

An aerial photograph of a savanna landscape. A river flows through the left side of the frame. A dirt road winds through the center and right. A green safari vehicle is driving on the road in the lower right. The terrain is covered in tall grass and scattered trees. The sky is clear and blue.

The Munywana Conservancy: A Landscape Restored

Decades of ecological recovery,
community partnership
& conservation innovation

Simon Naylor



MAP KEY

● &Beyond Lodges / Reserves

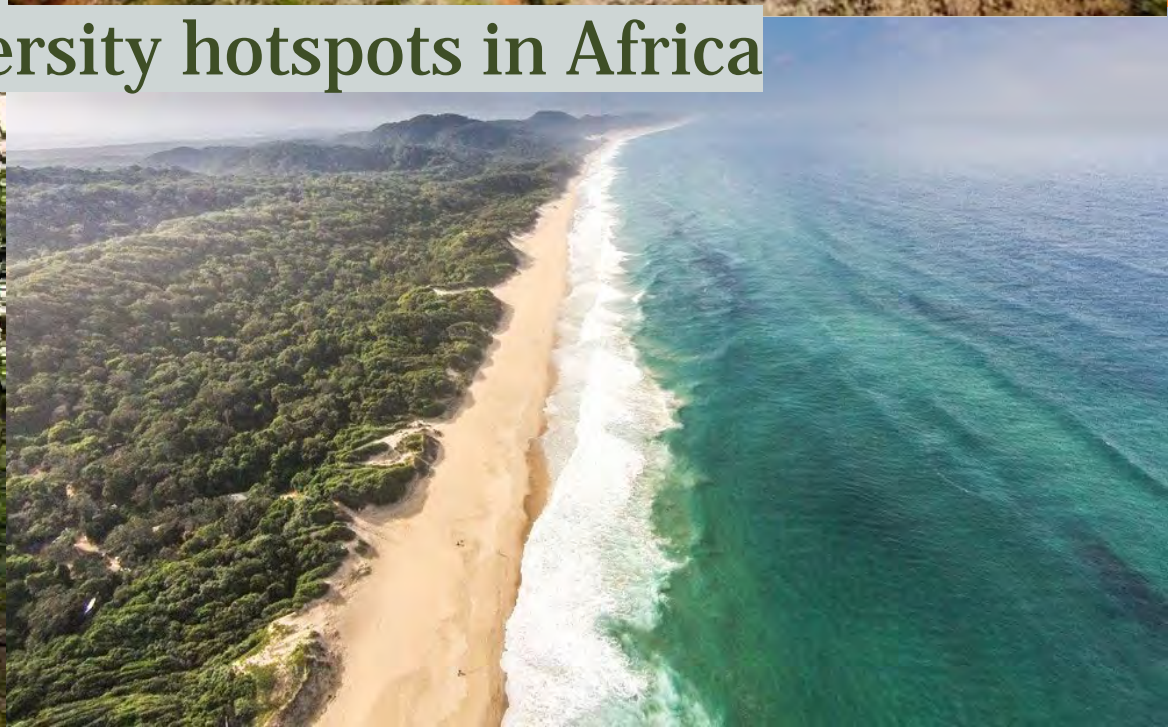






Maputaland

One of 8 biodiversity hotspots in Africa



Taming Of The Wilds

First by the great European hunters and traders



Taming Of The Wilds

Pioneer Farmers





Taming of the Wilds
Extensive DDT spraying



**Iconic Species and
their rangelands lost**



Apartheid & land dispossession



A black and white photograph capturing a large, chaotic crowd of people, likely during a period of civil unrest or war. The scene is filled with individuals, many of whom are holding rifles, suggesting a state of conflict or the threat of violence. The crowd is dense and appears to be moving or gathered in a public square or a similar open space. The overall atmosphere is one of disorder and tension.

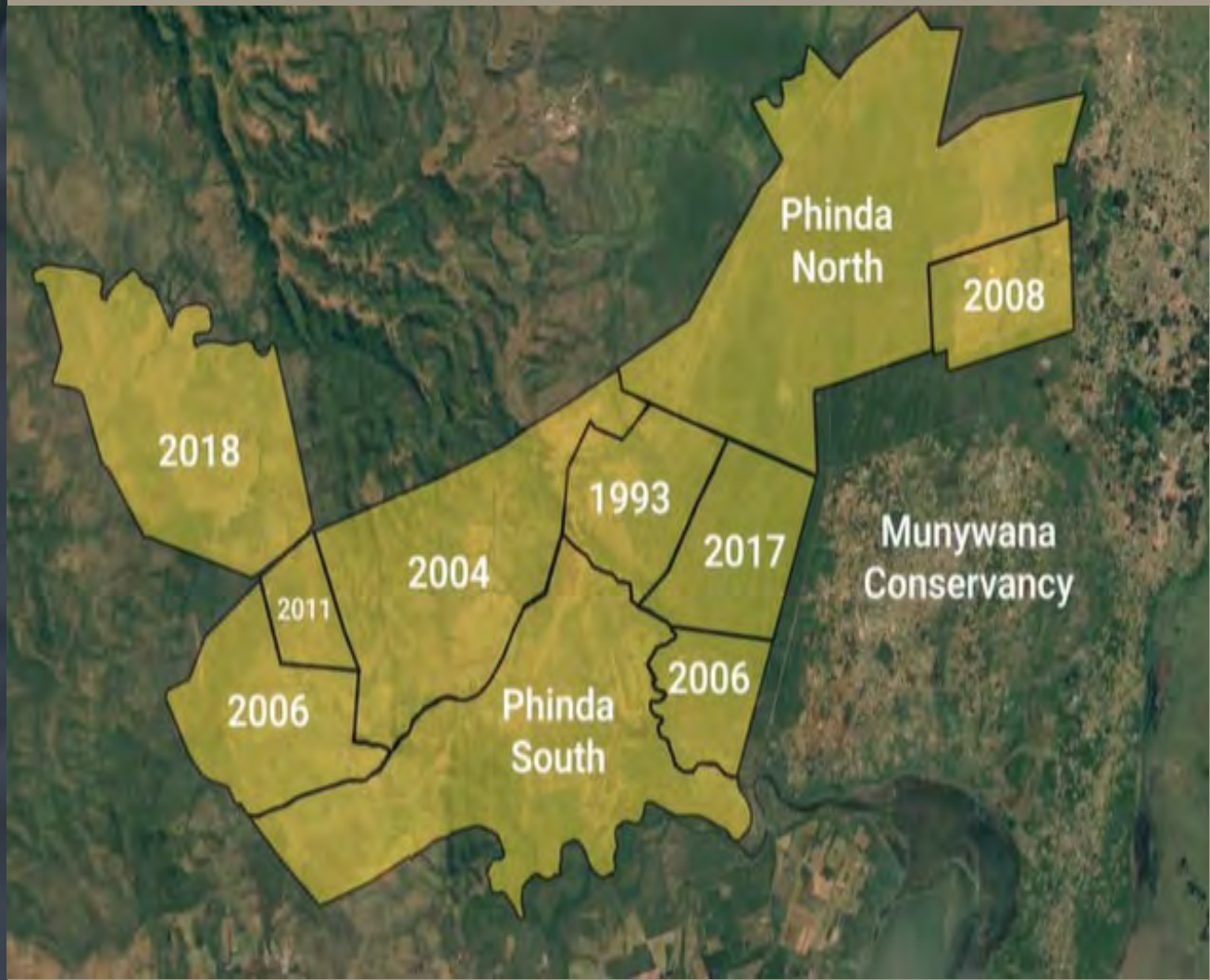
A country in transition
civil unrest and threat of war

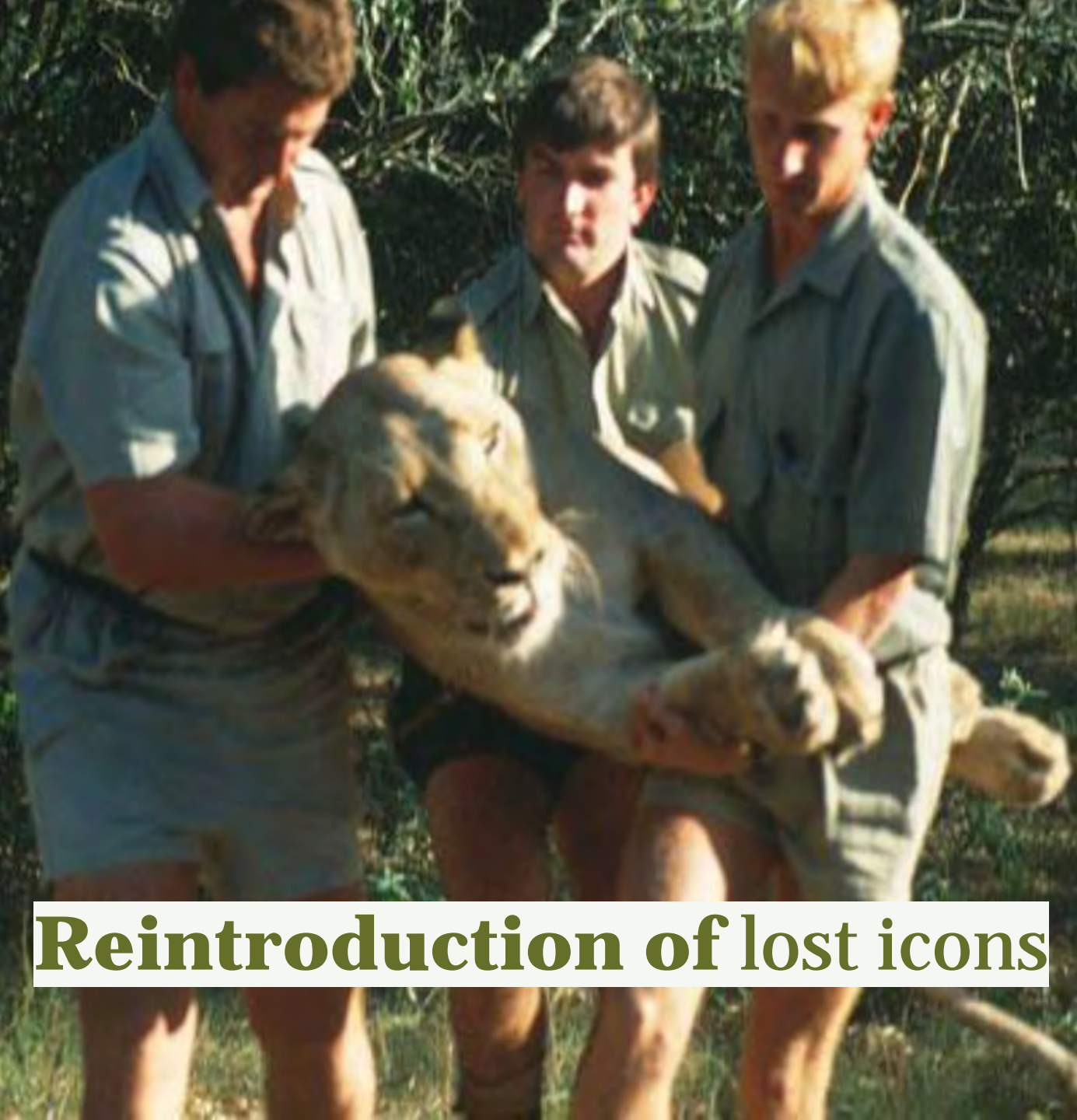
gettyimages®
Credit: Hulton Archive



The vision of Nelson Mandela:

"A sustainable future for humankind depends on a caring partnership with nature as much as anything else"





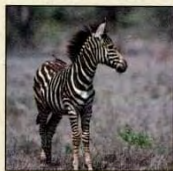
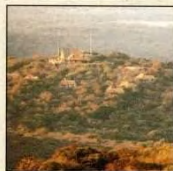
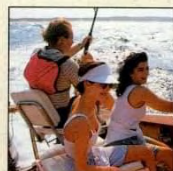
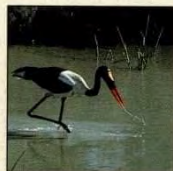
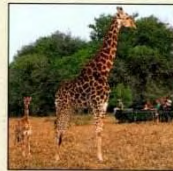
Reintroduction of lost icons

**OUT OF AFRICA
Leisure Stores**

Spectacular game viewing at Umfaans Turf with Out Of Africa Leisure Stores clothing and equipment. The Out Of Africa Leisure Stores—at present in Eastgate and Illovo—carry an unusual range of merchandise, generally not available in South Africa. The adventurous and the fashion-conscious can choose from a large selection of safari wear. New and unique ranges designed specifically for fashion, comfort and durability are available throughout the year. Also available for the Northern Hemisphere winter season are high fashion ski and travel wear and accessories from the top ski houses in Europe. Out Of Africa Leisure Stores pride themselves on making fun in the sun and in the snow affordable for everyone.



PHINDA
RESOURCE RESERVE



PHINDA IZILWANE – THE RETURN OF THE WILDLIFE





**The Evolving Vision:
Transfer of landowners
back to indigenous communities**



The Evolving Model:

Expansion & community participation and ownership



The Phinda Model:

- Conservation economy that works
- Core Pillars

High quality **profitable** wildlife & lodge experience

Low volume / High end



Habitat and rangeland management

- Fire
- Alien plant control
- Bush clearing
- Soil conservation



Effective Evidence based & Innovative Conservation Management

- ✓ Metapopulation management
- ✓ Security
- ✓ Long term monitoring and research
- ✓ Translocations
- ✓ Staff development



Entrenching Conservation in Partnership with People

- ✓ Health
- ✓ Education and Skills development
- ✓ Small business development
- ✓ Food security
- ✓ Wildlife ownership and tourism

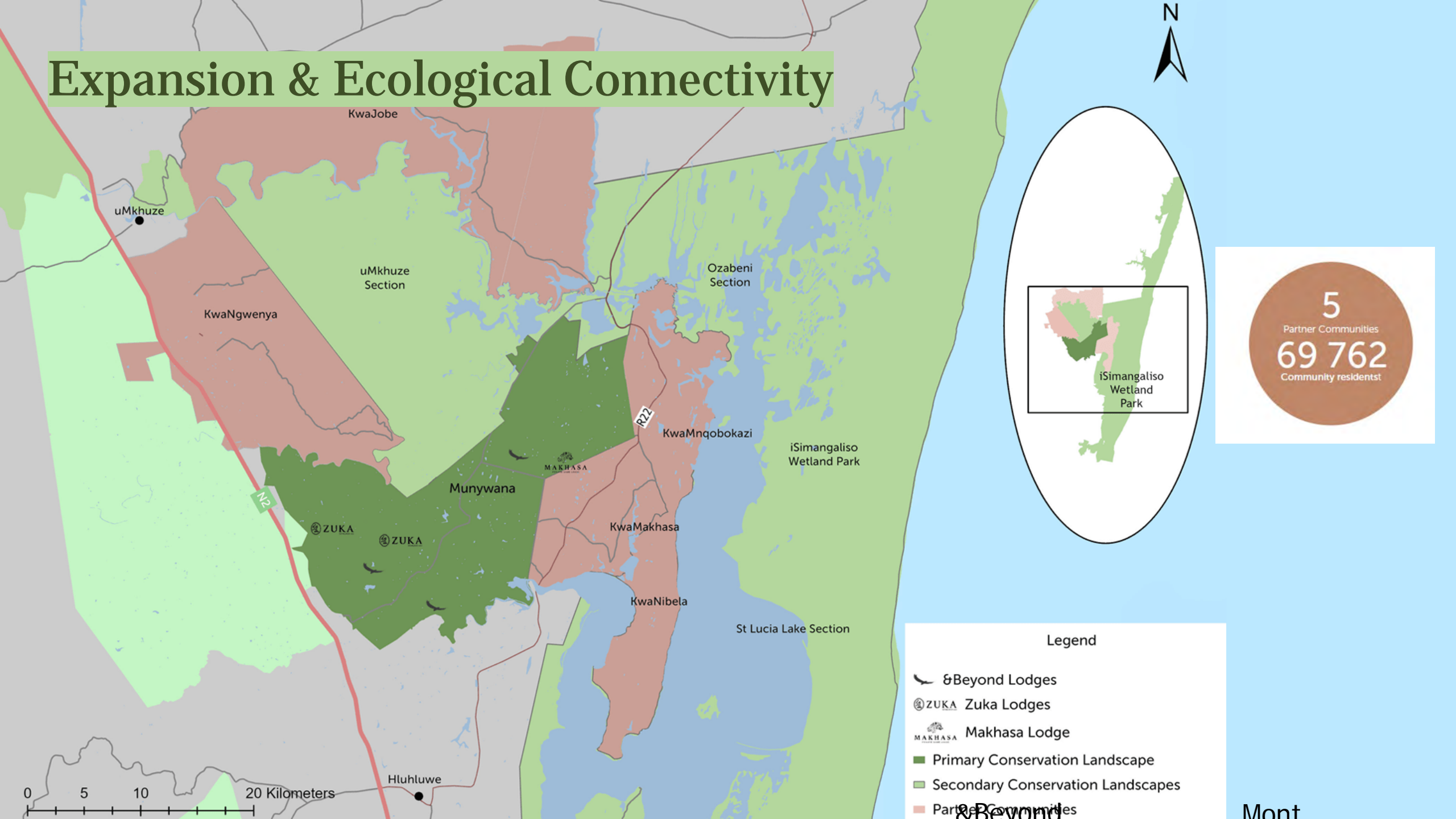


Remarkable Outcomes

- ✓ Ecological
- ✓ Social
- ✓ Economic



Expansion & Ecological Connectivity



THE POWER OF ONE LANDSCAPE

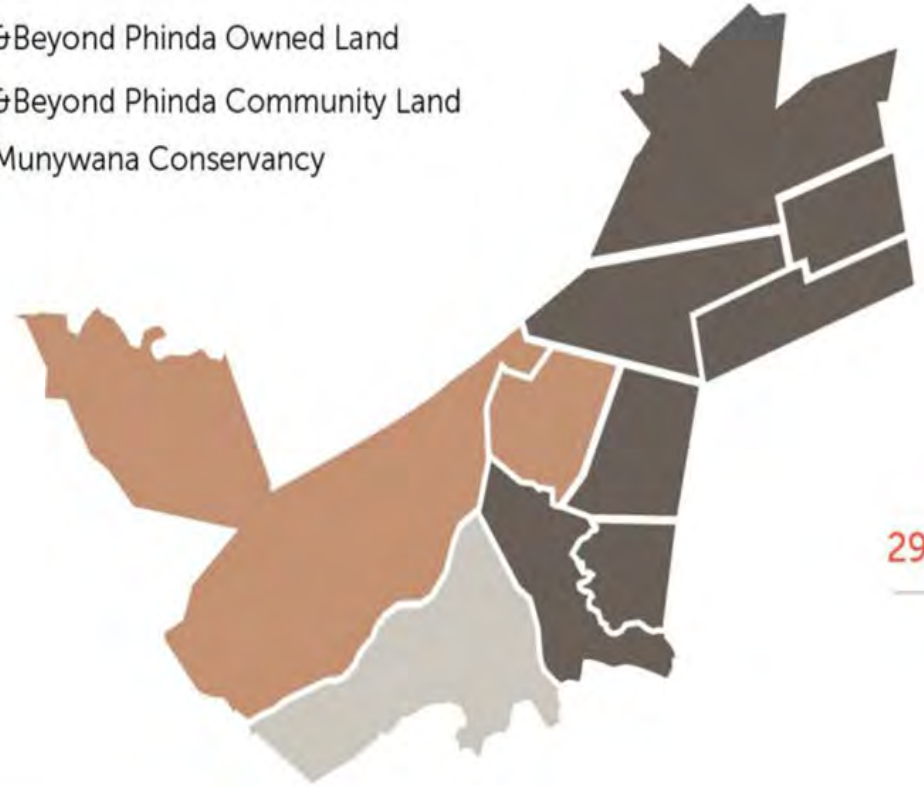
THE MUNYWANA CONSERVANCY



13 076 Ha

PHINDA PROPERTIES 1991

- Beyond Phinda Owned Land
- Beyond Phinda Community Land
- Munywana Conservancy



29 866 Ha

MUNYWANA PROPERTIES 2021

WILDLIFE TRANSLOCATIONS

ROUTES OF RENEWAL

What began with the reintroduction of wildlife populations for the creation of Phinda Private Game Reserve – and later, the Munywana Conservancy – has grown into a living legacy of translocations spanning three continents. Each move tells a story of restoration, conservation, and deep collaboration.



- Phinda rewilding, 1991-2004: The blueprint for renewal**
- A** 21 White rhino to Phinda
 - B** 37 Elephant to Phinda
 - C** 12 Cheetah to Phinda
 - D** 13 Lion to Phinda
 - E** 4 Elephant to Phinda
 - F** 14 Elephant to Phinda
 - G** 18 Black rhino to Phinda

- Africa translocations: Phinda's 35-year living legacy**
- H** 6 White rhino to Okavango Delta
 - I** 87 White rhino to Okavango Delta
 - J** 5 Lion to Akagera National Park, Rwanda
 - K** 30 White rhino to Akagera National Park, Rwanda
 - L** 16 White rhino to Garamba National Park, DRC
 - M** 17 White rhino to Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania

- India translocations: African expertise exported**
- N** 50 Gaur to Bandhavgarh National Park
 - O** 12 Tigers to Panna, Satpura and Sanjay National Parks
 - P** 48 Barasingha to Satpura National Park
 - Q** 50 Blackbuck to Kanha National Park
 - R** 20 Cheetah to Kunho National Park
 - S** 27 Nilgai to Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary

White rhino translocated



Black rhino translocated



10 Record number of rhino in a single Ilyushin IL-76 cargo plane







ENDANGERED WILDLIFE MILESTONES



White and Black Rhino

White rhino | **202**

translocated to establish founder
populations across Africa

Black rhino | **18**

translocated to support black rhino

Range expansion across Southern Africa



Cheetah

63 translocated to ensure critical
genetic
diversity across Southern Africa
metapopulation



Pangolin

Viable population established in a
region
where the Temminck's ground
pangolin was considered
locally extinct

CONNECTING THE HISTORIC AND CURRENT



Care of Land

2020 | Water bottling plants installed at all six lodges

2025 | Over 142 000 plastic bottles removed p.a.



Care of Wildlife

2019 | Phinda Button Spider discovered – new species

2017 | Phinda Rain Frog discovered – new species



Care of People

1991 | 22 Unskilled community people employed

2025 | 600+ skilled full time employees

CONNECTING THE HISTORIC AND CURRENT



School Education

2020 | **134** New & renovated classrooms

2025 | **19 000** Scholars supported across **50** schools



Healthcare

2020 | **4** Clinics supported

2025 | **51 070** Residents with access to primary healthcare



Higher Education

2025 | CLEF tertiary education fund established supporting **268** students

2025 | Programme evolves to include vocational training opportunities

SHARING THE IMPACT



Then



Now

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

33 years | Community impact in partnership
with Wild Impact/Africa Foundation

5 | Partner Communities |

69 762 | Community residents

FY 1995 – 2020

US\$ **5.5 Million** | Local procurement spend

US\$ **5.9 Million** | Capital Investment

US\$ **4.7 Million** | Annual disbursements to
Partner Communities

US\$ **7.5 Million** | Wage contribution, Phinda
& Muniwana

US\$ **22.7 Million** | Estimated lease fees to
two Communities till 2042



Phinda/Mkhuze Community Benefit Comparison (2000)

Measure	Mkhuze Game Reserve	Phinda
Estimated losses to poaching (annual)	In excess US\$ 60 000	US\$ 1,500 - US\$ 3,200
% respondents stating their community did not receive benefits	KwaNgwenya: 85% KwaJobe: 78%	Makhasa: <7% Mnqobokazi: just over 28%
% saying management works closely with communities	Under 10%	Over 54%

Key Challenges:

“The Hardest Moments”

- Economic Vulnerability Linked to Tourism
- Rhino poaching
- Complex Community Relations and Land Restitution Issues
- Climate Change
- Socioeconomic Tensions with Adjacent Communities



Key Improvements

A group of young women, likely from a traditional African community, are captured in a vibrant scene. They are wearing intricate, multi-colored beaded necklaces and headbands. The women are smiling and appear to be in the middle of a performance or a communal activity, with some clapping their hands. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting with other people present.

- ✓ Diversify revenue streams
- ✓ Ensure real value reaches communities
- ✓ Increase community voice in decision-making
- ✓ Prioritise women & youth inclusion
- ✓ Invest in the future



What has this landscape taught us?

Landscape restoration is possible even after extreme degradation - 150 years in 30 years




The Lesson:

Ecological restoration is possible at scale, given time, patience, and strong protection.

Wildlife can return when habitat is restored and protected



A close-up photograph of a middle-aged Black man with a shaved head, smiling broadly. He is wearing a white short-sleeved button-down shirt with a small orange sunburst logo on the left chest. He is gesturing with his right hand, pointing towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with many people, suggesting a community event or gathering. The lighting is bright, indicating it is daytime.

Trust and moving at
the speed of trust with
local communities is
essential.

The Lesson:

Deep inclusive
consultation is essential
for buy in

Community Involvement Must Evolve Beyond Employment



The Lesson:

Participation must move up the value chain from labour to meaningful decision-making and ownership.

Tourism Is a Tool, Not the Objective

High-end tourism can sustainably finance conservation but its challenging, marginal and not for all conservation areas

The Lesson:

Diverse income and revenues are necessary to buffer against the tourism shocks





**Strong Protection Is
Non-Negotiable**

Community goodwill alone could not replace trained, well-resourced security operations.

The Lesson:

Social solutions do not eliminate the need for enforcement- they complement it

Conservation Is as Much About People as Wildlife

Some of the hardest challenges were not ecological but social: expectations, elite capture, internal community politics, youth unemployment, and trust deficits.

The Lesson:

Social dynamics can determine conservation outcomes as much as species biology.



Science-based adaptive management is essential.

The Lesson:

Long term monitoring and credible academic research



Conservation Timelines Are Measured in Decades, Not Projects

Phinda's real outcomes - ecological recovery, governance maturity, leadership emergence - took 20–30 years, not funding cycles of 3 - 5 years.

The Lesson: Donors and managers must design for intergenerational timescales.

Like-minded organisations and NGOs partnerships can help restore and rewild the world



The Lesson: conservation is relational work.



No Model Is Static or Perfect

The Phinda model required continuous adaptation, ownership structures changed, partnerships shifted, tourism models evolved, and mistakes corrected over time.

The Lesson:

Successful conservation models are living systems, not templates

Leadership Truths



✓ Step into uncertainty - expect failure

✓ Be bold. Be brave.

✓ Make hard, uncomfortable decisions

Success is never final

You can't please everyone

✓ It's bloody hard work

✓ Work life balance

“Amongst the most challenging goals which the world has set itself for the twenty-first century is to try to combine development with sustainable use of the environment.”

Nelson Mandela

