

# IMPACT REPORT



2023



WILDERNESS

RWANDA



A lush tropical forest scene with tall, slender plants and dense green foliage. The image is dominated by vertical elements, including several tall, thin, brownish-green stalks that rise from the ground. In the foreground, there are large, bright green leaves with prominent veins, some of which are arranged in a fan-like pattern. The background is filled with a dense canopy of various green plants and trees, creating a sense of depth and a vibrant, natural environment. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day, and the overall color palette is rich in various shades of green and brown.

*Celebrating a conservation  
tourism success story*



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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is produced as the Wilderness Group celebrates its 40th anniversary. Operations in Rwanda commenced much more recently, with the purchase in 2016 of a 51% equity stake in Sabyinyo Silverback Lodge (now Wilderness Sabyinyo), and the opening in June 2017 of Wilderness Bisate. The report is aimed at stakeholders in Rwanda and intended to inform them about the role and impact of this business.

The data in this report relate primarily to subsidiaries in Rwanda of Wilderness Holdings Limited (Botswana). It does not include data relating to the Wilderness Group and its operations in eight other countries.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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# CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

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2023 is a momentous year for Wilderness. Firstly, it is the 40th anniversary of the Group's operations. Secondly, this is the first year since 2019 when we don't expect to experience drag on results due to hangovers from the Covid 19 pandemic. Thirdly, the Group is well into the process of rolling out its new, more consumer-facing, brand following a re-visioning process carried out during 2022.

Closer to home, the Group has exciting plans for operations in Rwanda. Construction will commence soon on new camps at Bisate and Magashi. We also hope to make further progress in respect of a possible new camp development at Gishwati-Mukura National Park.

The Wilderness Group is proud of what we have achieved in Rwanda, in such a short space of time. Although the tour operator Thousand Hills Africa and Sabyinyo Silverback Lodge (Sabyinyo) have been in existence for much longer, and Wilderness travel shops in southern Africa have long been sending tourists to the country, Wilderness itself did not invest directly in the country until 2016 when we acquired a 51% equity stake in the Governors' Camp Collection and Sabyinyo. This was followed in 2017 by the opening of Wilderness Bisate. In the short time since, we have added Bisate Kwanda and Wilderness Magashi in Akagera National Park.

More importantly, our Bisate investment has moved the market for tourism based on gorilla trekking in Rwanda. Prior to this, the most upmarket lodge catering to this market was Sabyinyo. Our proposals to develop Bisate intended to introduce a level of quality not previously offered in this region and some commentators were sceptical about the

feasibility of attracting sufficient numbers of guests, at the intended price point, needed to justify the level of capital investment required. Bisate was also the most complex build project ever undertaken by Wilderness, because of the terrain. But the rest is history: Bisate was the group's most successful new product launch and also demonstrated its extreme resilience by returning to profitability by August 2020, the first Wilderness camp to recover from the pandemic. This success story has also stimulated investments by a number of other major safari operators, all in the luxury end of the market, thus achieving an uplift of the whole gorilla-trekking industry and its contribution to the Rwandan economy, conservation and community development.

It is important, at this time, to pay tribute to the commitment to Wilderness Rwanda, and the understanding that was so strongly displayed, by our guests, staff, suppliers, financiers and shareholders during the pandemic. We have weathered many storms during the long life of Wilderness, but the pandemic far exceeded all previous disturbances in the scale and severity of the impact. We have been particularly humbled by how supportive our people have been despite the uncertainty and long periods when we had to close our doors. Shoulder to shoulder we got through the worst of it and, for that, we say thank you.



**Manzi Kayihura**  
Chairman

# OUR FOOTPRINT



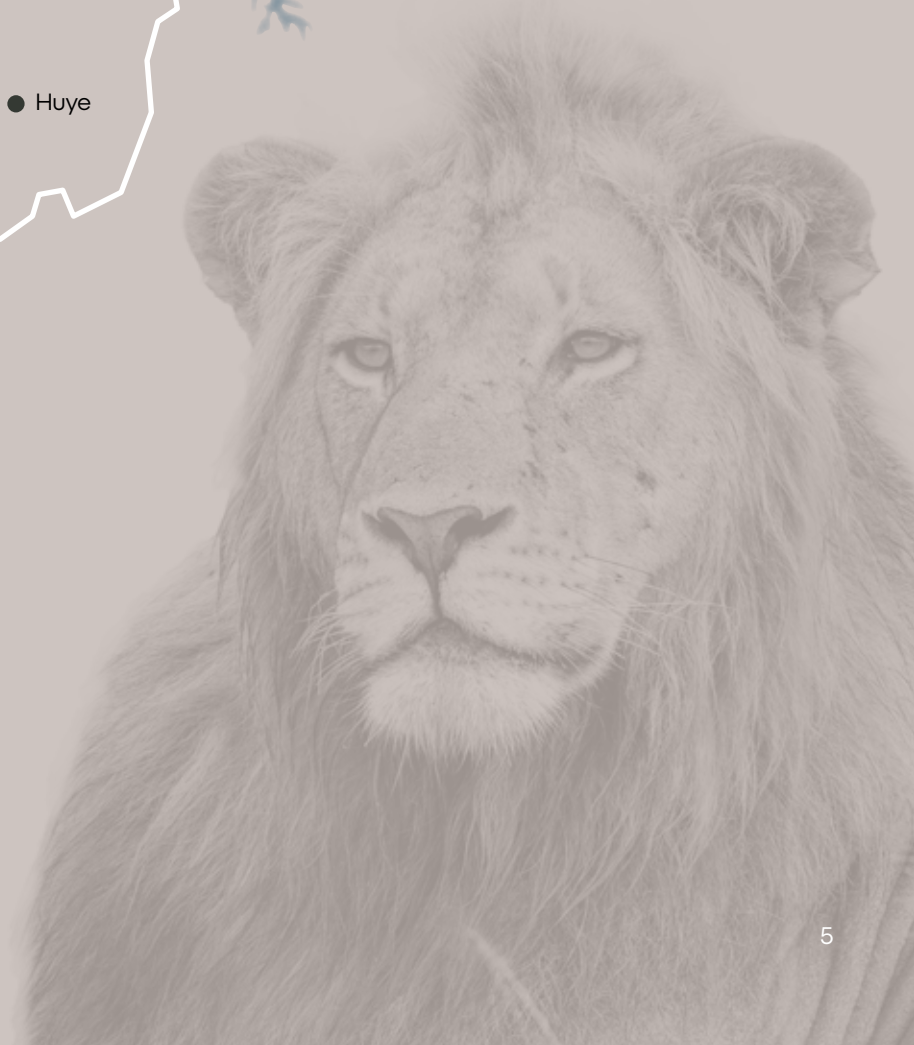
- Wilderness Camp
- Wilderness Associated Camp



# RWANDA



- ✈ Airport
- City/Town
- Wilderness Office
- Wilderness Camp

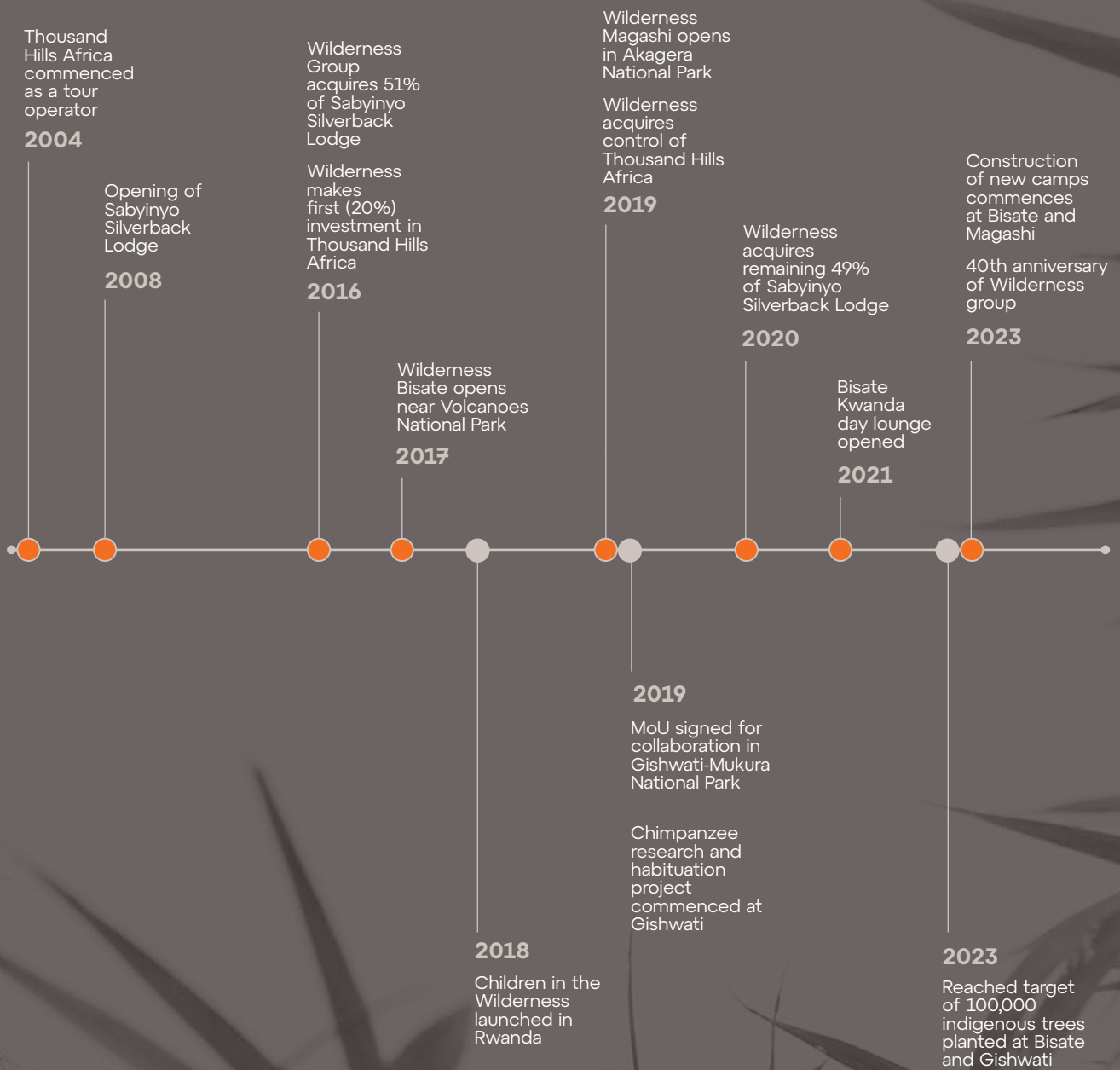




# OUR HISTORY

When the Company was formed in 1983, we commenced an exciting journey of discovery and learning. On this journey, we have reached numerous important business and impact milestones, the most important being illustrated here. We are particularly proud that many of these milestones have become precedents for the industry as a whole, and not just our own organisation.





- Business milestones
- Sustainability milestones

RWANDA

# AT A GLANCE

OVER THE LAST SEVEN YEARS



**3**  
camps, 48 beds

**16,000**  
guests hosted

For every  
**RWF 1** paid to shareholders,  
communities have been paid  
**RWF 2**,  
staff have earned  
**RWF 12**  
and Government revenues have been  
**RWF 44**



**RWF 22** billion paid by  
Wilderness and guests for leases,  
permits and and park fees

**108,000**  
indigenous trees planted and  
independent of our care

Investment in land for expansion of  
gorilla and chimpanzee habitat:  
**RWF 800** million

**RWF 209** million  
invested in chimpanzee research  
and habituation





**200**

Rwandans employed

**4.1**

staff members per guest bed

RWF **9.4** billion  
paid to staff

Nearly  
RWF **35** billion  
paid to Government

RWF **180** million  
to community development  
contributions

RWF **7** billion  
in local purchases of goods and  
services

RWF **7.7** billion invested

Third party (competitor) sales of  
RWF **47** billion

RWF **1.4** billion  
in payments to communities



**600**

children participating in 9  
eco-clubs

**200**

children attending 9 annual  
CITW conservation camps

**140**

bursaries worth RWF290  
million awarded



## OVERVIEW OF THE WILDERNESS BUSINESS

Wilderness is now the largest business of its kind in Africa, with camp or tour operations in 11 countries in Africa, the USA and UK. It had its roots in Botswana in 1983, when Wilderness was one of the pioneers of the conservation tourism business which has subsequently been replicated by many competitors the world over.

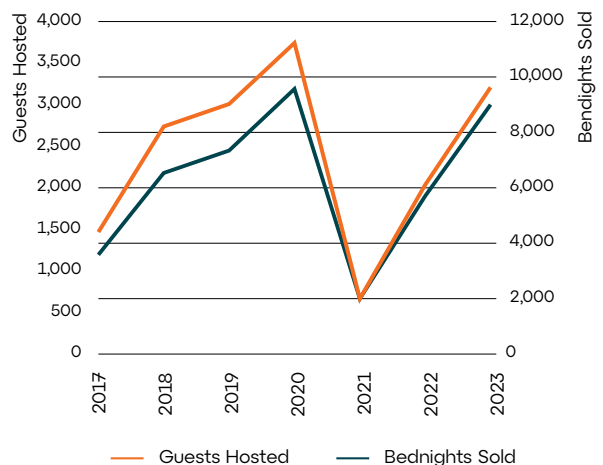
From humble beginnings in Botswana, Wilderness gradually expanded into the rest of southern Africa. Over time, it has evolved into a specialist luxury hospitality and conservation business. The Group now owns and operates 60 safari camps and lodges across Africa, as well as more than 25 aircraft, hosting nearly 40 000 guests per annum.

Of these, three camps are in Rwanda, hosting nearly 10 000 bed-nights per annum, with a further three camps currently being considered. The dramatic growth of the business in the country is illustrated by the following graph. Cumulatively, Wilderness has hosted 16 000 guests, equating to 43 000 bed-nights, over the seven years since our first investment in the country. The graph also illustrates the catastrophic impact that the Covid pandemic had on tourism and our business, with sales

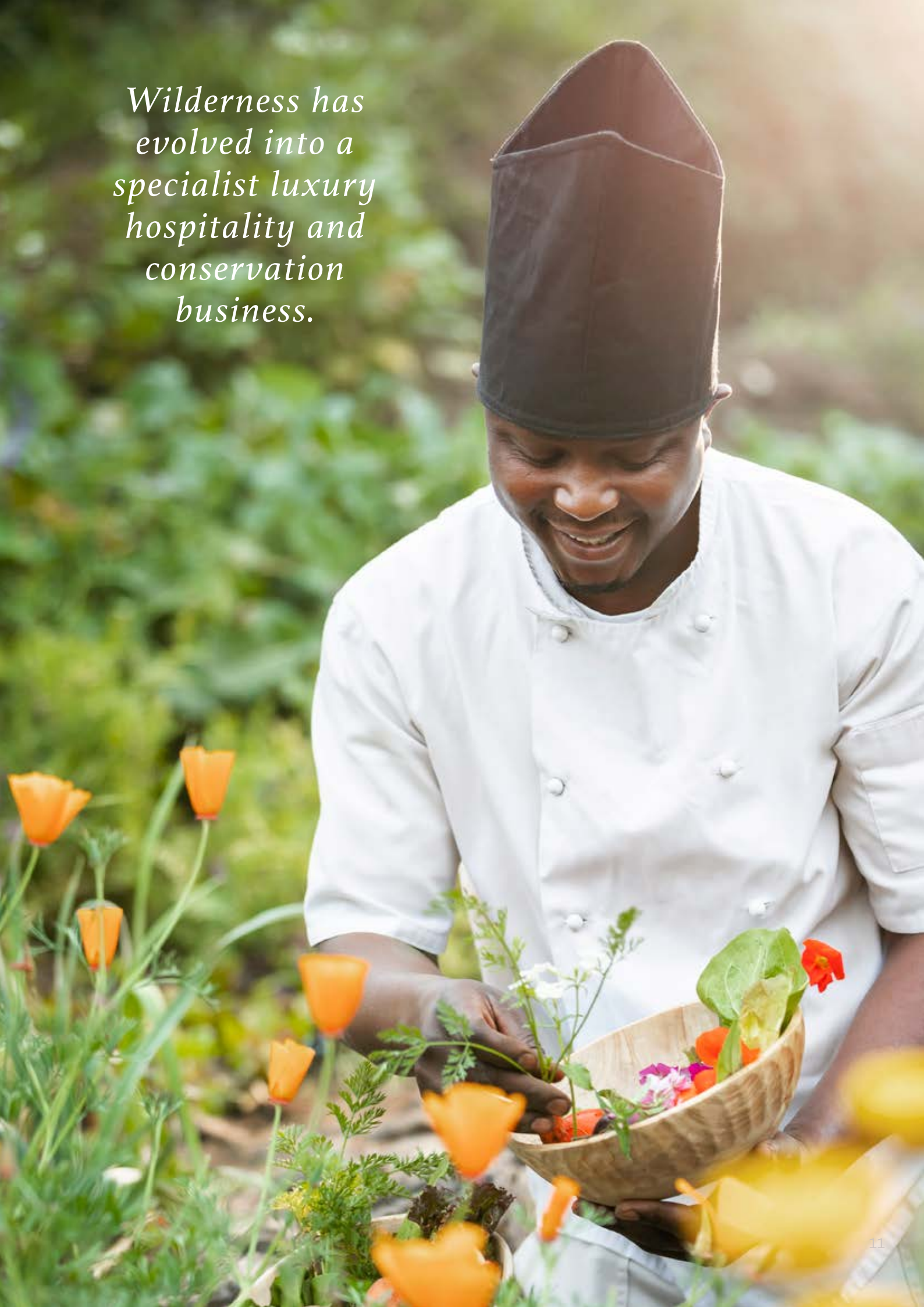
declining to just 1 600 bed-nights in FY21 (calendar year 2020) and about 50% of normal in FY22. Had these been normal years, numbers of guests hosted would probably have exceeded 22 000, accounting for more than 55 000 bed-nights.

Wilderness Rwanda is run through a network of Rwanda-registered companies, of which Imizi Eco Tourism Development Limited is the main operating entity (see page 12). The leadership structure of Wilderness Rwanda can be found on page 13.

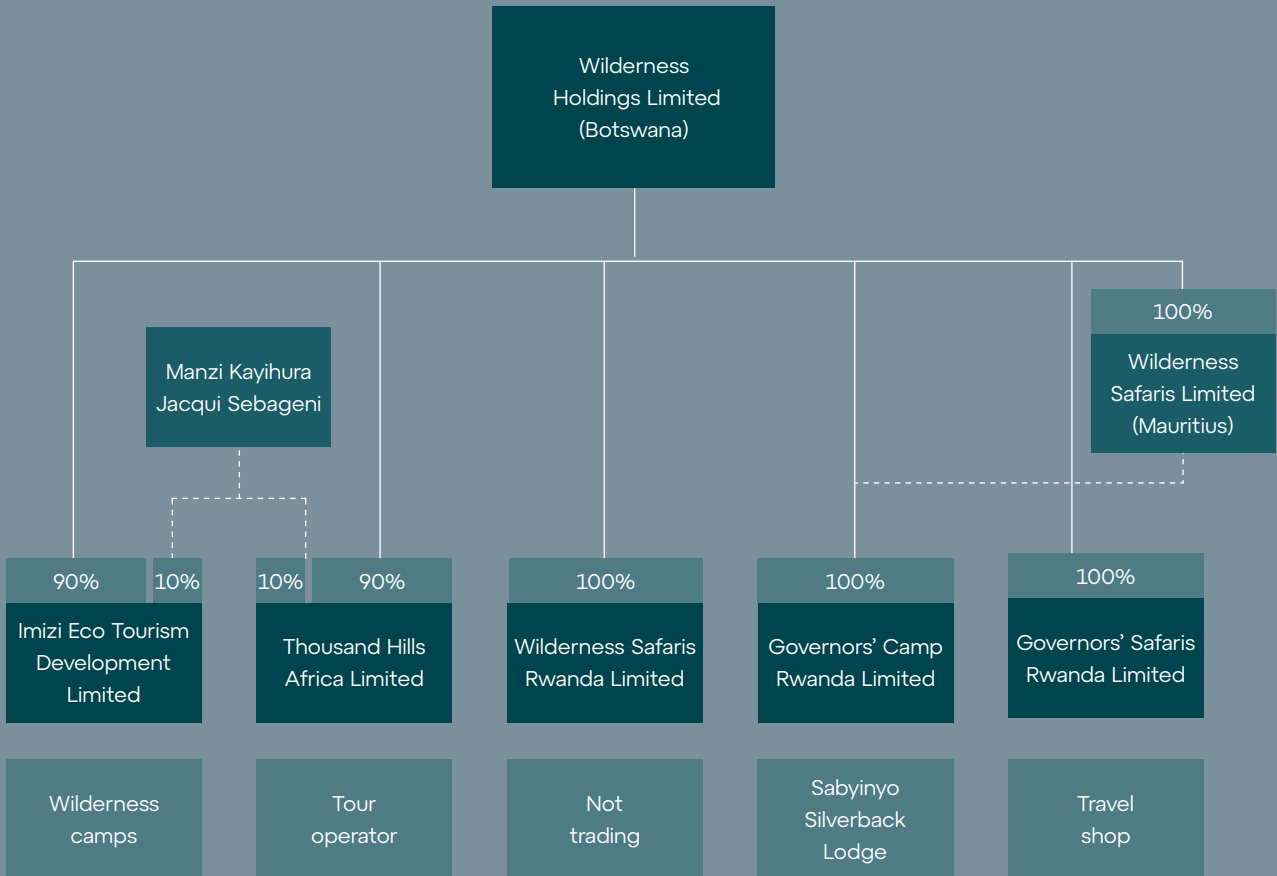
Figure 1: Guests hosted and bednights sold



*Wilderness has evolved into a specialist luxury hospitality and conservation business.*

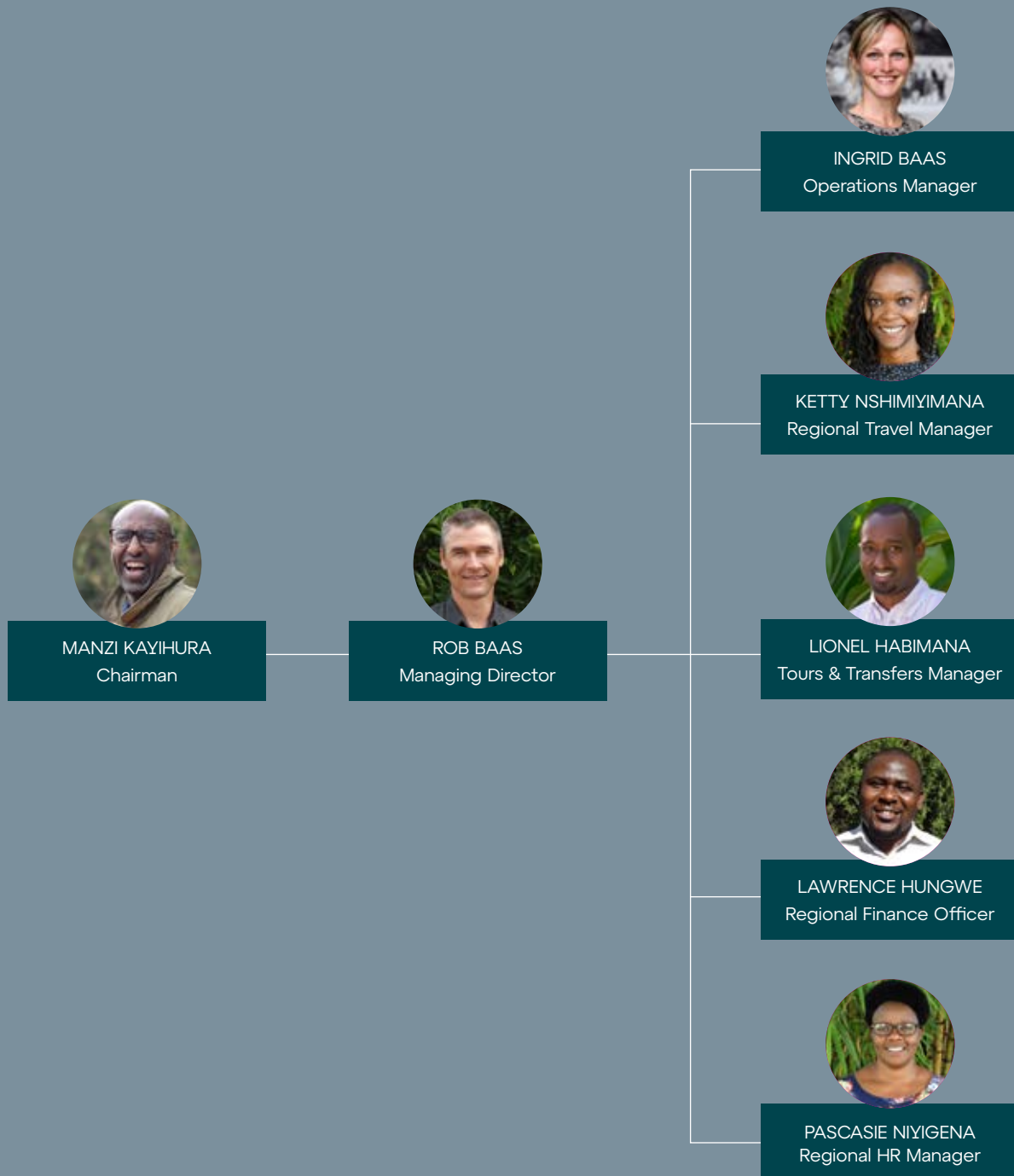


# RWANDA BUSINESS STRUCTURE





# THE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE







*“Without the  
wilderness, there  
is no Wilderness”*

## IMPACTS ON CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITIES

Our business operates in remote, rural areas, on land set aside for conservation by Government and/or communities. These areas have few sustainable economic alternatives, and the communities also suffer from limited access to education, health care and basic utilities. These factors lead to heavy reliance on the environment and can be threats to biodiversity conservation. But these areas, and the people living in and around them, are the foundations of our business, and so our Impact Strategy is designed and implemented in an effort to provide promising opportunities and address key threats to biodiversity.





## THREE PILLARS TO OUR IMPACT STRATEGY

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### EMPOWERMENT

Our business creates value for wilderness and wildlife. Employment and small business support and integration reduce reliance on natural resources;



### EDUCATION

Improved education increases economic opportunity, family resilience and support for conservation;



### PROTECTION

Human-wildlife co-existence and wildlife security programmes protect people from wildlife and wildlife from people.



## IMPACTS OF COVID ON WILDERNESS RWANDA

Although the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic is now behind us, it had such significant impacts on the business that it would be remiss not to briefly touch on the subject in this report. As has been shown above, the main impact was in the lack of visitors resulting from border closures and cancellation of international flights. These resulted in the sales of Wilderness Rwanda slumping in FY21 and FY22 to 28% and 85% respectively of pre-Covid levels. No business can survive such dramatic reductions in incoming funds and so it was necessary for management to embark on a survival strategy aimed at preserving cash.

The main elements of this strategy were:

- Deferring or cancelling all non-essential capital expenditure;
- Implementing significant cost-cutting measures across the business. In the first year of the pandemic we were able to cut costs by 47%. Sadly, these cost savings were in large part achieved by reducing staff salaries (our biggest single cost) and these pay cuts remained in force, at varying levels, for 15 months. Needless to say, this was very hard on our people;
- Securing funding support from shareholders;
- Development of protocols and processes to minimise health risks to guests and staff once it became possible to start hosting the few tourists who were willing and able to travel.

Wilderness Rwanda was fortunate to receive the support of staff, suppliers, shareholders and bankers during this difficult time. But reactions to the pandemic were not all defensive. The Group embarked upon aggressive efforts to re-engineer itself, particularly in regard to channels to the market, and these will stand the business in good stead into the future. The result is a more robust, diversified organisation, albeit one with reduced cash reserves and increased debt. FY23 has been a much better year, although occupancy rates are still a little below those enjoyed pre-Covid. Global supply chain constraints, the growing cost of fuel and other inflationary pressures weighed on the recovery. Forward bookings suggest that business is likely to return to pre-Covid levels during the current financial year.

The very serious impacts that the pandemic had on Wilderness Rwanda and the industry are dramatically illustrated by many of the charts and graphs presented in this report, which show serious disruptions in FY21 and FY22.







# EMPOWERMENT

The Empowerment pillar of our impact strategy encompasses our efforts to create a wildlife economy for the benefit of both conservation and people. These efforts and impacts occur at the level of the national and regional economies, as well as more locally.

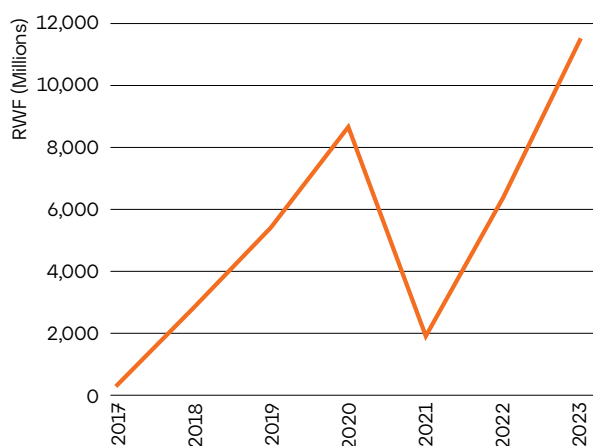
## IMPACTS ON THE ECONOMY OF RWANDA

Some of the more important indicators of the positive impacts resulting from Wilderness' operations on Rwanda's economy, and on Government revenue, are discussed in this section.

Firstly, Wilderness pays Government for taxes, licenses and permits of various kinds. These have totalled nearly RWF35 billion over the last seven years, peaking at just over RWF11.4 billion in the last financial year (see Figure 2). The impact of Covid can clearly be seen from the dip in the graph during FY21 and FY22.

It is critical to note that, over the same period, dividends paid to shareholders have amounted to just RWF790 million (see Figure 3). This means that Government revenues from the business are 44 times what shareholders have earned. Most profits have been reinvested in the business.

Figure 2: Payments to Government



Secondly, it should be noted that almost all of the turnover of the business is earned in hard, foreign currencies. The business, and indeed the industry, is thus an important generator of foreign exchange for the country.

Wilderness also makes significant purchases of goods and services from suppliers in Rwanda. These have amounted to RWF 7 billion over the last seven years, having peaked at nearly RWF1.7 billion in the last financial year (see Figure 4). The extent to which these local purchases have to be supplemented by imports has varied over time, depending on the nature of goods required. On average, 82% by value of goods and services required have been sourced from Rwandan suppliers. Needless to say, all of these local suppliers employ staff, pay taxes, etc., adding to the multiplier effects down the value chain.

Figure 3: Payments to stakeholders

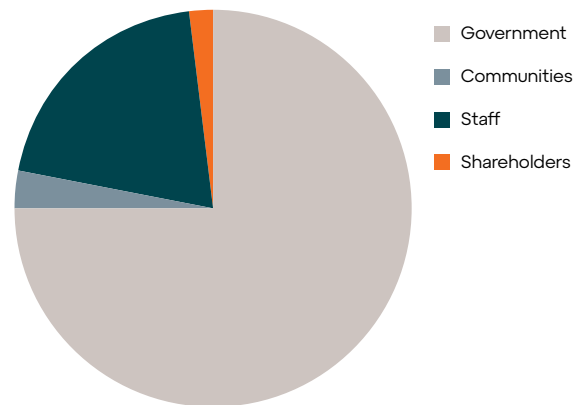


Figure 4: Purchases of goods and services from local suppliers

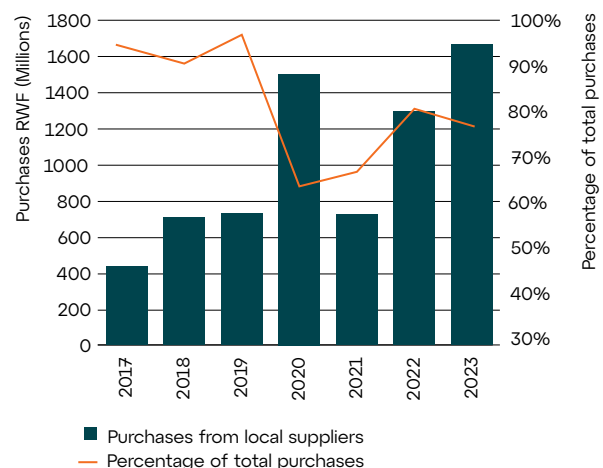
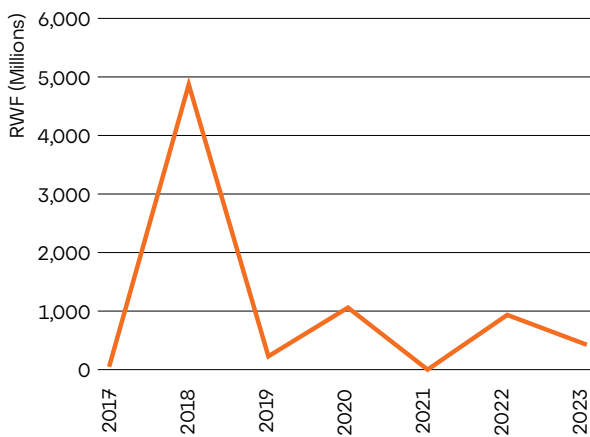




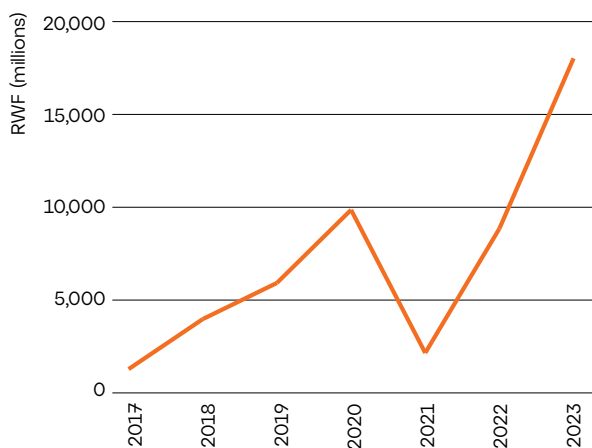
Figure 5: Capital expenditure



The levels of investment in Rwanda by the group are best illustrated by Figure 5 which shows capital expenditure in Rwanda over the seven year period. These have averaged RWF 1.1 billion per annum, totalling RWF 7.7 billion. The peak of RWF 5 billion in FY18 reflects the investment in Wilderness Bisate.

A notable further economic and industry impact arises from the fact that Wilderness Travel Shops in Rwanda and elsewhere also make sales to third party (competitor) products in the country. The scale of these sales, and the dramatic growth achieved, are illustrated by Figure 6. Over the last seven years, Wilderness travel shops around the world have made sales worth RWF 47 billion to third party products in Rwanda. In FY23 alone, these were worth RWF 18 billion.

Figure 6: Third party business sold by Wilderness travel shops



It is worth noting that many of these sales are made to our competitors and that we are major suppliers of business to them.

## PAYMENTS TO COMMUNITIES

The various payments that we and our guests make to local communities, in accordance with business arrangements entered into with these communities, are amongst the most important contributions that we make to empowerment. The payments circulate in local economies and give the people access to levels of funding that



would otherwise not exist. These funds can then be used by the communities for projects of their choosing. Most importantly, these payments create durable economic linkages with our neighbours and landlords. These payments have amounted to more than RWF1.4 billion over the last seven years (see figure 7). It is useful to note that this means communities have earned RWF2 for any RWF1 declared as dividends to shareholders.

Specifically, Wilderness Sabyinyo is owned by SACOLA, a community non-profit. This arrangement results in a sharing of the profits from the lodge, in addition to the rentals paid. These funds are used by SACOLA to drive socio-economic development in the Kinigi and Inyange sectors adjacent to Volcanoes National Park. To date the impact has been remarkable. Eight schools, including 64 classrooms, have been constructed. 12 km of road have been rehabilitated and 16 bridges constructed. 5,800 homes have been connected to power. One health centre has been built and medical insurance premiums paid for large numbers of the community. Two villages and over 70 homes have been constructed for needy people. Eleven water points have been built, serving 12,000 people and micro-finance and micro-enterprise projects initiated and funded that cover dairy, pigs, poultry, bee-keeping, carpentry and fruit-growing.

## EMPLOYMENT

The Wilderness Group employs more than 200 people in Rwanda. Fewer than 10 of these are

expatriates. It is astonishing to us how readily our staff have learned the necessary technical skills and applied their naturally welcoming personalities to the hosting of guests.

One of the major economic advantages of our business is how employment-intensive it is. Over the last seven years, Wilderness Rwanda has employed an average of 4.1 staff members per guest bed. This very high employment ratio is needed to provide the standards of service expected by guests visiting high-end lodges such as ours and shows the importance of our high-value, low-volume tourism model, from an economic perspective (as well as the more obvious environmental perspective).

Employment of numbers of staff means payment of significant salary bills. Over the last seven years, Wilderness Rwanda has paid its staff RWF 9.4 billion (this means that staff have been paid 12 times the dividends declared to shareholders over the same period.) Much of this cash has circulated in local economies, resulting in economic multiplier effects. Of course, such salary bills have also resulted in significant payroll tax revenue to Government: more than RWF 500 million per annum in more recent 'normal' years and a total of RWF 1.9 billion over the last seven years.

The training provided to these staff empowers them and is a focus of our Educate impact pillar, discussed below.

Figure 7: Payments to Communities.

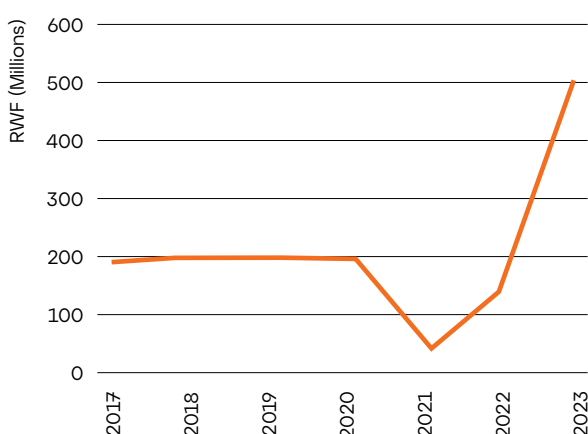
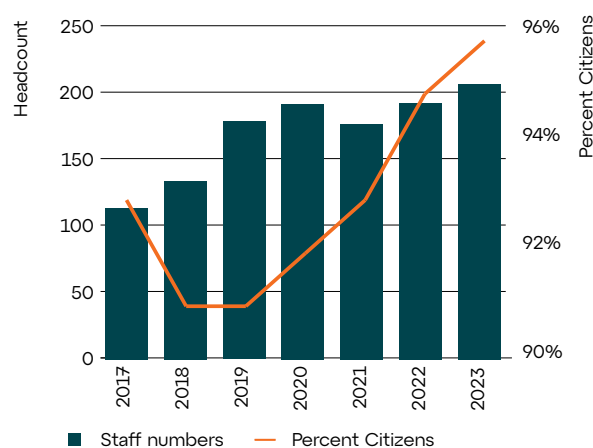


Figure 8: Headcount and localisation



## PHILANTHROPIC CONTRIBUTIONS

In addition to the business and employment relationships with our staff and communities, we and our guests and other partners also make various philanthropic contributions to the communities with which we work. The most important of these are in the field of education, which is the subject of its own 'Impact pillar', discussed in the next section. But many others are also made, depending on the needs of the communities and the funding available.

Examples of community development initiatives and projects (aside from those in education, see next section) supported by Wilderness over the last few years include:

- Rehabilitation of water harvesting facilities in Volcanoes National Park to supply water to Bisate villages (5 000 people);
- Improvements (desks, roof repairs, supply of power and water, hygiene facilities and vegetable gardens) for the seven schools with which we are partnered;
- Avocado tree nursery and organic fertiliser projects for development of small businesses of the Tuzamurane Co-Operative around Wilderness Bisate;
- Installation of solar borehole at Akayange village;
- Provision, over two consecutive years, of medical insurance and livestock for the poorest people in Bisate, Sabyinyo, Gishwati and Magashi communities.

A further notable contribution was in the form of food relief distributed to needy members of local communities most badly affected by the impacts of the pandemic on the economy. As tourism is one of the industries most badly impacted, our neighbouring communities really struggled. Using funds donated by the Wilderness Group Chairman's personal foundation, as well as other valued supporters, we used our logistical base and staff resources to purchase and distribute more than 1 420 parcels, totalling 35 tonnes, of food. The cost of this food exceeded RWF 20 million but this cost does not include the in-kind contributions of staff time and transport, storage etc. These distributions were made in accordance with the wishes of community leadership. It is estimated that this support reached 1 420 families, comprising 6 070 people.

The value of the above projects exceeds RWF180 million. Note that some of these concern provision of facilities at schools and thus straddle both the Empower and Educate impact strategy pillars.



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*We distributed more than 1 420 parcels, totalling 35 tonnes, of food.*





| WILDERNESS RWANDA



*Ensure conservation through support to education, particularly on environmental matters, as well as leadership development, for rural children.*

## EDUCATION

There are two main arms to the Educate pillar:

- Children in the Wilderness, and;
- Training given to our own staff.

## CHILDREN IN THE WILDERNESS

The Wilderness group is justly proud of the Children in the Wilderness (CITW) programme, as implemented in Rwanda. CITW has been running for 20 years, in five countries. The Rwanda programme is one of the flagships of CITW, despite having been operating for just five years. CITW is Wilderness' environmental and life skills education programme. It aims to ensure conservation through support to education, particularly on environmental matters, as well as leadership development, for rural children. The programme focuses on children in school or recent school-leavers. It thus addresses the next generation of decision-makers, inspiring them to care for their natural heritage and to become the custodians of these areas in the future. For more information on the CITW programme elements presented below, please see [www.childreninthewilderness.com](http://www.childreninthewilderness.com).

Children in the Wilderness (CITW) is implemented by the business which provides a variety of in-kind as well as monetary support:

- CITW staff salaries are funded by Wilderness, which also provides office space for CITW staff, logistical and administrative support, etc.;
- Additional funds for CITW are raised through a variety of mechanisms including guest donations and support through various other grants, including from the Wilderness Trust and other partners;
- All subscriptions to the Wilderness Members Club are donated to CITW.

Historically, the programme was based on the annual camps conducted in our camps, closed to paying guests for the occasion. But this focus was subsequently changed to the Eco-Clubs, which enable us to reach a much larger number of children, as illustrated in the CITW Programme Structure. The programme in Rwanda has already reached large numbers of children in its short life, a total of 600 participating in nine Eco-Clubs and a further 200 attending five annual camps.







# CITW PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

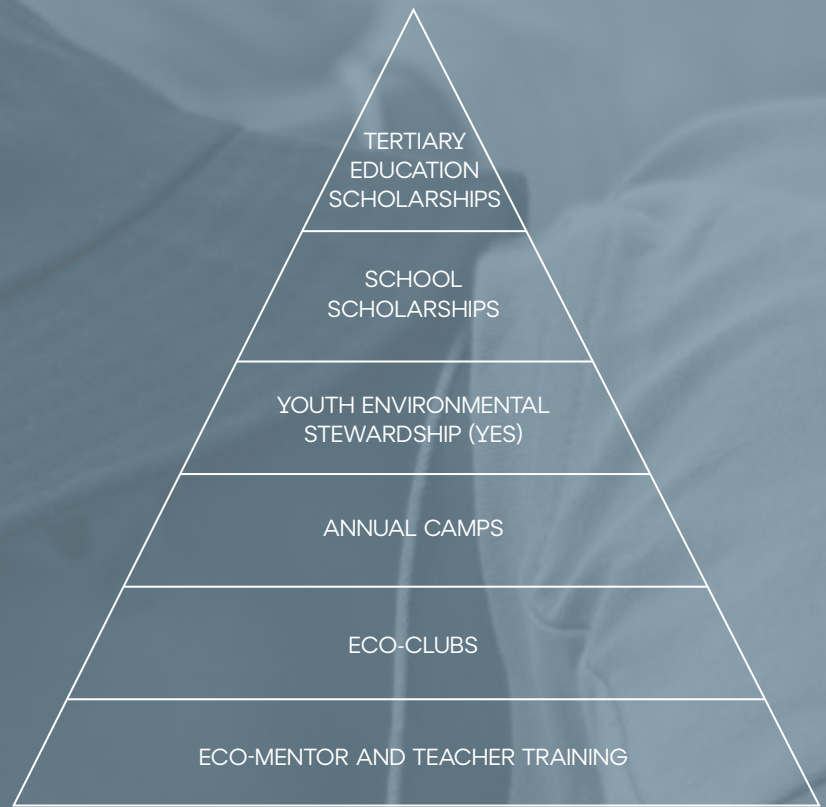
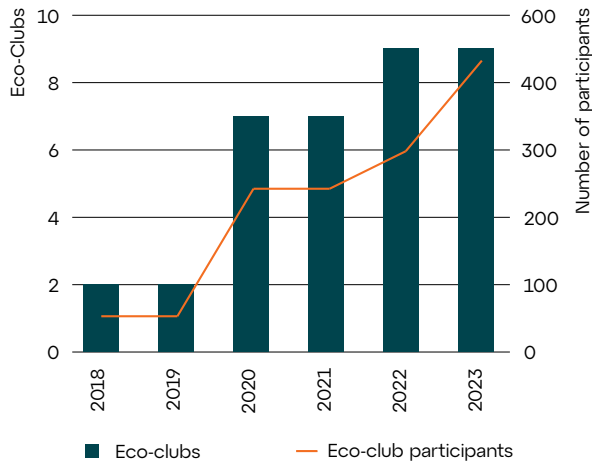


Figure 9: Eco-clubs

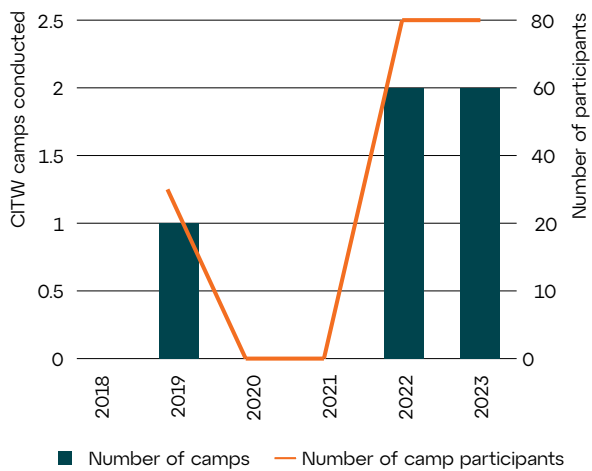


The camps were brought to a halt by Covid but have been active again for the last two years.

In order to ensure the CITW programme proceeds smoothly and with maximum impact, it is supplemented by training of teachers and mentors. The costs of this programme and training has exceeded RWF 27 million over the last five years.

Scholarships/bursaries are another, newer major feature of the Educate pillar in Rwanda. The graph below shows the remarkable statistics relating to this short-lived programme element. Over the last five years, 140 bursaries have been awarded to deserving and needy students from local communities. The value of these exceeds RWF 290 million. We are incredibly proud of this contribution to our communities.

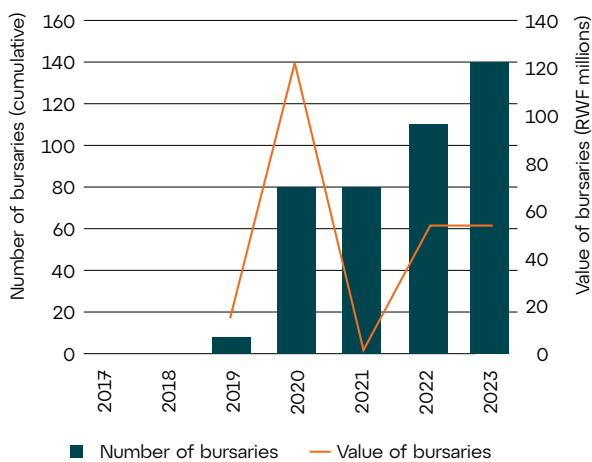
Figure 10: CITW camps



## STAFF TRAINING

Since 2017, Wilderness has empowered and trained our employees in Rwanda through various in-house and outsourced training facilities. The Wilderness training programmes are aligned to the highest tourism standards and will ensure employees are equipped with the knowledge and soft skills that lead to further leadership potential. The business continues to train all its employees to keep its service standards at the highest level. This is essential to remain competitive. With the ever-growing operation in Rwanda the company trains hundreds of citizen staff annually.

Figure 11: Bursaries



For the core of the business, which is in our lodges and the touring operation, staff involved in junior, middle and senior roles undergo annual training in the following fields:

- Hospitality;
- Lodge management;
- Driver guides;
- Professional safari guides;
- Chefs.

## HOSPITALITY

After initial training, junior staff such as housekeeping, front of house and back of house receive regular year-round training. Training needs analysis is done through guest feedback, formal appraisals, service and standards audits, and skills audits. This is an ongoing cycle. Training platforms like Lobster Ink, Education First, Wine101 and others are used in addition to in-person training by experts.

## LODGE MANAGEMENT

Lodge managers have access to management training files for the day-to-day operation. They are assisted by the Operations Manager, Hospitality Support Manager and Lodge Support Manager on any training needs.

Since 2017, a training programme has been in place for promising young Rwandan candidates. They are enrolled in the position of Trainee Manager and, once they master more qualities, promoted to Junior Manager, Assistant Manager and eventually end up as responsible Manager. In total, 16 Rwandan employees have or are successfully completing this programme and are in management positions, either within Wilderness or with other companies.

Once the junior and assistant managers have reached a certain level, an exchange programme is in place to ensure these candidates experience various aspects of the business, enabling them to grow to their full potential.

## DRIVER GUIDES

For our Touring operation, the driver guides receive continuous training in the form of in-person training or additional documentation. Training is conducted by experts in the field, sharing of experiences and constant support, enabling them to reach their full potential and ensure they are the best in their field.

## PROFESSIONAL SAFARI GUIDES

Since 2021, five Wilderness employees have passed their Field Guides Association of Southern Africa (FGASA) Apprentice Field Guide qualifications, the first Rwandan citizens to do so. Not only is this a milestone for Rwanda and its local guides, but qualifications like these serve to raise the standard

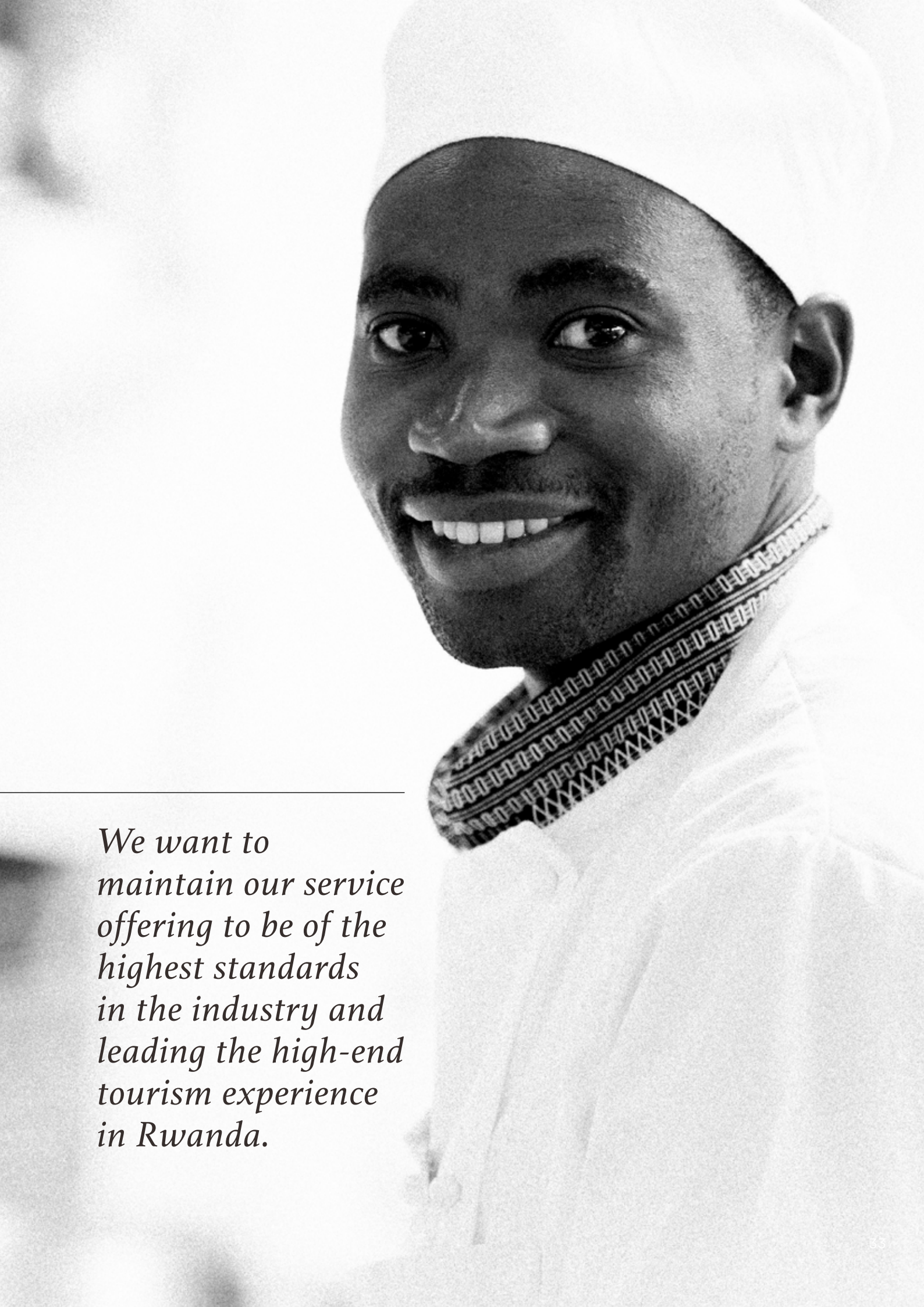
of guiding as a whole across the country. Our guests at Magashi will reap the rewards of this comprehensive training, combined with this gem of a safari offering in Akagera National Park. Additional guides are enrolled on the programme and should be fully qualified by the end of 2023.

## CHEFS

Since the opening of the first Wilderness lodge in Rwanda in 2017, we have trained citizens in the finest culinary skills. We have empowered employees from the local community to grow from no culinary skills to the position of Sous Chef. Various trainings have ensured that our kitchens serve meals according to the highest standards, offering one of the best possible food experiences in the country. Currently we have four kitchens and dining facilities in Rwanda and this will increase to six in 2024. Currently 40 Rwandan employees have been trained and run these facilities and this will increase to 60 in the coming year.

We are striving to empower and upskill many Rwandan employees to the positions of Executive, Head and Sous Chefs of our six different lodges. We want to maintain our service offering to be of the highest standards in the industry and leading the high-end tourism experience in Rwanda.





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*We want to  
maintain our service  
offering to be of the  
highest standards  
in the industry and  
leading the high-end  
tourism experience  
in Rwanda.*

*The quality of our tourism products, and the sustainability and prosperity of our business, are dependent upon the quality of the habitats and wildlife resources upon which they depend*



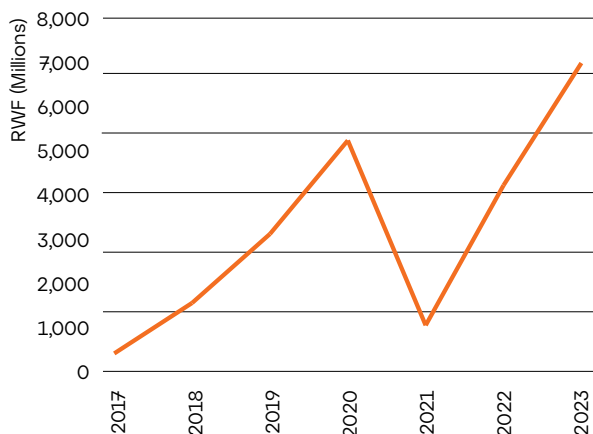
## PROTECTION

The Protect pillar of our Impact strategy is predicated on the reality that the quality of our tourism products, and the sustainability and prosperity of our business, are dependent upon the quality of the habitats and wildlife resources upon which they depend. Anything that we do that undermines the quality of these resources, undermines our business. Conversely, anything that we do that enhances these resources, improves our business: so we have a clear incentive to protect these resources. We do this through three main mechanisms:

- Paying a fair price for use of our concessions and the national parks, as well as the wildlife resources therein;
- Group Environmental Management Systems (GEMS);
- Conservation and research interventions intended to improve the quality of the ecosystems.



Figure 12: Conservation payments



## CONCESSION AND OTHER PAYMENTS

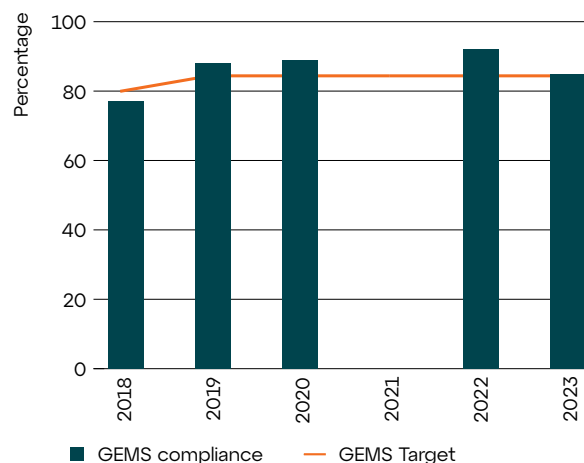
The single most important contribution that Wilderness makes to conservation (and development) arises from the payments that we and our guests make to Government and communities for the use of the national parks and our leases/concessions, as well as the wildlife living in these protected areas. These payments take the form of fees for gorilla permits, leases and park fees paid for or by the visitors. The payments are important because they offset the costs incurred by Government in running these parks and create incentives to expand areas kept under conservation.

The scale and the quantum of these payments is illustrated in figure 12. These payments have totalled more than RWF 22 billion since our initial investment in Rwanda in 2017. In FY23 alone, these exceeded RWF 7 billion. (Note that these payments include those made to communities as noted on page 22).

## GROUP ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (GEMS)

The purpose of our GEMS is to minimise any negative impacts on the environment that might arise from our operations, since these would undermine the quality of our products and ultimately harm the business. We established Group Environmental Management Systems (GEMS) for our camps in order to attain and

Figure 13: Compliance with GEM standards



maintain the high standards that differentiate us from our competitors. The GEMS provide a structured framework by which our camps are developed, operated and, if required, ultimately decommissioned.

Camp management and operations staff, as well as contractors employed during new builds and refurbishments, are required to use the GEMS as an operating guide and the minimum standard. The GEMS are updated regularly to ensure that we are utilising the latest suitable and sustainable technologies and adhering to best practice. In order to maintain the environmental integrity of our camps, we evaluate their performance against the GEMS bi-annually. These assessments allow us to measure our camps according to the same standards and help direct our efforts in instances where camps are not performing as they should. The current group goal is to achieve 85% GEMS compliance in all camps. Our performance against these targets is shown by figure 13.

The gap shown for FY21 is the result of the pandemic which resulted in most camps being closed. It also meant that Impact staff were not able to visit the camps to perform the assessments. We are pleased with the results of these assessments and will continue to ensure that these are done comprehensively and to the highest standards.



Two aspects of our GEMS warrant specific focus:

- Energy use and carbon emissions;
- Use of bottled water.

#### ENERGY USE AND CARBON EMISSIONS

Wilderness has been focussing on improving energy efficiency, and reducing carbon emissions, for more than a decade. In Rwanda, two of our camps are connected with the national grid, which is in large part hydro-powered, so this has been a lower priority. Nonetheless, Wilderness Magashi is distant from the grid and is thus largely solar-powered, supplemented by diesel generators.

Wilderness in Rwanda does not operate any aircraft, and only a few vehicles, so emissions from these sources are not a major factor in our business. However, there have in recent years been significant advances in battery-powered vehicles and it is

a matter of a few years before battery-powered game-drive vehicles will be a reality. At the present time, such vehicles are too expensive and insufficiently practical for widespread use but we are watching this space closely.

#### USE OF BOTTLED WATER

This is another area in which we have made great progress in recent years. Historically, guests expected to be given bottled water and this resulted in large amounts being trucked into camps with resultant significant costs, carbon emissions in the production and transport of the bottles and plastic waste. In response, reverse osmosis filters were installed in all camps and guests actively discouraged from using bottled water. This is reflected in the significant reductions in use of bottled water shown in figure 15.

Figure 14: Camp power systems

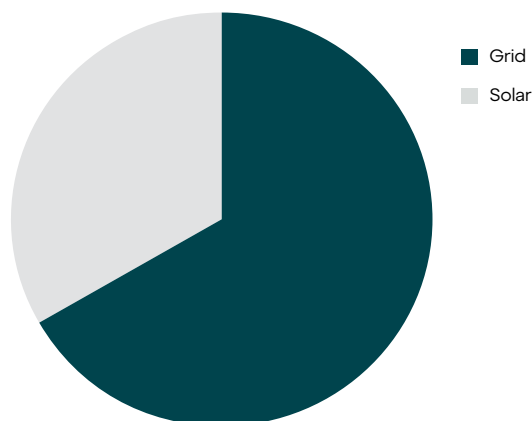
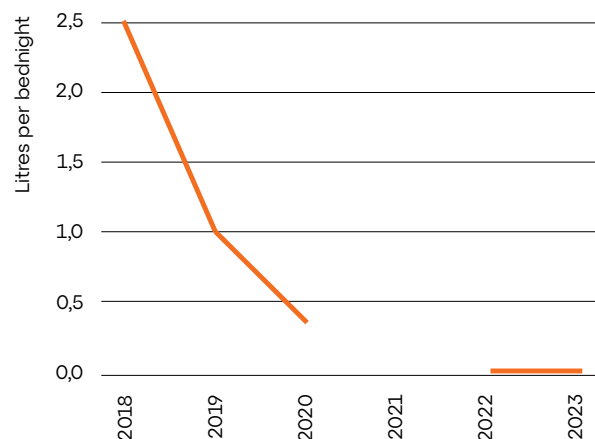


Figure 15: Bottled water consumption







## BIODIVERSITY INTERVENTIONS

In addition to the payments made for use of concessions and wildlife, we and our guests also make contributions to various conservation initiatives. These sadly were forced to contract significantly as a result of the pandemic and the flow of funds from the business and guests will only commence once the operations and profits return to normal.

Nonetheless, Wilderness in Rwanda has already made significant investments in biodiversity conservation, some of this funded by guest donations:

- At the time of the original investment in Bisate, the area was almost entirely dedicated to agriculture, dominated by exotic plants and with very little indigenous vegetation or wildlife remaining. Nearly 32 hectares of land was purchased from the then owners and a process of revegetation was commenced, in anticipation and in parallel with, construction of the lodge. More than 88 000 trees have been planted using seedlings from our own nursery and the transformation of the site has been remarkable. Aided by fertile volcanic soils and generous rainfall, trees have grown quickly and the return of indigenous wildlife, particularly birds and small mammals, has been most gratifying. On site monitoring by trail cameras has documented the return of mammals such as serval and side-striped jackal;
- Since then, a further five hectares have been purchased for the purpose of expanding gorilla habitat and the process of reforesting this land is commencing. Such purchases and reforestation will continue into the future. Taken together with the previous item, the cost of the land purchased and the reforestation effort has exceeded RWF800 million, with these costs being funded by Wilderness and our guests/ donors. This excludes many direct costs borne by Wilderness;
- In preparation for the possible launch of a product at Gishwati-Mukura National Park, we have since 2019 supported the work of a team of researchers, trackers and agronomists studying and habituating the chimpanzees and reforesting the land inside and outside the park. Over 20 000 indigenous trees have been planted on the 18 hectares of land that is part of the Gishwati reforestation program. The total cost of this support has now exceeded RWF208 million.





## GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE

The financial statements of all companies across the Wilderness Group are audited annually by independent auditors, currently mainly PwC but formerly mainly Deloitte & Touche. All companies have received clean audit opinions.

All tax affairs are conducted scrupulously in accordance with the legislation and all taxes are paid up to date. All relevant returns have been submitted.





# WILDERNESS RWANDA AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Wilderness employs more than 200 people, increasing to 300 in the current year. Many of these are employed in remote rural areas where there are few other economic activities and employment alternatives. Our research also shows that each employee supports an average of nearly eight family members, which means that our activities are directly impacting the lives of nearly 3 000 people. Salaries paid to these staff improve their lives and also circulate in local economies, creating multiplier effects.



## End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

The poverty reduction measures outlined under SDG 1 make a material contribution to improving community livelihoods and eliminating any malnutrition in the regions in which we operate.

All staff working in camps are supplied with nutritionally balanced meals for the duration of their stay/s in camps.

A number of nutrition programmes and vegetable garden projects have been implemented and supported, either through Children in the Wilderness or the community outreach programmes.

35 tonnes of food aid was distributed to needy communities during the pandemic, benefitting more than 6 000 people. A further nearly 15 000 avocado trees were distributed to 5 000 households in Kingi.



## Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

All staff and their dependents have medical insurance. In addition, preventative health care and well-being programmes for all staff are operated. In particular, we continue with efforts to educate staff about the dangers of HIV/AIDS and avoiding infection. For those staff that are infected, we support their efforts to obtain anti-retrovirals and to manage their health.

We also work to identify any injury and or health risks existing in the workplace, eliminate or mitigate these as far as possible, and educate staff as to any residual risks.

A number of initiatives of community development programmes, as well as Children in the Wilderness, work to improve awareness and health in the community areas in which we operate.



## Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Comprehensive training programmes are in place for staff at all levels, and all facets, of the organisation.

Children in the Wilderness, working through Eco-Clubs, CITW camps, Youth Environmental Stewardship and scholarship programmes all address education and learning opportunities for our neighbour communities.



## Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Discrimination of any kind, including gender discrimination, is forbidden in the Group. All our projects are managed and implemented through four active community committees and empowerment and equality is on the agenda of quarterly meetings.



## Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

All guests and staff are provided safe drinking water.

All staff housing incorporates suitable ablutions for staff.

Water-saving technologies are employed.

A number of boreholes and toilet facilities, including hand washing and toilets for girls, at all schools have been provided under the *aegis* of Children in the Wilderness and/or community outreach/development activities.



**Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all**

Energy-saving technologies are employed in camps and offices. Most of our camps employ renewable energy of various kinds to provide power for operations.



**Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**

The Wilderness business model is all about sustainable tourism and employment creation, in remote rural areas where few alternative economic activities are possible. By operating a successful business, we are able to empower local communities and help to conserve Rwanda's wilderness areas for future generations to enjoy. We actively work to improve the quality of the ecosystems and the wildlife populations based upon them, since this improves our business. Conversely, any activities that undermine ecosystems also undermine our business and so we actively work to prevent this. Our employment is labour-intensive and provides opportunities to unskilled workers coming from poor rural communities.



**Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation**

The building technologies employed in our camps are low-impact, using sustainable materials to the maximum extent possible, and can be completely removed without a trace after camp closure, should that occur. Our camp site rehabilitation processes have in the past been recognised by industry awards. Our camps are built and operated in accordance with Group Environmental Minimum Standards developed to ensure that any negative impacts on the environment are prevented and minimised. Camp performance against these standards is evaluated on a bi-annual basis and remedial action taken in the event of camps that do not meet the necessary standards.



**Reduce inequality within and among countries**

A large proportion of our staff come from poor rural communities and the income they derive from employment, as well as the payments made to communities as landlords and/or partners, constitute material contributions to the rural economies. Our employment and outreach activities are non-discriminatory.



**Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns**

The whole rationale for our business is to be sustainable, and this is ensured through our Impact Strategy. As noted under SDG 9, our Group Environmental Management Systems were developed and are implemented to ensure the ongoing sustainability of our operations. Bi-annual reviews assess ongoing compliance with these standards and remedial action is taken where required. No hazardous chemicals are used in our operations and all solid and liquid wastes are appropriately managed and disposed of. Waste is minimised and separated for recycling where opportunities exist. Use of bottled water is actively discouraged through the provision of alternatives and the setting of targets for reduction. We have also embarked upon a 'War on Plastic'. We have shared our Group Environmental Minimum Standards with our competitors and collaborate with them in our impact endeavours. Children in the Wilderness Eco-Clubs and camps, as well as Eco-Mentor training, include lessons on climate change, waste management, recycling and sustainable consumption and production.



**Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts**

Wilderness Rwanda has focused on reducing power consumption and invested in renewable energy.





**Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development**

Wilderness Magashi is located on the shores of Lake Rwanyakazinga. Waste water is treated before discharge.



**Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss**

We operate in formal and informal protected or wilderness areas and actively work to ensure our operations do not impact negatively on them. At the same time, our presence and operations highlight these areas and their potential and importance, providing resources for their conservation and management and thus contributing to their maintenance and conservation.

We have worked to re-establish locally extinct populations into their former ranges where possible.

Our operations result in equitable sharing of benefits from use of these areas with local communities.

Our community outreach and Children in the Wilderness programmes aim to educate local communities, especially children, on the importance of their wilderness areas and to reduce unsustainable uses of them.



**Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development**

The Group has numerous partnerships of various kinds with governments, NGOs, community organisations, donors, academic institutions and other businesses: all with the aim of collaborating and leveraging respective strengths to ensure sustainable development.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

If you would like to donate to assist with **Wilderness Rwanda's impact activities**, please follow the link below:

[empowersafrica.org/partners/wilderness-wildlife-trust/](https://empowersafrica.org/partners/wilderness-wildlife-trust/)

For donations specific to our **Children in the Wilderness** programme, please follow this link:

[empowersafrica.org/partners/children-in-the-wilderness/](https://empowersafrica.org/partners/children-in-the-wilderness/)

# AWARDS

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Wilderness Rwanda receives many awards and accolades recognising the quality and sustainability of our camps and our business. The awards won by the Rwanda business are too numerous to all be listed here. Instead, we note what we consider the most important awards won in recent years:

- Wilderness Bisate recognised as one of the top 500 hotels in the world in the *Travel + Leisure* 500 list (April 2023);
- Wilderness Bisate wins 2022 World Travel Award in the Rwanda's Leading Safari Lodge 2022 category (October 2022);
- Wilderness Bisate wins *Travel + Leisure* World's Best Awards - #1 in the Top 10 Safari Lodges in Africa and #14 in the 100 Best Hotels in the World (August 2022);
- Wilderness Bisate selected as a winner of *Fodor's* Finest Hotels 2022 (October 2021);
- Wilderness Bisate included in *Andrew Harper's* Top 10 Safari Lodges and Camps for 2021 (August 2021);
- Wilderness Rwanda and Children in the Wilderness Community Co-ordinator, Aline Umutoni listed in the inaugural Top 100 Young African Conservation Leaders Awards (March 2021);
- Wilderness Bisate listed in the *Tatler Travel Guide's* Top 101 Hotels in the World (December 2020);
- Wilderness Bisate listed in *Condé Nast Traveller* Readers' Choice Awards – #3 in the Top 25 Resorts in Africa category, and also listed #10 in the Top 50 Best Resorts in the World! (October 2020);
- Wilderness Magashi listed in *Town & Country's* Best New Hotels in the World (June 2020);
- Wilderness Bisate wins in *Condé Nast Traveler's* 2020 Gold List Awards;
- Wilderness Magashi listed as one of the world's best new hotels in *Travel + Leisure's* prestigious 2020 It List (February 2020);
- Wilderness Bisate included in *Condé Nast Traveler's* 2020 Gold List Awards of the editors' all-time favourite places to stay in the world (December 2019);
- Wilderness Magashi listed in *Fodor's Travel's* Go List in the Middle East & Africa category, as one of the top 52 travel destinations across the globe for 2020 (November 2019);
- Wilderness Bisate was named as one of the 'Best Properties Worldwide' in Air France *Madame's* Gold List (June 2019);
- Wilderness Bisate featured in *TIME* magazine's inaugural list of the World's Greatest Places (August 2018);
- Wilderness Bisate listed in *Condé Nast Traveller's* Hot List as one of the best new hotels in the world (August 2018);
- Wilderness Bisate wins *National Geographic Traveller's* 'Clean & Green' Big Sleep Award, highlighting 51 of the World's Best New Hotels (June 2018);
- Wilderness Bisate wins *Condé Nast Traveler* Hot List Award (June 2018);
- Wilderness Bisate listed as one of *Robb Report's* Best Hotels in the World (June 2018);
- Wilderness Bisate listed in the *Town & Country* Hotel Awards as one of 'The Best New Hotels in the World' (May 2018);
- Wilderness Bisate listed as one of the world's best new hotels in *Travel + Leisure's* It List (February 2018)
- Wilderness Sabyinyo is voted the Big Tusker Runner-up in the Ultimate Safari Experience Tusker Awards for (2017)
- Wilderness Rwanda, & CITW, wins Environmental Stewardship and Social Impact Award from the Corporate Social Responsibility Network Rwanda (October 2022).



WILDERNESS RWANDA







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Discover Earth's Ultimate, Untamed Places