

# conservation

## To each Rothschild's its own name

The project started as an individual identification catalogue in 2010 that is continually updated, writes  
**RUPI MANGAT**

In 2009, when Zoe Muller launched the Rothschild's Giraffe Project, she didn't quite envisage that it would become Kenya's longest running giraffe project. Now in its fourth year, Muller can count some successes with what is today the most endangered of the nine giraffe subspecies.

The Rothschild's giraffe is a subspecies with five "horns" (actually bone protrusions from the skull) instead of two. Also known as the Baringo giraffe, the Rothschild's last bastion in Kenya was in the west around Soy and neighbouring Uganda. However, after the subdivision of land in the late 1960s, it seemed that there was little hope for the survival of the Rothschild's.

This subspecies survived a dark period largely thanks to Betty Leslie-Melville; she brought a breeding herd from Soy to her backyard in Karen that is today the famous Giraffe Centre.

available for more wildlife species to be brought in, it was the perfect choice for the Rothschild's giraffe. The giraffe browses on acacia. With little threat of carnivorous predators and increased security, Soysambu became the ideal choice.

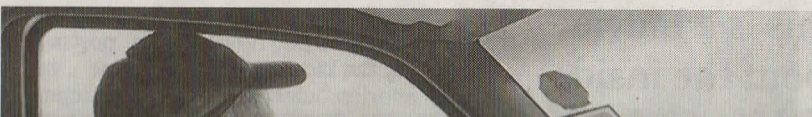
Today, with 65 Rothschild's giraffes, Soysambu Conservancy harbours 10 per cent of the world's remaining population.

"Kenya is the last remaining stronghold for these giraffe in the wild," states Muller. "It's classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List and there are thought to be fewer than 670 individuals left in the wild with 450 in Kenya."

The Rothschild's Giraffe Project aims to research and conserve the species in the wild.

### Individual names

The researcher and her team, who spend long hours in the field studying their subjects



### RECOGNITION

*Kenyan wins  
award for bird  
conservation*



A KENYAN has been honoured for his work in the conservation of rare bird species.

A former employee of the Kenya Forest Service, David Ngala (pictured) received the 2012 Conservation Hero Award from US-based Disney Worldwide Conservation for his work in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest near Malindi.

The award is given annually to individuals for their efforts to save wildlife, protect habitat and educate the people around them about the importance of environmental conservation.

Mr Ngala, who was among six people honoured from six countries and three continents, received a \$1,000 cash award plus Ksh10,000 (\$120) from the Imperial Bank.

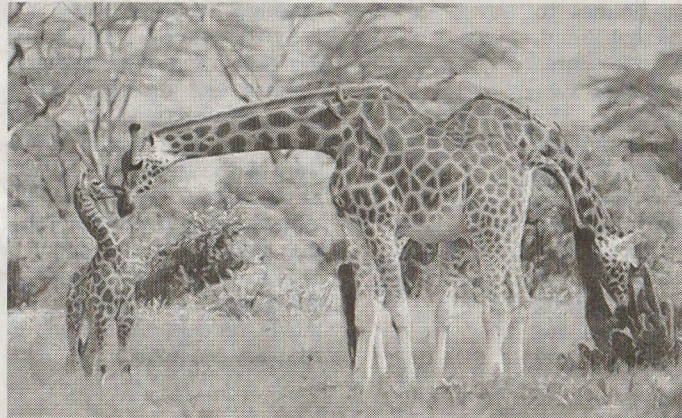
It has been a long struggle for Mr Ngala. Born in 1952, he joined KFS in 1970 as a forest nursery attendant and later a driver. His interest in conservation was awakened by the trips he used to take with students and researchers. With much knowledge

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With the success of the new herd in Nairobi, it was inevitable that at some point space would run out for the increasing numbers and it did. A few were taken to Lake Nakuru National Park while some wandered off into Nairobi National Park, where they bred with the Maasai giraffes – a matter of concern for hybridisation of a species so limited can lead to dwindling numbers of the species.

In 2007, the Soysambu Conservancy was formed around Lake Elmenteita. Declared a Ramsar site in 2005, meaning a wetland of international importance, the former cattle ranch harbours a healthy population of wildlife and different habitats. With space



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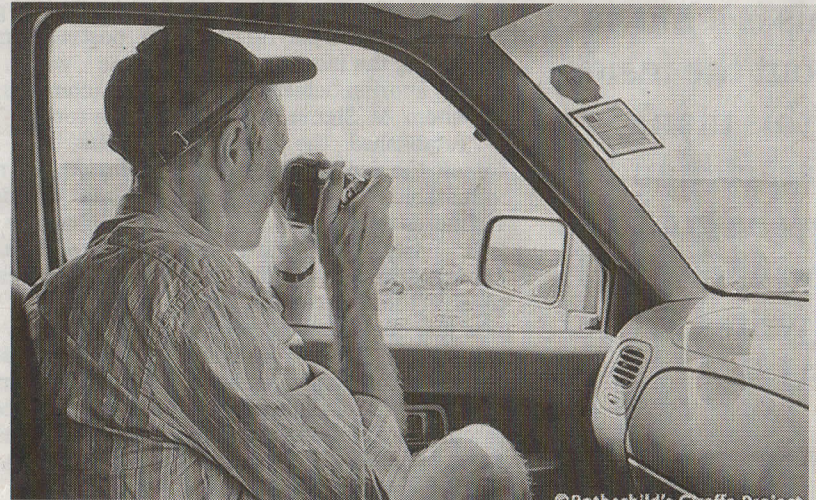
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#### Individual names

The researcher and her team, who spend long hours in the field studying their subjects and equally long hours at the computer entering data and analysing it, know their subjects by name much like the Amboseli Elephant Research Project, which is the longest study of wild elephants in the world, started in 1972 by Dr Cynthia Moss.

According to Muller, each giraffe on Soysambu Conservancy has been individually identified, has a name and can be recognised on sight. The Rothschild's Giraffe Project started an individual identification catalogue in 2010 that is continually updated with new births and any deaths.

"The markings on a giraffe's coat are unique to that individual, a bit like fingerprints



**From top: The research team captures a giraffe for samples, giraffes at the conservancy and a researcher observing giraffes in the wild.**

Pictures: Zoe Muller

in humans, meaning that each animal is identified using photos. Each giraffe gets its own page in the catalogue, which contains a photograph of its left- and right-hand sides for identification. The giraffe is given an ID number, a name, then details about the individual are recorded, like sex, age, birth date (if known), relationships to others and so on.

"This means we have an extremely accurate record of each giraffe in Soysambu Conservancy, which helps us monitor movements, home ranges, interactions between individuals and the growth of the population," explains Muller.

Most Rothschild's giraffe

populations today are in well protected areas, where their populations remain quite stable.

"The only factor limiting their growth now is habitat space," says Muller. "As we find new habitats for them and carry out translocations, the population is likely to grow."

In 2011, eight young Rothschild's giraffes were translocated to Ruko Conservancy near Lake Baringo.

"It was a scary exercise, but all went well. Now, almost 20 months on, the giraffe are happily settled and two are pregnant. We hope that this population will now continue to breed to boost numbers of Rothschild's giraffe in Kenya."

the people around them about the importance of environmental conservation.

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It has been a long struggle for Ngala. Born in 1952, he joined KEFRI in 1970 as a forest nursery attendant and later a driver. His interest in conservation was awakened by the time he used to take with students and researchers. With much knowledge on various bird species, Mr Ngala became one of the most sought-after guides by foreign students and researchers, who are keen on tracking rare bird species in the Arabuko-Sokoke forest.

In 1997, Mr Ngala led the elders and the community around Arabuko Sokoke forest in resisting a directive by the then president Daniel arap Moi to hive off a third of the forest for settlement.

Mr Ngala also tracks and prevents poachers from harvesting timber, killing wildlife. He has traced more than 1,400 animal traps and helped in the arrest of poachers.

Dr Munir Virani of the World Centre for Birds of Prey and the director of the Peregrine Fund Projects in Africa, who has worked with Mr Ngala for 20 years, termed him an inspiration to the local community.

The Arabuko-Sokoke forest is protected as a national forest reserve. The forest protects many endemic and near endemic species. The Clarke's weaver is prevalent in the forest, while the Sokoke Scops owl, Sokoke pipit, the Amani sunbird and spotted ground thrush are found only here and in a forest fragment in Tanzania. The forest also has savannah elephants, African civets, as well as Sokoke baboons and vervet monkeys. The park is also recognised as a centre of amphibian diversity.

Fred Oluo