



WHITE OAK
CONSERVATION



annual report

2019

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485
threatened
animals
live at WO
today

17,000
acres
under
conservation

3

from the director

As one of the largest private conservation centers of its kind, White Oak Conservation cares for threatened species from around the world at our facility in Northern Florida. Our natural areas and forests are home to a plethora of native wildlife and plants, and White Oak serves as a keystone property, protecting the St. Marys River and the watershed from development and pollution.

As we produced this report, the Covid-19 pandemic changed the world. The White Oak team has implemented numerous precautions to ensure that staff members and their families stay safe. Through the gracious support of Walter Conservation donors, our animal care and conservation efforts have continued unabated.

The pandemic will have an unfortunate and lasting impact on the world's wildlife. Lockdowns have prevented field staff from working, and wildlife poaching is on the rise globally. Severe reductions in travel-related income has created far-reaching

hardships across the industry, resulting in the direct loss of tourism funds available for operating parks and reserves and employing key staff.

White Oak Conservation's 2019 Annual Report shares the impact of our efforts to save species. As in any year, our work is never finished, but we'll share with you our progress and reinforce the relevance of our programs over time. Given the bizarre and extenuating circumstances facing the world today, we pledge to reinvigorate and sustain our efforts to save wild animals and protect wild places. We hope that you are inspired by our efforts and we encourage you to join and support us.

Steve Shurter
CEO, Executive Director
White Oak Conservation Foundation

There are approximately
150
florida panthers
left in the wild



7

18
White Oak holds
the largest single
group of okapi
outside Africa



wildlife, wildlands & people

32
species
in our care



The recipe for successful wildlife conservation is actually quite simple. Secure animal populations. Protect habitats. Create human support networks.

The devil is in the details, and the actual groundwork necessary for conservation to succeed is complex. At White Oak we focus on three essential ingredients.

Our **Wildlife** programs focus on species that need our help and that thrive in our environment. The animals at White Oak are important to the survival of their species. Today, White Oak is home to 32 species. We are committed to sustaining their populations. Forever.

Every animal needs a home. White Oak ensures that wildlife has a safe place to live. As stewards of the environment, we are entrusted with protecting these **Wildlands** as habitats, and with carefully managing this treasured space today and for the future.

We are fighting a losing battle if people don't respect and value wildlife and wild places. Loss of habitats, illegal hunting and wildlife trafficking take a horrific toll on species across the globe. At White Oak we invest in people, our community, students and visitors, to ensure our guests understand the value of these animals and care about them.

4,700
people
toured WO in 2019

Conservation is about **People**. You are their future.

17,000
acres
under
conservation

florida grasshopper sparrow

106
florida
grasshopper
sparrows
released into the
wild in 2019

Currently, White Oak Conservation is the only place breeding Florida grasshopper sparrows for release.

The Florida grasshopper sparrow was first described in 1902. At the time, a relatively widespread population of the birds lived in south-central Florida. By 2017, only about 15 pairs remained in the wild, mainly because their native prairie grassland had been converted to cattle pastures, sod production and other agricultural uses.

In 2016, White Oak became involved in the recovery of the Florida grasshopper sparrow in partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The first Florida grasshopper sparrows bred at White Oak that following year. In 2019, we released 106 Florida grasshopper sparrows into the wild in south Florida. We are on track to surpass that number in 2020.

mississippi sandhill crane

Mississippi sandhill cranes are an endangered subspecies of sandhill crane found in southern Mississippi. Due to habitat loss, their numbers in the wild had dropped to 30 birds by 1981. That year, the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center began releasing captive-reared chicks into the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge. In 1992, the responsibility for the birds' recovery was transferred to the USFWS Southeast Region. White Oak began a partnership with the USFWS in 1994 and we received our first breeding pairs of cranes at the end of that year.

In 2019, six young Mississippi sandhill cranes hatched at White Oak were transported to the Refuge and released. There are currently an estimated 129 Mississippi sandhill cranes on the Refuge.



White Oak
has rewilded
68
mississippi
sandhill cranes
since 1995



❖ White Oak has worked with Mississippi sandhill cranes for more than 20 years.



21
Florida panthers
have been rewilded
by White Oak

florida panther

White Oak is the only facility equipped to rehabilitate orphaned or injured Florida panthers for release back into the wild.

The endangered Florida panther is found in southern Florida, predominantly south of the Caloosahatchee River, where its range is under pressure from development. Car strikes and aggression over shrinking territories cause injuries that, if not lethal, require medical care and rehabilitation. In 1986, in partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, White Oak developed a 15-acre habitat to rehabilitate injured and orphaned panthers. Later that year, the first Florida panther arrived at White Oak.

White Oak is now home to a pair of sibling male panthers who were orphaned and too young to survive without human care. They live in naturalistic enclosures at White Oak and are able to climb trees and navigate through thick brush, while serving as ambassadors for their species.

rhinoceros

How many rhinos are enough?

Unfortunately, the outlook for white rhinos in Africa today is grim. Poaching for their horns has taken a heavy toll, and the white rhino population has dropped from 25,000 to 18,000 in just 8 years. In light of rampant wildlife trafficking, we plan to add even more rhinos into safe assurance populations at White Oak.

In 2012, on a ranch in South Africa, two black rhinos, Little Bit and Tyson, survived a late-night attack by poachers. Three other rhinos were killed for the illegal rhino horn market. White Oak acquired the young rhino couple, who are now safe, and Little Bit is due to give birth in 2020. It only takes two to make a difference.

Conservation centers like White Oak have significantly improved the health and quality of human care for Indian rhinos, also known as greater one-horned rhinos. We have created nearly 60 acres specifically for these rhinos to forage and socialize, with large lakes to bathe in. Rewilding efforts in India's national parks give hope that the population of this impressive rhino will continue to grow and recover.

3,600
greater one-
horned rhinos
live in the wild

❖ Resembling an armor-plated dinosaur, the greater one-horned or Indian rhino seems like a prehistoric creature at first glance. These rhino “giants” enjoy wetlands, meadows and woodlands near rivers where they are found in India and Nepal. Today, our modern-day dinosaurs are alive and well at White Oak.





dama gazelle

In 1962, a small herd of dama gazelles was imported from a remote ouadi (a desert valley with water) in northern Chad with a final destination of several U.S. zoos. Those 12 gazelles went on to reproduce and, after many generations, there are 200 dama gazelles as a part of a coordinated long term Species Survival Plan.

It's our most successful assurance population program. We have produced more than **400 calves**, and today White Oak cares for 43 dama gazelles both at White Oak and at the Walter Conservation Burr Ranch in Texas. Our success over the past 37 years has guaranteed the survival of the dama gazelle.

In 2019, we embarked on a program to rewild dama gazelles in Chad. Working with partners Fossil Rim Wildlife Center and the Sahara Conservation Fund, White Oak is developing plans to send dama gazelles from the U.S. for reintroduction to their native habitat.

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okapi

White Oak's conservation breeding program for okapi began in 1991. The okapi Romakari was born in 1989 in the Ituri Forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo. His parents were okapi living at the Okapi Conservation Project located in Epulu. Because of his lineage, he was the perfect candidate for enlistment into the okapi Species Survival Plan, and in 1991 he and another okapi arrived at White Oak following a lengthy trip and quarantine period. These two males were strategically placed with females, and their reproduction was prolific.

Romakari is retired now at White Oak, and we celebrated his birthday in 2019 – 30 years. He's an okapi legend, having produced 17 offspring in his lifetime. His visage has even graced the pages of National Geographic.

Today the **4,000 - 6,000** okapi estimated to live in the Ituri Forest are endangered due to illegal hunting, disease, natural resource extraction and civil unrest. These factors threaten the region and complicate conservation efforts. The okapi at White Oak in human care are a critical population that ensures the safety and survival of the species.

Every animal counts.

18
okapi
live at White Oak, the largest population outside of Africa

wildlife baby boom



White Oak
has had
188
cheetah births
since 1985

Cheetahs may be the fastest animal on land, but they are currently in a race for their survival. Cheetahs face multiple pressures in the wild, including habitat loss, conflict with farmers who see them as a threat to their livestock, and a burgeoning black-market exotic pet trade.

Assurance populations like White Oak's are important to preventing the loss of this iconic African species. Morticia, a female born in September 2019—is being raised with her “brother” Gomez, a male born at the Cincinnati Zoo and Gardens and brought to White Oak to be her littermate. Both cubs were born into single-cub litters. By being raised together, they are learning natural behavior that they would not have otherwise experienced.



There
have been
70
giraffes
born at White Oak since
1987, including two
born in 2019



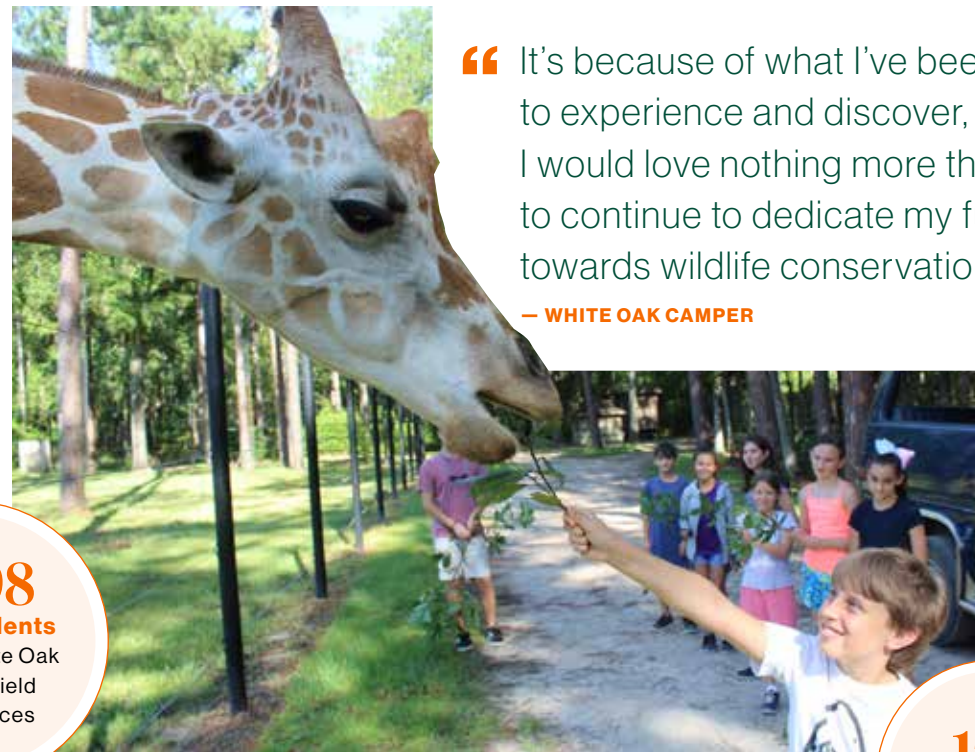
There are
fewer than
7,500
cheetahs
left on the African
landscape.



❖ Three double-wattled cassowary chicks were hatched at White Oak in 2019. White Oak was one of three AZA facilities to breed cassowaries in 2019.

education: looking toward the future

People are the key to successful conservation programs. Accordingly, the development of training and educational opportunities for students and professionals is one of the highest priorities for White Oak.



“It’s because of what I’ve been able to experience and discover, that I would love nothing more than to continue to dedicate my future towards wildlife conservation.

— WHITE OAK CAMPER

1,298
K-12 students
visited White Oak
through Field
Experiences

K-12 LEARNING

Today’s youth are passionate about the world around them. White Oak works with schools in surrounding counties to transform that excitement into conservation knowledge and action. Through field experiences, research, community service projects and outreach, White Oak instills a conservation ethic in future leaders.

SUMMER CAMP

White Oak Conservation Summer Camp provides experiential learning opportunities that immerse campers in all that White Oak has to offer – wildlife, veterinary science, natural resources, sustainability and more.

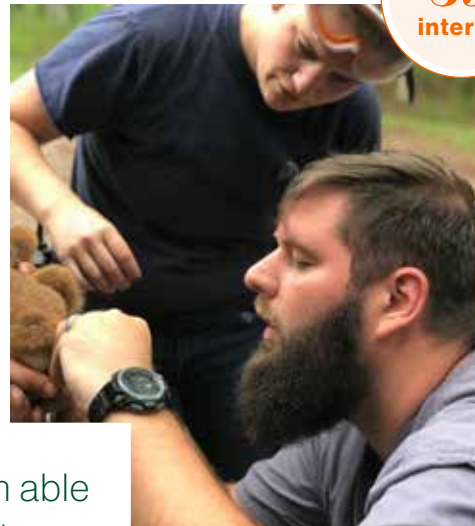
176
conservation
campers



39
interns

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

White Oak is a unique, innovative center for conservation, and we invite people from around the world to train with us, learn from us, and help us protect wildlife and wild places. We are proud to offer a variety of training opportunities to engage with White Oak’s experts and programs, including residencies, internships, and preceptorships.



EMERGING WILDLIFE CONSERVATION LEADERS

Every two years, a new cohort of early career conservation professionals joins the Emerging Wildlife Conservation Leaders (EWCL) program. EWCL combines conservation and leadership skills training, networking opportunities with peers and established practitioners, and mentorship to develop a global wildlife conservation project. In response to the continued rhino poaching crisis, all 2019 projects were rhino-focused, and 25 up-and-coming conservation leaders representing 24 organizations participated.

conservation begins at home

1,130

acres

underwent prescribed burns to promote quality wildlife habitats and reduce wildfire hazards. Fire also plays a critical role in managing longleaf pine ecosystems

White Oak has dedicated
20
acres
of property to wildlife food plots

wildlife food plots

Food plots can benefit many types of wildlife. They also can assure that wildlife species have adequate food supplies in the spring and summer months for reproduction and raising their young. White Oak has established nine food plots throughout our property. It is another way that we support native wildlife and sustainable habitats.



❖ A single bat can eat 6,000 to 8,000 insects each night.

bat houses and monitoring

Bat houses provide a safe environment for bats. They give females a safe, warm place to raise their young, and since most female bats have only one pup each year, bat populations grow very slowly. Bats are one of nature's best methods of pest control. A single bat can eat up to 1,200 mosquito-sized insects every hour. Bats also are useful pollinators, and their guano is a great fertilizer.

White Oak now has **10 bat houses** on property. Four bat houses were installed at White Oak in 2019, including 3 BCM Rocket Roost bat houses. These houses are specially designed to mimic a dead tree roost. This style of house attracts a wider range of bat species and can hold approximately 120 bats.

To continue with our bat conservation work, White Oak partnered with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in July 2019 to take part in their Long-term Bat Monitoring Program. This program allows Florida Fish and Wildlife staff to work with White Oak staff to collect acoustic data on bat populations at White Oak over a 10-year period. The data collected is through bat calls or acoustic data. Because so little is known about bat species in Florida, this data will allow us to compile a species list and to learn which species are present during different times of the year. By collecting data over a long period of time, White Oak also will be able to better understand the health of the bat populations and observe population trends. To date, nine species of bats have been recorded here at White Oak!

white oak conservation foundation

White Oak Conservation Foundation funds White Oak's efforts to save endangered species and preserve large, wild spaces across the globe.

Led by philanthropists Kimbra and Mark Walter, the nonprofit supports conservation efforts at White Oak and on millions of acres of reserves in Africa and North America.

White Oak pioneers global conservation efforts through innovative science; assurance wildlife populations; species recovery; anti-poaching strategies; education programs; and collaborations with other conservation organizations.

Whenever possible, we work with government conservation efforts and conservation partners to rewild endangered species. Habitat preservation is equally critical, because severe habitat loss is proven to lead to extinction. Wildlife protection initiatives ensure species survival.

We believe that humans are at fault. We also believe humanity has the power to reverse these effects.

To contribute to the foundation, please visit www.whiteoakconservation.org or call 904-225-3383.






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