

HOW TO  
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# RETURNING LIFE TO THE



# WILD

**A special rewilding edition in memory of the late Djala.** Born in the wild and orphaned by poachers, Djala was rescued, brought to Howletts, and returned to the wild 20 years later.

SUMMER 2026

 **THE ASPINALL  
FOUNDATION**  
Registered Charity No. 326567

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## FOREWORD: DJALA'S LEGACY

The story of Djala lies at the very heart of The Aspinall Foundation.

Born in the forests of the Republic of Congo. Orphaned by the bushmeat trade. He was rescued and given a second chance at survival.

In 1984, Djala arrived in the UK, where he joined a gorilla group at Howletts Wild Animal Park under the care of the late John Aspinall. That same year, John founded The Aspinall Foundation.

He would spend much of his life in human care, before achieving something truly extraordinary. In 2013, he was returned to the wild, where he lived free for the final decade of his life.

Observers noted the transformation this meant for him: his coat regained a natural sheen, his behaviours reflected true independence, and he thrived in the environment where he had begun life so many years before.

Sadly, Djala has since passed away at the ripe old age of 42, but his story does not end there.

His legacy lives on in the forests of Batéké Plateau National Park, through his son Djongo and his granddaughter Taali, the world's first wild born gorilla to two captive-born parents.

*Whether Djala directly inspired the creation of The Aspinall Foundation is unknown - but his story undoubtedly helped shape its mission: to return animals to their rightful home in the wild.*

**In this edition of Wildcry we celebrate Djala's life and the rewilding vision he inspired.**

Thanks to your support we are leading the way in returning animals to their natural habitat. Demonstrating that with the right expertise, commitment, and vision, it is possible to restore species to their rightful place in the wild.

Behind every return like Djala's is a story of extraordinary complexity, dedication, and care. That is the story of this edition of Wildcry... a story you make possible.



**Amos Courage**  
Overseas Project Director

# RETURNING LIFE TO THE WILD: UNDERSTANDING REWILDING

Across the world, silence is spreading through once-vibrant ecosystems. Forests stand without their great apes, grasslands lose their grazers, and savannahs are losing their apex predators. Entire ecological systems begin to unravel, quietly, but irreversibly. Yet there is hope.

Through bold, science-led rewilding, The Aspinall Foundation (TAF) is not only protecting endangered species but also returning them to where they belong... the wild.

## A Brief History

Rewilding is a relatively modern conservation approach, but its roots lie in decades of ecological thinking. Its principles build on earlier conservation efforts that sought to protect habitats and species throughout the 20th century. Rewilding differs by going further. Instead of simply preserving what remains, it aims to restore ecosystems to a self-sustaining state.

Early projects demonstrated that species could be successfully reintroduced, but only with meticulous planning and long-term support.

Rewilding is both a science and an art. It involves restoring not just individual species, but entire ecological relationships - predators, prey, vegetation, and the subtle balances that sustain biodiversity.

Rewilding restores biodiversity, strengthens ecosystems, and creates landscapes that can sustain both wildlife and local communities.

## THE ASPINALL FOUNDATION AT THE FOREFRONT

TAF is a world leader in rescuing, rewilding and protecting wild animals and the places they call home. We are unique in our approach and protect more than a million acres of precious wilderness around the world. Some notable highlights include:

- TAF's projects in Central Africa alone help restore vast landscapes, including an area of gorilla habitat the size of Kent on the Batéké Plateau, while monitoring and supporting many reintroduced animals across multiple species around the world.
- Reintroducing over 75 captive, and wild-born gorillas, to the wild and supporting the groundbreaking first wild-born gorilla births to captive-born parents.
- Successfully rewilding black rhinos across Africa to restore wild populations.
- Restoring habitats and populations of some of the most Critically Endangered lemurs in Madagascar.
- Rewilding hundreds of primates in Indonesia to restore populations and protect watersheds.
- Rewilding bison in Romania.
- Becoming the first organisation to ever rewild cheetahs born in the UK.
- Rewilding the first-ever European-born honey badger.



**This is not short-term conservation; it is generational change and it is only possible because of people like you.**

# REWILDING: A SERIOUS UNDERTAKING. PLANNING FOR LIFE *IN THE WILD*

What does it really take to rewild an animal?

Before a single animal moves, years of preparation are needed. This planning phase is one of the most critical and complex elements of rewilding.



## Animal selection: getting it right from the start

Selecting the right individuals is a highly scientific process guided by international standards such as IUCN guidelines. Each animal is carefully assessed based on things such as:

- Sex ratios – ensuring sustainable breeding populations
- Age – balancing reproductive potential and adaptability
- Health status & disease risk – protecting both the individual and wild populations
- Individual characteristics – temperament, behaviour, and adaptability
- Nutritional requirements – planning for dietary transition to wild food sources
- Genetics & traceability – maintaining genetic diversity and integrity
- EEP/TAG approvals – working with international conservation breeding programmes

**This stage alone can take months, or even years, of evaluation.**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Exporter/Importer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  | PERMIT/CERTIFICATE<br><input type="checkbox"/> IMPORT<br><input type="checkbox"/> EXPORT<br><input type="checkbox"/> RE-EXPORT<br><input type="checkbox"/> OTHER    |  |
| 2. Telephone Number                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |  Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora |  |
| 3. Importer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
| 4. Country of origin                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  | 5. Country of import                                                                                                                                                |  |
| 6. Telephone Number                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  | 7. Issuing Management Authority                                                                                                                                     |  |
| 8. E-mail address                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  | UK: CITES Management Authority<br>Centre for International Trade - Bristol<br>Horizon House<br>Denney Road<br>Bristol, BS1 5AN<br>Tel: +44 (0) 3000 200 301         |  |
| 9. Location at which live specimens of Annex A species will be kept                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  | 10. Species (scientific name)                                                                                                                                       |  |
| 11. Description of specimen (incl. marks, sex/date of birth for live animals)                                                                                                                                                                                                  |  | 12. Sex                                                                                                                                                             |  |
| 13. CITES Appendix                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |  | 14. Quantity                                                                                                                                                        |  |
| 15. Country of Origin                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  | 16. Permit No.                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| 17. Country of last re-export                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |  | 18. Date of issue                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| 19. Certificate No.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  | 20. Date of issue                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| 21. Scientific name of species                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
| 22. Common name of species (if available)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
| 23. I hereby apply for the permit/certificate indicated above.<br>Remarks (e.g. on purpose of introduction, details of accommodation for live specimens, etc.)                                                                                                                 |  |                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
| I attach the necessary documentary evidence and declare that all the particulars provided are to the best of my knowledge and belief correct. I declare that an application for a permit/certificate for the above specimens was not previously rejected.                      |  |                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
| Live animals will be transported in compliance with the CITES Guidelines for the Transport and Preparation of Shipment of Live Skilled Animals or, in the case of air transport, the Live Animals Regulations published by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). |  | Signature                                                                                                                                                           |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  | Name of Applicant                                                                                                                                                   |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  | Place and date                                                                                                                                                      |  |





## Reintroduction processes: a world of paperwork and precision

Behind every rewilding success lies an extraordinary administrative effort. Each movement of an animal across borders requires a comprehensive suite of documentation, including:

- International CITES licences for legal wildlife transfer
- Export and import health certificates, ensuring strict veterinary compliance
- Import permits and landing licences
- Detailed animal profiles, including medical and behavioural histories
- Nutritional transition plans
- Certificates of origin and specimen reports
- Legal agreements governing transfer and long-term care

In many cases, this process involves direct coordination between governments, veterinarians, and conservation bodies across multiple countries. Where documentation pathways do not yet exist, TAF teams help create them, ensuring every movement meets the highest international standards.

## Adapting to change: Preparing animals for freedom

Perhaps most importantly, the animals themselves must be prepared.

Through familiarisation with new environments such as travelling crates, new noises to replicate travel conditions, plus a thorough health check to ensure they are ready to travel, everything is done to ensure the journey is as stress-free as possible for animals setting off on a long trip.

# CASE STUDY PREPARING TO REWILD BLACK RHINOS

Few conservation challenges are as significant as reintroducing critically endangered species such as black rhinos. Preparing to rewild three UK-born individuals, Kisima, Chanua, and Mizi, to their ancestral home in Tanzania, illustrates the scale of the planning needed.

## Preparing for release

Each rhino is being extensively prepared for the journey through:

- Comprehensive veterinary assessments
- Behavioural evaluations to ensure suitability
- Nutritional planning for transition to wild forage
- Gradual acclimatisation to transport systems

Their size, strength, and sensitivity make every stage of preparation critical.

## A global effort

This project is bringing together:

- International governments and regulatory bodies
  - Veterinary and conservation experts
  - Logistics and transport specialists
  - In-country teams preparing the release site
- Every permit, every document, every decision needs to align perfectly.



## From Kent to Tanzania

The journey itself will be extraordinary:

- Specialist vehicles transport the rhinos from UK parks to the airport
- Custom-built crates ensure safety and stability
- Carefully coordinated flights minimise stress and duration
- Ground teams receive and transport the animals to protected reserves

From there, the rhinos will enter a carefully managed acclimatisation phase before release.

## The moment that matters.

When Kisima, Chanua and Mizi finally step into the wild, it will mark more than the end of months of careful planning; it will herald the beginning of a new life.

# TRANSPORTING LIFE ACROSS CONTINENTS

## The Journey: Coming home

Once planning is complete, the next challenge begins: moving animals safely from the UK to remote wilderness areas around the world. This is one of the most technically demanding aspects of rewilding and one where there is no margin for error.

## Engineering safety: Crate design

Every animal travels in a specially designed, IATA-compliant crate tailored to its species and behaviour. These crates must:

- Allow natural movement (standing and lying).
- Provide optimal ventilation.
- Minimise stress through controlled light and secure structure.
- Include safe access to food and water.
- Ensure absolute containment and protection.

For some projects, crates are even adapted to be carried through dense terrain, where ingenuity is required in rough, real-world conditions.



## FROM PARK TO PLANE: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Transport begins in the UK where animals are carefully moved using:

- Climate-controlled vehicles.
- Secure internal compartments.
- Continuous monitoring systems.
- Specialist trailers designed for safety and stability.

Every detail is designed to reduce stress and protect welfare.

## FANTASTICAL DISTANCES

**656,361 MILES**

THE ESTIMATED  
DISTANCE THAT  
ANIMALS HAVE  
TRAVELLED FROM  
KENT TO THEIR  
FOREVER HOMES IN  
THE WILD ACROSS  
ASIA, AFRICA AND  
EUROPE.



### INCLUDING:

✓ **PRIMATES TO  
INDONESIA:**  
**388,278**

✓ **GORILLA:**  
**108,931**

✓ **BLACK RHINO:**  
**41,557**

✓ **CHEETAH:**  
**11,492**

✓ **ZEBRA:**  
**10,815**

✓ **SUMATRAN  
RHINO:**  
**6,711**

✓ **HONEY  
BADGER:**  
**5,746**



## Crossing continents: Travelling safely

Air transport adds another layer of complexity. TAF teams work closely to ensure:

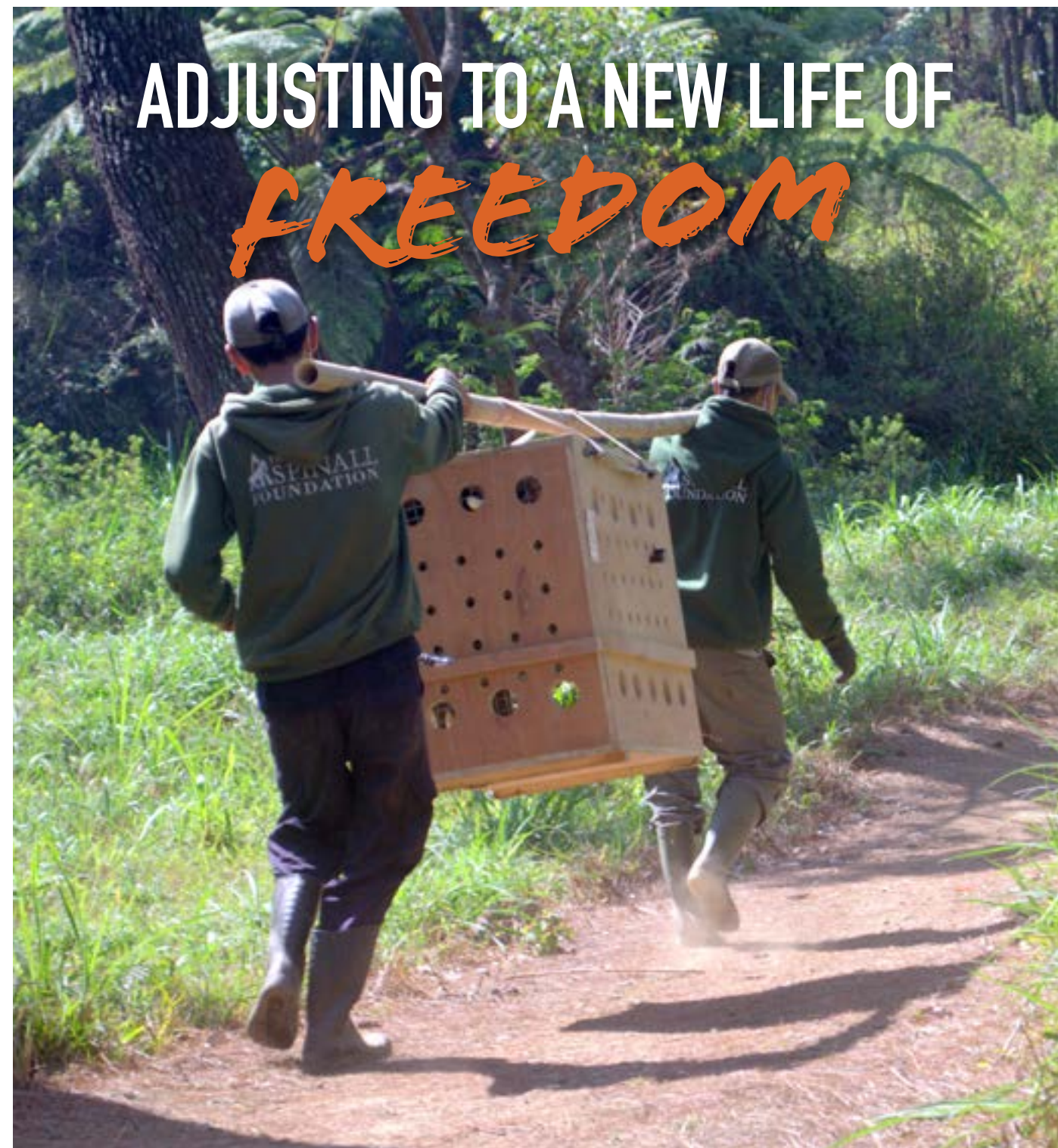
- The shortest and safest flight routes.
- Animals receive mild sedation if needed, akin to you and me needing something to calm our nerves if we are nervous flyers.
- Compatibility with aircraft cargo systems.
- Appropriate loading equipment and trained personnel.
- Contingency plans for delays or disruptions.

Even small details such as cargo bay dimensions or access during flight can impact the success of a journey.

## Into the wild: Coming home

- One of the most difficult stages often comes last. Once in-country, animals must travel across remote landscapes often on unpaved terrain. TAF teams:
- Test routes in advance.
  - Travel in convoys with backup vehicles.
  - Carry essential supplies including food, water, fuel, and equipment.
  - Use a combination of vehicles, manpower, and specialist tools.

This final journey is where planning meets reality, and where expertise truly matters.



**For many endangered animals, returning to the wild is not a single moment; it is a carefully guided process.**

At The Aspinall Foundation (TAF), rewilding does not end when an animal arrives in its native habitat. In many ways, that is where the real work begins. Behind every successful release lies an extraordinary period of support, rehabilitation, and preparation, ensuring that each animal is not just free, but truly ready to survive and thrive.

**This is the hidden, vital stage of rewilding, turning survival into independence.**

## CREATING A SENSE OF HOME: ONE STEP AT A TIME

For animals born or raised in a managed environment, or rescued from trauma, the wild is unfamiliar, unpredictable, and often overwhelming to begin with.

TAF's approach begins by creating a bridge between

captivity and the wild.

Animals are introduced to natural environments, but ones that feel safe, while gradually exposing them to the realities of life beyond human care.

This 'soft release' philosophy

ensures that animals do not experience a sudden, disorienting transition, but instead build confidence step by step.

The goal is simple, yet profound: to help each individual feel at home in the wild once more.

## THE HABITUATION PHASE: LEARNING TO BE WILD

Central to this process is the habituation phase, a carefully managed period during which animals adapt to their new environment.

In TAF projects, this often takes place on large naturally occurring islands, in enclosed forest areas, or in specially built bomas that provide a safe, intermediate step. These allow animals to:

- Become familiar with their surroundings.
- Build strength and independence.
- Be monitored closely before full release.

Here, animals experience:

- Natural weather patterns and seasonal changes.
- Increasing independence from human-provided care.
- Opportunities to explore, forage, and express natural behaviours.

Camera traps and remote monitoring systems allow teams to observe without interference, ensuring animals develop authentic survival skills. Together, these measures ensure that when the time comes, animals are not just released, but ready.



## HEALING FROM THE PAST: REHABILITATION OF TRAUMATISED ANIMALS

Many animals entering rewilding programmes carry the scars of human impact. Some have been rescued from the illegal pet trade. Others have been orphaned due to poaching or habitat destruction. These individuals often require intensive behavioural and psychological rehabilitation.

TAF teams work patiently to:

- Rebuild natural behaviours lost in captivity.
- Reduce dependency on humans.
- Restore confidence and social skills.
- Reintroduce appropriate group dynamics.

This is delicate work. Progress cannot be rushed. Each animal moves forward at its own pace, supported by experienced keepers, veterinarians, and field teams.

For these animals, rewilding is not just a conservation act; it is a second chance at life free from suffering.

## DIETARY TRANSITION: GOING WILD

A critical step involves moving from managed diets to wild foraging. This is done gradually:

- Domestic food is reduced.
- Wild food is introduced in increasing variety and quantity.
- Nutritional intake is carefully monitored.

## CASE STUDY

# THE GABON GORILLA PROTECTION & REINTRODUCTION PROJECT

Nowhere is this approach more evident than in TAF's work in Gabon.

Working in partnership with the national parks agency, the project aims to return gorillas, many rescued from the illegal pet trade or born in captivity, to their ancestral forest home.

## A carefully managed return

Gorillas arrived at the project and entered a structured habituation programme:

- They were introduced to large, forested islands, allowing safe exploration.
- Supplementary feeding supported their nutritional transition.
- Camera traps and field teams monitored behaviour continuously.

Over time, the gorillas began to forage independently, form social groups, and adapt fully to their environment.

## Rebuilding lives

Many individuals in the project had been orphaned or traumatised. Through patient rehabilitation, they regained natural behaviours and built social bonds, essential for survival in the wild.

## A thriving population

Today, TAF teams monitor around 40 gorillas across multiple groups and a number of solitary individuals within the reserve.

The results are remarkable:

- Stable social groups have formed.
- Reintroduced individuals are integrating successfully.
- The world's first wild-born gorillas born to zoo-born parents.

These milestones represent not just survival—but true ecological restoration.

## A future made possible

Rewilding does not end with this release. It is a long-term commitment to every animal, every ecosystem, and every community involved.

Through expertise, dedication, and compassion, TAF is leading the way, demonstrating that even the most complex conservation challenges can be overcome. This is the impact your donations are making possible.

## REHABILITATION SUCCESS!



**OVER 447 ANIMALS SUPPORTED  
THROUGH REHABILITATION TO  
ADJUST TO THE WILD.**

INCLUDING :

**339 PRIMATES**

**6 CHEETAH**

**85 GORILLAS**

**1 HYENA**

**8 RHINO**

**1 HONEY**

**12 BISON**

**BADGER**

# TRULY FREE. WHEN REWILDING BECOMES REALITY

There is a moment, quiet, powerful, and years in the making when an animal takes its first true steps into the wild.

**No barriers. No safety nets. Just instinct, landscape, and possibility.**

For The Aspinall Foundation (TAF), this moment is not only the end of a journey; it is the beginning of a new life. A life where animals not only survive but shape the future of their species.

By the time an animal is ready for full release, it has already undergone an extraordinary journey, careful selection, rehabilitation, habituation, and acclimatisation. But the final step, true freedom must be handled with the greatest care.



## PROTECTING THE LANDSCAPE: MANAGING WILD SPACES

Rewilding does not happen in isolation. It depends on safe, well-managed habitats and monitoring continues throughout, often using camera traps and field teams to ensure animals are left to thrive without interference. Alongside this, TAF works in partnership with governments and conservation bodies to protect and restore the vast areas that animals are finally being released into, areas that often cover hundreds of thousands of acres.

### Partnerships provide:

- Long-term habitat protection, restoration and management.
- Anti-poaching efforts.
- Community engagement.
- Continuous monitoring of wildlife populations.
- Investment in local conservation infrastructure.

**By protecting and restoring habitats, TAF is not only supporting individual animals, but entire ecosystems.**

### Working with Communities: A Shared Future

Successful rewilding depends on people as much as it does on animals.

TAF works closely with local communities, recognising that conservation must deliver real, lasting benefits. This includes:

- Employment opportunities within conservation teams.
- Support for local infrastructure and services.
- Education programmes promoting sustainable living.
- Collaboration with community leaders and organisations.
- Rural development opportunities.

By building strong relationships and shared purpose, TAF ensures that both wildlife and communities can happily coexist.

### Thriving in the Wild: The long-term impact

The true success of rewilding is measured not in the release of an animal, but in what happens next. When reintroduced animals reproduce in the wild, it marks a defining milestone. It means they have:

- Successfully adapted to their environment.
- Established natural behaviours.
- Contributed to the recovery and longevity of their species.

Each birth represents hope. A step away from extinction. Across TAF projects, these moments are becoming more frequent and more significant.



### Strengthening the gene pool

Many endangered species suffer from limited genetic diversity, increasing vulnerability to disease and environmental change. By reintroducing carefully selected individuals from rescue centres together we are helping to:

- Increase genetic diversity in threatened wild populations.
- Reduce the risks associated with inbreeding.
- Strengthen long-term population resilience.

This is conservation at its most strategic, ensuring not just survival, but sustainability.

## CASE STUDY

# A NEW GENERATION OF CHEETAHS THRIVING IN THE WILD

Few stories capture the long-term success of rewilding more powerfully than that of cheetahs returned to the wild through TAF's pioneering work. In a conservation milestone, captive-born cheetahs have not only been successfully rewilded but have gone on to breed successfully in the wild.

At Mount Camdeboo Private Game Reserve in South Africa, a vast 35,000-acre landscape in the Great Karoo, wonderful things are happening.

Thanks to the support of donors like you, in a world-first initiative, a male cheetah named Nairo was rewilded from Howletts Wild Animal Park. He joined Ava, a female raised at Ashia Cheetah Centre, who had already been released into the reserve.

Together, they adapted, hunted, and established their territory in the wild. Then came a defining moment.

### A new life begins

On 12 November, Ava gave birth to a litter of four cubs. It was a powerful confirmation of success: two captive-born cheetahs breeding naturally in the wild. The project proved that captive-born cheetahs can breed successfully in the wild.

Both parents had become skilled hunters, essential for raising cubs in a demanding environment and this success ensured the next generation had the best possible start.



### Growing up wild

The cubs quickly began to show their individuality with a confident protective male who leads his siblings, a feisty quick-tempered brother, a gentle calm female, and a shy alert sister all growing naturally into who they were meant to be.

These early behaviours are more than endearing; they are signs of healthy development in the wild.

As the cubs grow, they will learn to hunt, navigate their environment, and eventually establish territories of their own, continuing the cycle of life that rewilding seeks to restore.

AMAZING  
BIRTHS  
IN THE  
WILD

40

infants to rewilded gorillas - including the world's first to two rewilded parents.

25

calves to rewilded rhino - with over 60 descendants now including grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, possibly even great-great grandchildren now!!

15+

cubs to rewilded cheetah - one is now a grandfather, and likely soon to be a great-great grandfather, with the cubs being moved to other reserves this year.

## WHAT'S *NEXT* A FUTURE WRITTEN IN THE WILD

Every animal that steps into the wild carries with it years of planning, care, and commitment.

Every successful adaptation restores balance. Every wild birth strengthens a species. Every protected landscape secures a future.

### The story of Djala the gorilla lies at the very heart of this work.

Born in the forests of the Republic of the Congo.

Orphaned by the bushmeat trade.

Rescued and given a second chance at survival at Howletts Wild Animal Park in 1984. The same year, John founded The Aspinall Foundation.

Returned to the wild in 2013, he lived freely for the final decade of his life.

Now gone, his legacy lives on through his son and granddaughter, still thriving in the wild.

Djala's journey came full circle. But more than that, it helped shape a vision. Today, that vision has seen over 100 orphaned gorillas rescued, rehabilitated, and many returned to the wild, alongside countless other animals including: cheetahs, rhino, bison, a honey badger, the list goes on...

His story is a powerful reminder of what is possible: not just survival, but return. Not just a single release, but generations living free. This is the impact your gifts make possible.

**Hot off the press:** As we write this, we have just received the most exciting news that Djala's son Djongo has fathered a baby boy who has been named Djala Junior (DJ for short). This name is a fitting tribute to his grandfather who went through so much before leaving his legacy in the wild. A legacy that proves rewilding really does work!

Together, let's honour Djala's memory and rewild even more animals who deserve the same chance to live their life free in the wild...



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