dedication, and the incredible efforts of our team of 110 keepers – who have touched the lives of communities across three counties: Samburu, Isiolo, and Marsabit.

Apart from rescuing one baby elephant in 2024, we also welcomed many other species into our care, including zebras, Somali ostriches, and gerenuks.

HIGHLIGHTS IN 2024

1. Expanded the sanctuary: This means we're now able to accommodate a broader range of species – and ensure that we keep providing a safe haven for wildlife in need.

2. Our 4th elephant rewilding: In a historic and unique achievement for Reteti, we successfully reintroduced 13 elephants back into their natural ecosystem – marking a major milestone in our ongoing conservation efforts.

3. Kelele's remarkable survival: Kelele, a magical survivor, overcame a severe injury incurred during his first week in the wild while traversing rocky and mountainous terrain – a testament to the resilience of the animals in our care.

4. Empowering women: The sanctuary purchased goat milk from 1,280 women through our Milk to Market Program – providing these women with an income and, by extension, uplifting entire communities. At Reteti, we firmly believe that when women thrive, we all thrive.

5. Opening our Visitor Centre: We proudly unveiled an incredible and educational Visitor Centre, which not only highlights Reteti's work, but also promotes tourism across Northern Kenya. This centre serves as a blueprint for raising awareness and fostering conservation efforts throughout the region.

6. Visit by President Ruto: We were deeply honoured to host Kenya's president, His Excellency Dr. William Ruto, at Reteti. This visit underscores that Reteti is not only a community-led initiative, but also recognised on both national and international platforms.



A LETTER FROM OUR MANAGER, PETER LENASALIA

We are immensely grateful for our partnership with The Sarara Foundation (TSF) and their incredible community of donors, as well as to Save the Elephants (STE) for their guidance and monitoring, and the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance for their research and support. It takes a village, they say, and all of these contributions play a crucial role in maintaining the success of this pioneering project.

“ Namunyak’s community has been invaluable in maintaining this shared project – and we extend our deepest thanks to them. ”

As management and keepers, we are committed to maintaining high standards and continuing to innovate as we take Reteti to even greater heights. We are deeply thankful to our donors for making this progress possible. We invite you to visit Reteti and witness the incredible work we are doing firsthand.

Thank you for your continued support.

Peter Lenasalia



WHERE WE ARE LOCATED

Namunyak Community Conservancy

Reteti Elephant Sanctuary is located in Namunyak Community Conservancy in Northern Kenya – home to the nomadic Samburu people.

The Conservancy is a pioneering model of community-based conservation. Spanning more than 850,000 acres, it is home to a diverse array of wildlife, including elephants, lions, and endangered species like the Grévy's zebra.

The conservancy was established to protect these vital ecosystems while simultaneously supporting the Indigenous Samburu people, ensuring that conservation and community development go hand in hand.



OUR JOURNEY OF HOPE

The Reteti Elephant Sanctuary Community United for Elephants is a project like no other. This level of community ownership and management has unlocked a profound movement across Kenya and beyond, and has quickly become a flagship model for modern, community-based conservation alongside Sarara and Namunyak Conservancy. It has become a symbolic program for Kenya as a nation, and is charting a new way forward for the environmental and social development space that's reversing trends – seeing wildlife returning, populations increasing, and household-level livelihoods dramatically improving.

As co-founders of Reteti alongside the Namunyak community, we could not be prouder of the incredible success of this project, and it gives us hope for the future of elephants in this wild region and beyond. As the operating partner to Reteti, The Sarara Foundation is excited to further enhance the amazing impact of the sanctuary – supporting best-in-class elephant care, animal rescue, wider landscape-level conservation, social development initiatives, and further uplifting Reteti's voice as global advocates for Elephant Conservation and Indigenous peoples.

Jeremy Bastard & Katie Rowe

CEO AND DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION, THE SARARA FOUNDATION



2024 OVERVIEW



33

ELEPHANTS IN
RETETI'S CARE



110

STAFF MEMBERS
FROM THE
SAMBURU
COMMUNITY



13

ELEPHANTS
RELEASED IN
NAMUNYAK

President
Ruto
visited



One elephant
rescue in
2024

& VARIOUS OTHER
SPECIES LIKE GIRAFFES
AND SOMALI OSTRICHES



ONE RELEASED
ELEPHANT
SUCCESSFULLY
BROUGHT BACK TO
SANCTUARY TO
HEAL FROM INJURY



1,280

MILK MAMAS
SUPPORTING
THE ELEPHANTS



15

MOTORBIKE
DRIVERS
SUPPORTING
MILK MAMAS



Opened
Visitor
Centre

WHO WE ARE

On a fast-developing continent where space is at a premium, the Indigenous Samburu are working to preserve the region's vast and pristine landscapes, as well as their age-old tradition of harmonious coexistence with wildlife.

As the world's first Indigenous community-owned African elephant sanctuary, Reteti was established by the Samburu community in 2016 to care for orphaned elephant calves. The sanctuary's ultimate mission is to release all of the elephants in their care back into the wild. The facility is the result of a widely recognised and expanding grassroots conservation movement driven by communities across this key region – a movement that is growing new economies, transforming lives, and helping to conserve natural resources.

Many elephant calves are orphaned every year in Northern Kenya due to drought, man-made wells, human-wildlife conflict, and maternal mortality. The sanctuary was established in response to urgent requests from the local community to rescue these orphans and bring them to safety.

In the past, it was difficult and expensive to rescue orphaned elephant calves in such a remote region, and local communities saw little value in raising the alarm. Today, with Reteti, there's a strong desire to assist orphaned calves and help them remain in the landscape of their birth.

Reteti's keepers are all recruited from within Namunyak Community Conservancy. They are all part of the Samburu community, which has lived alongside wildlife for hundreds of years and deeply respect the elephants with whom they share the land and its resources.



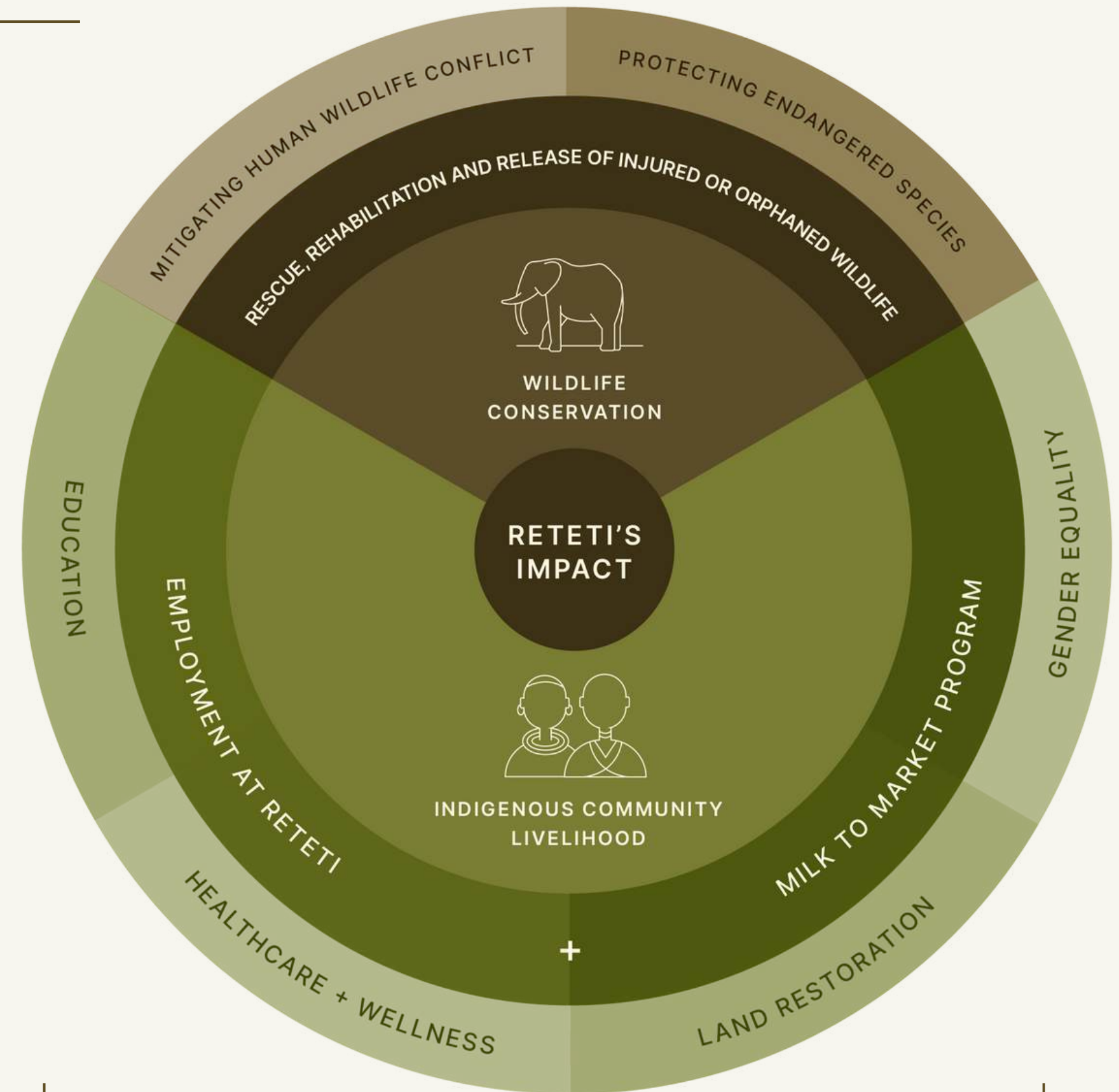
OUR MISSION

Community-based Conservation

At Reteti, local communities are taking care of the elephants with whom they share the landscape. Wild elephants can be a huge threat to humans on foot, yet the Samburu have developed an extraordinary relationship with elephants that has existed and been maintained for generations. Traditional stories tell of a time when elephants and the Samburu were part of the same family.

Benefits from elephant conservation flow to local people in the form of education, healthcare, and employment. Security, jobs, and extra income have helped to bring increased stability to the landscape.

A growing truth across Northern Kenya is that community-based conservation may be the only way large wildlife and nomadic pastoralists can truly coexist. Reteti Elephant Sanctuary is at the forefront of this movement – one that protects wildlife not just from people, but for them. In that way, Reteti is as much about people as it is about elephants.



CLIMATE RISK

Most of Africa's remaining biodiversity is co-habited by wildlife and Indigenous Peoples. Preserving this biodiversity is key to turning around the climate crisis.



NEWS ON THE GROUND

Milk to Market Program

NURTURING HOPE AND GROWTH

Launched in 2021 with just one village supplying 160 litres of goat milk daily, the Milk to Market Program has become a transformative force in Namunyak Community Conservancy.

In 2024, the Milk to Market Program continued its remarkable growth and impact within Namunyak Community Conservancy. Now involving **1,280 Milk Mamas** across 21 manyattas (homesteads), the initiative collectively provides **680 litres** of locally sourced goat milk each day to Reteti Elephant Sanctuary, generating a total payout of **KSh.51,376,633 (US\$398,000)** in 2024 alone.

The addition of nearly **500 new participants** in the last 12 months strengthened economic resilience for numerous Samburu families. More women opened their first bank accounts, and improved animal husbandry reduced livestock diseases, ensuring a stable, high-quality milk supply. Amid challenging conditions, the boda-boda (motorbike driver) team successfully transported milk along dusty roads, but the need for upgraded and additional motorbikes remains a key focus.



One major highlight was the development of **new enterprises**, including a goat milk soap-making initiative. This venture not only offers an additional income stream for the women but also promotes sustainability and diversified revenue sources beyond milk sales.

Community-led rangeland restoration efforts – supported by the Eco Rangers – expanded, with almost 9,000 bunds dug to conserve rainwater and reseed grasslands, creating **healthier ecosystems** for livestock and wildlife alike.

Looking ahead to 2025, goals include enhanced infrastructure (like pasteurisers, solar power, and new motorbikes), more comprehensive training on rangeland management, and scaling milk-based products to broader markets.

With each success, the Milk to Market Program continues strengthening livelihoods, protecting precious ecosystems, and demonstrating the profound impact of community-driven conservation





PHOTO BY AMI VITALE

NEWS ON THE GROUND

We rescue, to release.

OUR RELEASE HERD'S PERMANENT RETURN TO THE WILD!

One of the most momentous achievements at Reteti Elephant Sanctuary in 2024 was the **release of 13 orphaned elephants** into Namunyak Community Conservancy. This fourth release marks a major milestone in Reteti's ongoing commitment to rescuing, rehabilitating, and returning orphaned elephants to their ancestral homeland. Each calf's journey began with a dramatic rescue – from falling into a well or becoming separated from their herds during drought – and culminated in a carefully planned reintroduction process.

The newly established release boma served as a safe, transitional space. Here, keepers prepared the elephants for the wild by gradually minimising bottle-feeds and leading extended bushwalks that allowed them to interact with their future ecosystem. The emotional day of release was filled with anticipation as the gates opened, and the elephants stepped confidently into a world where they would **forge new relationships with wild herds**.



Reteti's team, in close collaboration with Save the Elephants and the local Samburu community, continue to monitor the group through their GPS tracking collars using EarthRanger and on-the-ground monitoring. These efforts help assess the elephants' adaptation, health, and integration with other wildlife. Every successful day they spend in the wild reinforces **the power of community-led conservation**, demonstrating that people and wildlife can truly thrive together.

For the Reteti keepers, each release is a deeply emotional triumph. Watching the elephants reclaim their place in the wild symbolises hope, renewal, and a brighter future. It stands as a powerful testament to the sanctuary's core mission: to rescue, rehabilitate, and ultimately release – so elephants can be truly wild once more.



The Washington Post

Orphaned as babies, these elephants returned to the wild amid bittersweet tears.

By Ami Vitale and Rael Ombuor

[READ ARTICLE](#)





NEWS ON THE GROUND

The newly unveiled Reteti Visitor Centre

Officially inaugurated by Kenya's President, His Excellency Dr. William Ruto, on 8 November 2024, the newly unveiled Reteti Visitor Centre is the culmination of four years of planning by The Sarara Foundation, Namunyak Community Conservancy, Save the Elephants, and MASS Design Group. Principally funded by Jody Allen and the Wild Lives Foundation, the centre provides a dynamic, hands-on experience for visitors of all ages.

Nestled near the foothills of the breathtaking Mathews Mountain Range, it vividly portrays the **plight of Northern Kenya's wild elephant herds, while highlighting the unwavering efforts to restore their numbers and regenerate the rangelands.**

Mindfully curated to encompass the meaningful work of the sanctuary's passionate team of Samburu keepers, researchers, and rangers, it's a testimony to generations of coexistence between the area's Indigenous people and the wildlife with whom they share this land.



The centre's design was **inspired by traditional Samburu bomas** – harnessing natural materials, including elephant dung as the main ingredient in the floorwork. During construction, the local contractors often had visits from curious four-footed bystanders, including giraffes and elephant orphans from Reteti.



WHAT IS A BOMA?

Specially constructed stockades that are typically circular and made from natural materials like wood and thatch – which provide temporary enclosures for wildlife to find shelter. Bomas can also serve as a place for rescued animals to sleep, and are perfect for avoiding the harsh midday sun.

Highlights include **interactive exhibits** showcasing elephant tracking, community-led conservation, and the science of rewilding, culminating at Reteti's viewing platform, where visitors can watch and photograph the elephant calves being fed by their keepers. With multilingual displays in English, Kiswahili, and Maa, the Reteti Visitor Centre honours the region's rich cultural diversity – inspiring future conservationists from around the globe.





GLOBAL NEWS

Shop for a cause!

RETETI LAUNCHED AN ONLINE STORE

The store features an exciting range of apparel, lifestyle products, and unique artwork by Karen Laurence-Rowe. **100% of the proceeds supports the sanctuary's orphaned elephants and their Samburu keepers**, who nurture and guide the young calves until they are ready to be released back into the wild.

By wearing or using your Reteti purchases, you **help spread the story of this extraordinary community-owned sanctuary**. Become part of Reteti's extended global family, and let your daily life carry a piece of Namunyak Conservancy's inspiring conservation mission.

[SHOP.RETETI.ORG](https://shop.reteti.org)

Infrastructure enhancements at Reteti

2024 marked a significant phase in infrastructure improvements at Reteti, each contributing to a better environment for our elephants and the surrounding community.



RELEASE SITE

Early 2024, Reteti constructed a new release site in the bush for the successful rewilding of 13 elephants which took place in June of last year. Since then, it has also helped other rescued wildlife – from ostriches to impala – on their journey back into the wild. Beyond boosting Reteti’s capabilities, this key addition stands as a **powerful asset for Namunyak Community Conservancy**, amplifying the region’s collective conservation impact.



NEW CAR AND TRACTOR

Two vital additions in 2024 were a new car for rescues, release herd monitoring, and essential ongoing community engagement, as well as a new tractor for ongoing maintenance at the sanctuary. These vehicles **significantly strengthen Reteti’s capacity** to protect orphaned elephants, foster local partnerships, and ensure safe, well-functioning facilities year-round, further improving daily operations and providing increased logistical support.



UNDERGROUND WATER TANK

Reteti’s newest infrastructure project is a 100,000-litre underground water tank to meet the sanctuary’s evolving needs, from elephant calves to rescued wildlife of all kinds. This vital addition **bolsters water security** and supplements the existing borehole, which has yielded less water than anticipated since 2022, ensuring stable supplies for Reteti’s growing residents.



NEWS ON THE GROUND

Sera's pioneering journey!

At just a week old, Sera was found trapped in a well at Kisima Hamsini. She spent three days alone, and her family eventually abandoned her, prompting a nearby patrol team to call for a rescue. Arriving at Reteti Elephant Sanctuary during the global lockdown in February 2020, she became **the first orphaned calf to receive the newly formulated goat milk**, developed by Reteti's co-founder Katie Rowe. This innovative approach marked a turning point: today, Reteti's goat milk formula supports every elephant orphan at the sanctuary, and it also sustains the 1,280 Milk Mamas who supply it.

Despite her tiny frame, Sera's lively spirit quickly emerged. She bonded deeply with her keepers – particularly Naomi – and became inseparable from fellow orphans Bule and Naisimari. Her wrinkled face and gentle nature bring comfort to younger calves, securing her a special place within the herd. Although small, she displays a calm wisdom that exceeds her age, endearing her to everyone she meets.

Now turning five, **Sera is evolving into a caring leader**, attentively watching over new arrivals to ensure they adjust smoothly. Her journey – beginning in peril and culminating in resilience – embodies Reteti's mission to rescue, rehabilitate, and ultimately release orphaned elephants into the wild.

One day, Sera may follow Kapai's legacy as the sanctuary's next matriarch, nurturing future generations with her unwavering, compassionate presence.

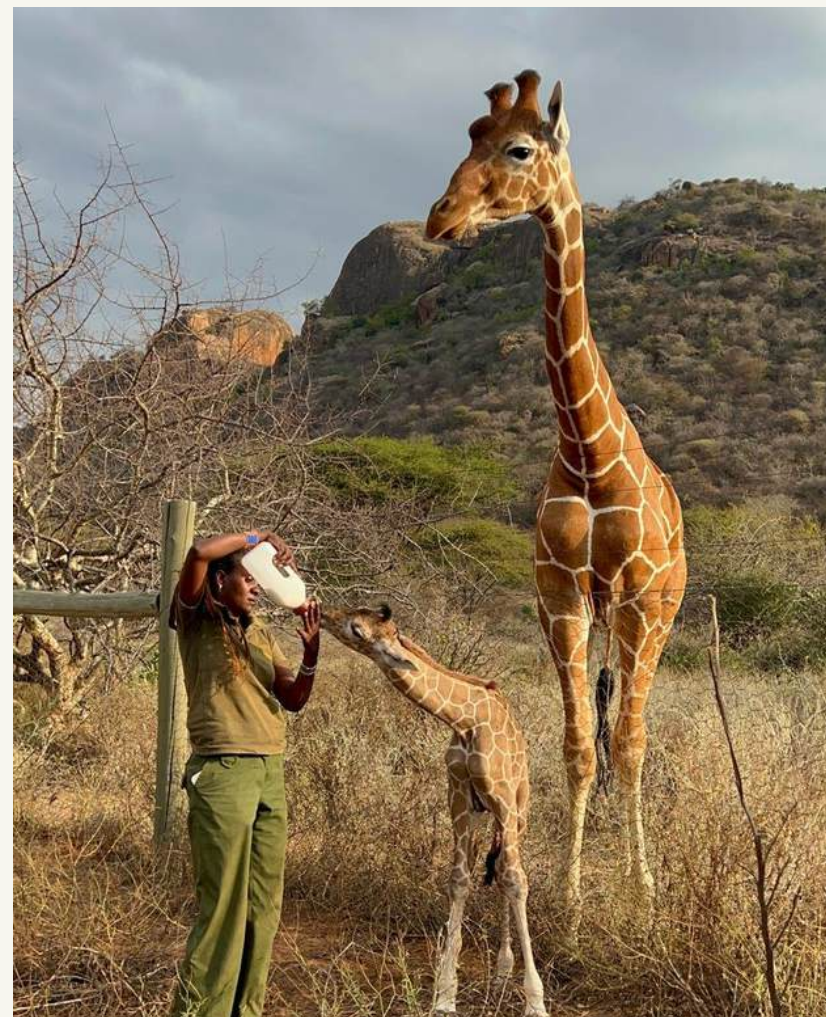
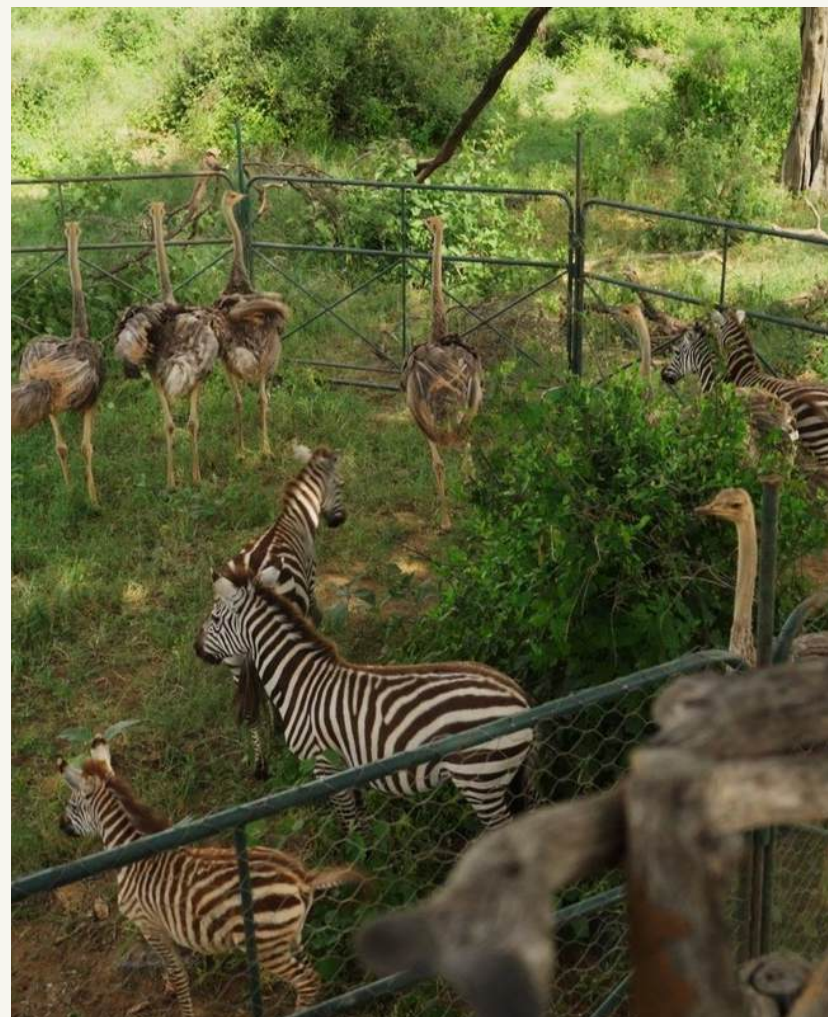


NEWS ON THE GROUND

Beyond elephants

Reteti has long been a safe haven for more than just elephants – offering urgent care and **second chances to a range of orphaned and injured wildlife**. In 2024, the team celebrated the successful release of six Somali ostrich chicks, rescued after being separated from their mothers in the long grass of the Mathews Range. Nurtured at the sanctuary alongside several orphaned Grévy's zebra foals, the ostriches were rewilded near the foot of the mountains in a joyful dash to freedom. Their journey marked another **powerful moment in community-driven conservation**.

Reteti also became home to Leitemu, a five-day-old reticulated giraffe found weak and alone in September. Carefully raised on nutrient-rich camel milk through the Milk to Market Program, he continues to thrive under the attentive care of his keepers. Over the years, Reteti has extended its care to orphaned buffalo, gerenuk, baboons and various antelope – quietly proving, time and again, that **conservation rooted in compassion and local knowledge has the power to restore not only individual animals, but entire ecosystems**.



[READ MORE: OSTRICH RESCUE AND RELEASE](#)

[READ MORE: GIRAFFE RESCUE](#)



The Washington Post

Orphaned as babies, these elephants returned to the wild amid bittersweet tears

By Ami Vitale and Rael Ombuor

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THE HINDU

Reteti Elephant Sanctuary:
Rewilding in Kenya

By Ami Vitale

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Adorama

How Photo Prints Can Help the Planet: Inside Vital
Impacts' Change-Making Work

By Stephanie Vermillion

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KEY CHALLENGES IN 2024

- Intense threats to elephant populations in the region due to the effects of extreme weather conditions.
- Reversing and curbing land degradation.
- Managing human-wildlife conflict.
- The closing of key wildlife corridors as farming activities continue to expand across the continent.
- Increasing competition for natural resources in the face of population growth.

KEY OBJECTIVES IN 2025

- The establishment of a mobile veterinary unit.
- Increasing Reteti Elephant Sanctuary's role as the regional and global advocate for elephant conservation.
- Expand the sanctuary's facilities to keep up with the demand to rehabilitate orphans in need of specialised care on their journey back to the wild.
- Building long-term strategies to secure and maintain Namunyak Community Conservancy's elephant habitat – and helping to prevent incidents where baby elephants become victims in wells.
- Expanding the capacity and efficiency of the Milk to Market Program through additional equipment.



GET INVOLVED

It takes a village to raise a calf

Our team would not be able to rescue, rehabilitate and release these incredible animals if it weren't for your generous donations. Every contribution directly supports hands-on care, around-the-clock feeding, expert veterinary treatment and the resources needed to give these animals a second chance at life.

As we look to the year ahead, your continued support helps us strengthen community-led conservation, protect vital habitats and ensure that more stories like Sera's, Long'uro's and the zebras, ostriches, and more can unfold. Join us in this movement – because when people and wildlife thrive together, the future looks brighter for all.

[DONATE TODAY](#)

[ADOPT AN ELEPHANT](#)

[GIFT A MILK BOTTLE](#)

OUR PARTNERS



ANY QUESTIONS?

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RETETI.ORG

Reteti Elephant Sanctuary works hand in hand with
The Sarara Foundation and Namunyak Community Conservancy



PHOTO BY THIGE NJUGUNA