

# MY VISION FOR WILDLIFE



Born Free Trustee, wildlife blogger and Education Editor for National Geographic Kids, **Kate Stephenson** shares her love for the wild and dreams for the future.

**L**ike most people, I loved animals as a child – I just never lost that interest. The first time I realised that wildlife needed our help was when I was about seven years old. My mum adopted Born Free's Roque the tiger for me (p15) and I started reading about the threats that tigers faced in the wild. I'd say that's where my passion for conservation started.

My first wildlife hero was Virginia McKenna – her stirring speech in the film *Born Free* about Elsa the lioness being 'born free, so she should live free' resonated with me even as a kid. People like Virginia made me want to change the world. Even if that meant one person at a time.

I knew my life would be entwined with wildlife when, aged 18, I spent three months volunteering with Born Free at Shamwari Game Reserve in South

Africa. It changed my entire life perspective. Seeing animals in this environment, living as wild a life as possible, really made me realise that the conditions we see in zoos and marine parks across the globe are far less than satisfactory. Once you've seen herds of elephants roaming for miles a day, lion prides lazing in the sun with full bellies after an afternoon of hunting and leopards hidden among the branches of trees, it's very hard to accept relatively small enclosures with basic 'enrichment'.

When I returned I started my 'Kate on Conservation' blog, to be a voice among young people, to inspire them to care about the protection of wildlife and why it's important. Blogging and social media have also taught me that we all have the ability to inform others. It's easy to campaign online, lobby MPs, sign petitions and share information with others.

I've now been a Born Free trustee for just over a year, and it's been a fascinating learning curve for me. It's a great reassurance to see how things work behind the scenes. I'm proud to be involved with such a genuine, passionate and dedicated organisation, who not only rescue individual animals, but also lobby governments, tackle some of the biggest global issues, such as wildlife trade, and work on the ground to mediate cases of human-wildlife conflict.

The desperate plight of so many of our planet's wild species keeps me motivated. When you hear that there are less than 20,000 lions left in the wild in Africa; that if things remain as they are, there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050; and when in 2018 we all lost the last ever male Northern White Rhino in existence – it's enough to motivate me to spend the rest of my life trying to make a difference.

"An outstanding writer and blogger, Kate is a remarkable asset to our team. Her heart burns with compassion."

**Will Travers OBE**  
President