

# Revitalizing sites in Africa

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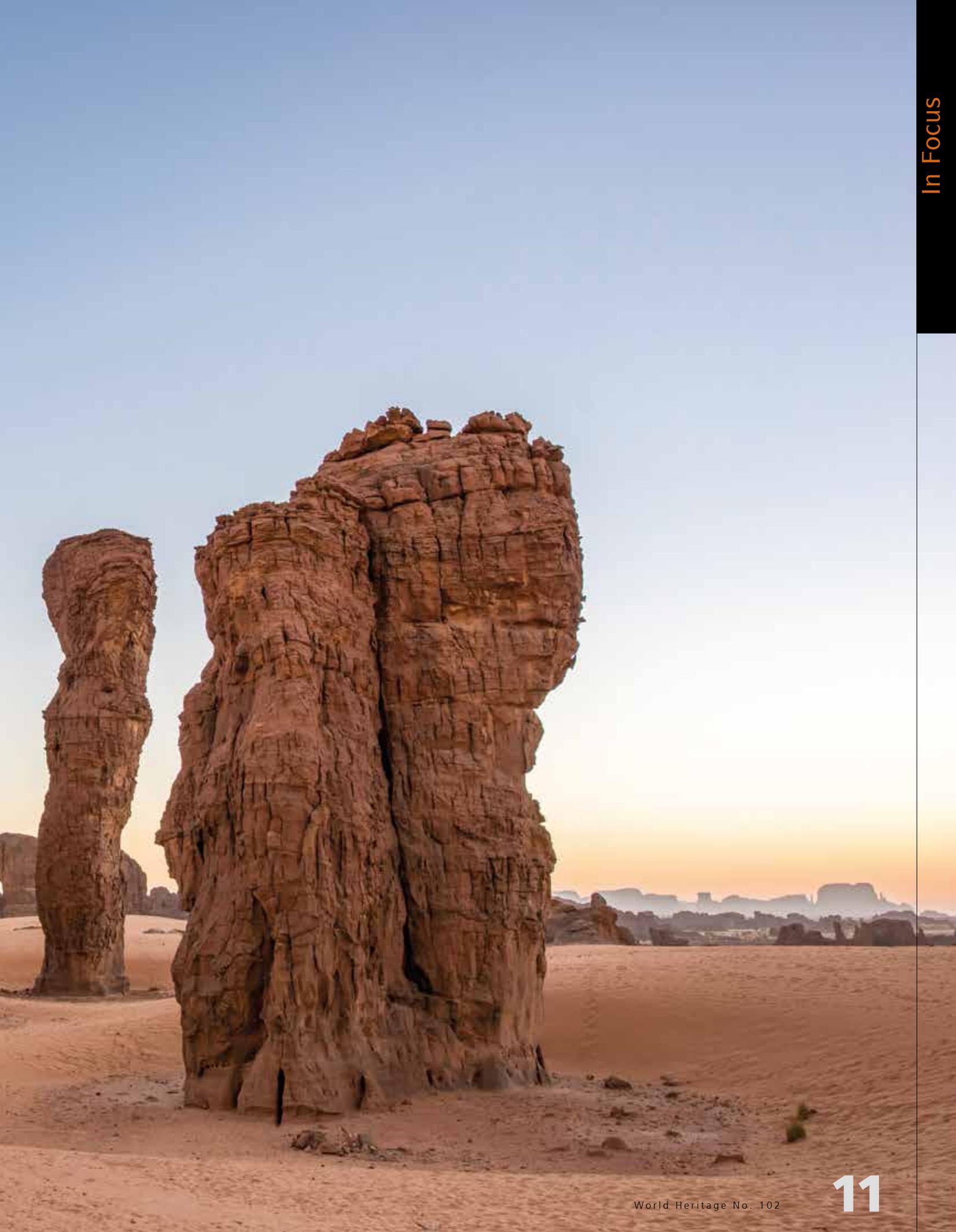
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Ennedi Natural and Cultural Reserve (Chad).

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Camels in Ennedi.

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In 2000, in response to the dramatic decline of protected areas in Africa from lack of funding and poor management, African Parks pioneered a progressive new method for wildlife conservation with its Public-Private Partnership (PPP) approach. Through this method, the government of the country delegates the day-to-day operational management of a protected area to a private partner.

Spearheaded by five progressive conservationists – Peter Fearnhead (current CEO of African Parks), Mavuso Msimang, Dr Anthony Hall Martin, Michael Eustace and Paul Fentener van Vlissingen – this groundbreaking management model came at a critical time, when some of Africa's most significant wild areas were on the brink of complete collapse. Operating within a legal framework, in collaboration with the government of the country and local communities, African Parks has since transformed the failing structures of nineteen parks in eleven countries across the continent, protecting 14.8 million ha of land for nature.

African Parks joined forces with UNESCO in Chad, for the protection of Ennedi Natural and Cultural Reserve; in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for the protection of Garamba National Park; and in Benin for W and Pendjari National Parks. Together, they have ensured these wilderness areas are secured well into the future. The case studies below show how the African Parks model, through effective park management, is safeguarding the long-term future of these three globally significant UNESCO World Heritage sites in Africa.

### Ennedi, Chad

In 2016, in Istanbul, the World Heritage Committee inscribed the Ennedi Massif, a sandstone citadel in the Sahara Desert spanning 40,000 km<sup>2</sup>, on the UNESCO list. Its Outstanding Universal Value lies not only in its incredible geological and ecological legacy, but also in its archaeological wealth. With three criteria (two natural and one cultural), Ennedi falls within the 3.5 percentage of mixed sites classified worldwide. Upon its inclusion, the Committee pointed out the weaknesses of the planned management system, which were likely to fail to guarantee the level of protection necessary to maintain the exceptional value



Community engagement in Ennedi.

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of the site, owing to inadequate human, technical and financial resources. The Committee also supported the creation of a protected area incorporating the northern foothills of the massif and the surrounding sandy depression, thus providing strong legal protection. This would restrict the attribution of new oil and mining exploration rights such as those granted in 2012, which prevented the northern part of the massif, identified as a unique ecological transition zone, from being included in the classified site. Furthermore, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) evaluation also encouraged the Government to further explore the possibility of improving the management of the site through a Public-Private Partnership with African Parks, which at the time was being considered. Two years later, this proposal became a reality, and the Chadian Government concluded a long-term partnership with African Parks for the management of the Ennedi Natural and Cultural Reserve, newly created by decree in February 2019. Overcoming a complete absence of infrastructure and reserve staff at the launch of the project, African Parks, distinguished by its technical expertise and credibility, raised the required funding and quickly built momentum, establishing solid foundations for staff growth and activity development, and strengthening relationships with local authorities and institutions to ensure a common vision for the reserve's future. Today, 75 staff members, including government employees, operate from the newly-built 570 m<sup>2</sup> headquarters,

powered exclusively by solar and wind energy. From this base, numerous field surveys are prepared, including a first-ever archeological inventory, which has led to the identification of 334 new archaeological sites in 2021 alone.

As part of their commitment to restoring a functional Sahelo-Saharan ecosystem, on 6 August 2021, the Reserve celebrated the release of eleven red-necked ostriches, previously almost entirely eradicated from the region. Six months later, thirteen healthy ostrich chicks hatched under the protective gaze of 40 rangers, who work on a relay system to monitor the ostriches around the clock. These rangers have all been recruited and trained within Ennedi, and deployed by the reserve management since the signing of the management partnership.

In a world where demographic growth remains exponential, Ennedi may well become an illustration of what the future holds for us: managing territories while looking to promote harmony between wilderness and people. It is a challenge bound to increase as we progress further into the 21st century. In the massif, 30,000 semi-nomads have learned to live with the desert and today are an essential and inseparable component of the landscape, as indicated by the thousands of rock art sites scattered across this open-air museum. Through its management model, African Parks emphasizes economic development and poverty alleviation for surrounding communities to ensure that each protected area is ecologically, socially and financially sustainable.

## Garamba National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

About 1,500 km southeast of Ennedi, the arid Saharan dunes give way to the verdant tropical rainforests and Sudano-Guinean savannahs in the DRC, home to an abundance of herbivores. Garamba National Park, one of the oldest parks in Africa, was once home to more than 22,000 elephants, with a unique mix of savannah and forest species, and harboured what was at the time the largest known northern white rhino population in the wild. The park was formally declared a World Heritage site in 1980. However, for decades, this land of plenty was plundered by a succession of armed groups including rebels, militarized poachers and refugees, who wreaked havoc on human populations and wildlife alike. As a result, by the year 2000, Garamba had lost 95 per cent of its elephants and all of its northern white rhinos. In 1996, the World Heritage Committee flagged Garamba as a site in danger, sending an alarm signal to request urgent assistance in implementing the necessary protection measures to save this gem of biodiversity.

In 2005, African Parks and the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) joined forces to answer this call, signing a long-term management partnership for Garamba and the three 'Domaines de Chasse' surrounding the park, with the objective of barring further destruction in the park and bringing stability to the region. The challenges to secure Garamba were mammoth, with extreme insecurity, poverty and poaching pressure exacerbated by rebel groups. In 2016, African Parks led a massive overhaul of the park's law enforcement strategy, which saw improved training, information gathering and improved logistical and communication networks. Over the course of several years, elephant poaching has been almost completely eradicated and, coupled with strong community development initiatives, this overhaul has resulted in Garamba's remarkable transformation. It was achieved thanks to the unwavering support of key donors convinced by the PPP approach and African Parks' successful protected areas management model, which focuses on enhancing security and professionalism

among park management while engaging with local communities. Today the park is the last stronghold of the largest elephant population and the only surviving population of Kordofan giraffe in the DRC.

With the retreat of the Lord's Resistance Army terrorist organization and the arrival of African Parks, Garamba may have finally entered a new era, as herds of buffalo, kob and hartebeest now thrive on vast expanses of lush savannahs and local communities have become an integral part of Garamba's transformation. Over 14,000 households now have access to power through the park's solar energy programme and previously inaccessible potable water is available to thousands of villagers. Socio-economic opportunities in the region have been unlocked with over US\$800,000 being generated and returned to the communities, while 1,500 children now attend school and nearly 100,000 people have access to medical care. Garamba has become one of Africa's greatest success stories and the region's most important source of security, offering peace and prosperity to all.



Kids in schools in Garamba National Park (Democratic Republic of Congo).

© Marcus Westberg



Garamba National Park landscape.

© Marcus Westberg



Colobus monkeys in Garamba National Park.

© Marcus Westberg



Garamba National Park.

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Elephants in Pendjari National Park (Benin).

© Marcus Westberg



Kids in school in Pendjari National Park.

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Lion in Pendjari National Park.

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## W and Pendjari National Parks, Benin

The influence of Sudanian savannahs such as Garamba's, and that of the Sahel such as Ennedi's, have shaped the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) Complex, which is the largest intact ecosystem in West Africa. Here, vegetation varies from grasslands and shrubby savannas to gallery and riparian forests. The WAP Complex is of unparalleled importance for West African wildlife, ensuring vital free movement of populations and holding the last viable lion and cheetah populations in all of West Africa, and over 80 per cent of the region's elephant population. As a result, it was placed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2017. That same year, the Government of Benin and African Parks entered into a long-term partnership for the management and financing of Pendjari National Park, and three years later W-National Park was also added to the portfolio.

Positioned at the crossroads of three countries – Benin, Niger, and Burkina Faso – the WAP Complex currently faces serious threats as violent extremist groups, operating across the Sahel, push further south and into northern Benin. This pressure resulted in several tragic incidents in the first half of 2022 in W and Pendjari. The situation requires the coordination of multiple stakeholders to manage and mitigate the threats and the parks' management staff are working closely with the Beninese army, local authorities and community leaders to safeguard the communities living in and around the WAP Complex, as well as the wildlife. However, ensuring the law is upheld is only part of the solution, while a strong focus on community development and engagement to help ensure the long-term protection of these areas is the other.

Over two decades, African Parks has committed to refining a protected area management model through its PPP approach and the results have been extraordinary. Approaching management in a holistic way, effective law enforcement, biodiversity conservation, community development, infrastructure, tourism and enterprise development and strong governance structures are implemented. This ensures the parks under its mandates are part of a sustainable landscape management approach, where the



W National Park (Benin).

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protected area is not seen as separate, but rather as part of the broader system, providing significant societal benefits including security and stability, socio-economic development, health and education and the continued provisioning of vital ecosystem services.

### Expanding impact

With the PPP approach, a framework and a tried and tested tool to overcome challenges has been provided. During the last two decades, African Parks has used each management agreement to learn and, as a result, to refine its model. Over time it has become clear that mutual trust is paramount for any management agreement to be successful; governments are entrusting the management of their natural asset to a private partner, while the private partner is investing millions of dollars into an asset that does not belong to them. Success can be slow and a long-term commitment from both parties is vital if the rewards are to be seen. Proof of concept is also key to develop from an

initial foundational and proven partnership into the broader landscape or other areas within a country. To ensure successful partnerships with all stakeholders, including government, communities and donors, constant nurturing and work is needed through clear communication, engagement and delivery. And lastly, each country and landscape is unique and needs the right mandate to ensure its long-term success.

The task of protecting biodiversity is immense, and time is short, so to further expand their impact, African Parks developed an Incubator Programme to assist other NGOs through mentoring and technical support to implement its model across Africa.

With the introduction of its PPP approach to protected area management 22 years ago, African Parks is not only providing one solution to the perpetuating loss of vital landscapes. It has also enhanced the role that UNESCO plays in preserving remaining natural heritage and ensured the protection of biodiversity across Africa. 🌿