

Legendary explorer Kingsley Holgate and his team are two-thirds of the way through their 41st humanitarian and geographic expedition which began in June 2023, and are now gearing up to reach some of the wildest and most isolated regions in central, north and west Africa.

Utilising new Defender 130s, the Afrika Odyssey expedition, which began in June 2023, has already surpassed 40 000 kilometres through some of the most treacherous routes in Africa, withstanding torrential rains, excessive heat and record floods in the past eight months.

This expedition is delving into the wild heart of 12 diverse African countries and has a strong conservation, culture, and community focus.

The aim is to reach 22 unique wildlife reserves, managed by the conservation NGO African Parks in partnership with the government of each country. "Over the past 30 years of adventuring in every country on the continent, we've come to realise that Africa's iconic biodiversity and wildlife is under immense threat," said Holgate.

"For a long time, we've been asking the question: is there hope for Africa's wild spaces as well as the people who depend on it, in the face of burgeoning global demand for natural resources?"

"That's what spawned the idea for this expedition and there's good news. We've been privileged to see first-hand the incredible work being done to protect and restore vast tracts of wilderness and the frontline fight against criminal networks that profit from illegal trade in wildlife, logging, and mining.

"We've heard gut-wrenching, personal stories of loss from rangers on the frontline, alongside uplifting stories of hope that bear witness to the revival happening in many countries thanks to proactive governments, and the positive impact it is having on both wildlife and neighbouring communities."

The expedition has, so far, reached 15 of the 22 wildlife regions on its list.

Starting in the northern tip of the Namib desert at Iona National Park in south-western Angola, it has journeyed through nine national parks in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi; reached the furthest and highest source of the White Nile in the mountainous rainforests of Nyungwe in Rwanda; tackled a difficult route to two remote wildlife parks in South Sudan; and nearly lost the expedition Defenders to the worst floods in 20 years at Garamba National Park in the remote north-eastern corner of the DRC.

It is also providing humanitarian support to communities living alongside these wildlife regions.

"Unusually high rainfall in the East



Humanitarian adventure mission continues across the continent

and Central African regions have escalated malaria cases, especially in young children and babies," said expedition leader Ross Holgate.

"The whole team also contracted malaria while in East Africa and we know from personal experience how deadly malaria can be.

"We've distributed over 7600 long-lasting insecticide-treated mosquito nets to date on this journey. With one mosquito net protecting on average a mum and two children, that's nearly 23 000 people safe from malaria.

"We've also provided 1800 reading glasses to poor-sighted, mostly elderly people in these isolated areas.

"Additionally, conservation education forms an integral part of this expedition. Through our Wildlife Art programme, we've helped educate thousands of children living along-

A group of women from DRC seen at the Garamba National Park with their mosquito nets. PHOTO: SUPPLIED



Angola's Iona National Park wild camp is set among dramatic sandstone cliffs. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

side African Parks-managed protected areas about the values of caring for their environment. They are the future guardians of these wildlife gems and it's important to pass on the baton of conservation, to ensure

they continue to benefit from Africa's wildlife resources in the coming years," added Ross.

"Ahead lies the most difficult part of the expedition, to reach seven wildlife regions in Republic of Con-



Malawi Wildlife park manager Dave Robertson fills a calabash from the Shire River. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

go, Central African Republic, Chad and Benin.

"We'll be tackling dense rainforest conditions, difficult river crossings, vast desert and rocky mountain terrain where water and fuel will be hard



A resident at the Rwanda Akagera National Park tests her new reading glasses. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

to come by, as well as potential security threats. The logistical issues for this chapter are extreme."

The Afrika Odyssey's Scroll for Conservation — which has hundreds of pages already filled with inspiring messages from community leaders and beneficiaries, park rangers, conservation partners and government envoys — will also complete the journey, as will the well-travelled Zulu calabash that is collecting symbolic

water from all 22 African Parks-managed protected areas.

"We trust that the Zen of Travel will continue to ride with us," said Holgate. "We need to showcase the inspirational potential of Africa's people and wild places — it is not all doom and gloom." — Supplied.

Follow the expedition on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Kingsley-HolgateFoundation>