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Net conservation impacts of COVID-19 will be strongly negative in Africa – new research

A new research study, [*published in Nature Ecology and Evolution*](#), argues that the net conservation impacts of COVID-19 will be strongly negative in Africa unless effective mitigation actions are put in place. While there have been some positive environmental outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic, these are likely temporary and prone to reversal when travel restrictions ease and countries return to business as usual.

African wildlife-tourism generates over US\$29 billion (R505 billion) annually, it employs 3.6 million people, generates 40% more full-time jobs per unit investment than agriculture, has twice the job creation power of the automotive, telecommunications and financial industries, and employs proportionally more women than other sectors.

But according to University of Cape Town student Ashley Robson who co-authored the study, “the global pandemic has created a ‘perfect storm’ by reducing conservation funding, lowering conservation capacity, and elevating human threats to wildlife and wildlands. Our research identifies and proposes steps to overcome these challenges in the short-term and uses the current crisis as a wake-up call that more resilient conservation models are needed in the future. Unless we do this, we stand to lose much of Africa’s wildlife and wild places and, as a result, the livelihoods of millions of people.

“African wildlife authority budgets are already grossly inadequate and risk being slashed further, jeopardizing wildlife and wildlands. Compounding these effects is the continent-wide collapse of wildlife-based tourism due to travel restrictions and traveller concerns.”

Supporting conservation efforts will help national and local African economies recover from the devastating impacts of COVID-19 by diversifying and bolstering economies, creating employment for rural citizens and protecting ecosystem services. Safeguarding wild habitats against encroachment can also help tackle a key root cause of emerging zoonotic diseases, lessening future pandemic risks.

According to the study the actions needed include: managing the immediate crisis by prioritising financial assistance, employing strategic planning and retaining staff for future expansion; tackle environmental destruction and address the ongoing threats of habitat destruction and illegal, unsustainable and/or unsafe wildlife trade; and address systemic flaws in the current conservation model which highlights that baseline funding for conservation from African governments is simply inadequate and a lack of sufficient, long-term, systematic support for African conservation from the Global North, who benefit considerably from Africa's wildlife and lands, without contributing sufficiently towards its costs.

At this critical juncture, business as usual could be catastrophic, but decisive and collaborative action can ensure that Africa's wildlife survives COVID-19 and that more resilient conservation models benefit humans and wildlife for generations, said the study authors.

[Read the full study.](#)



With international travel bans and local lockdowns in place, eco-tourism in Africa, and the funding it provides to conservation, has come to a grinding halt.

Photo: © Morgan Trimble

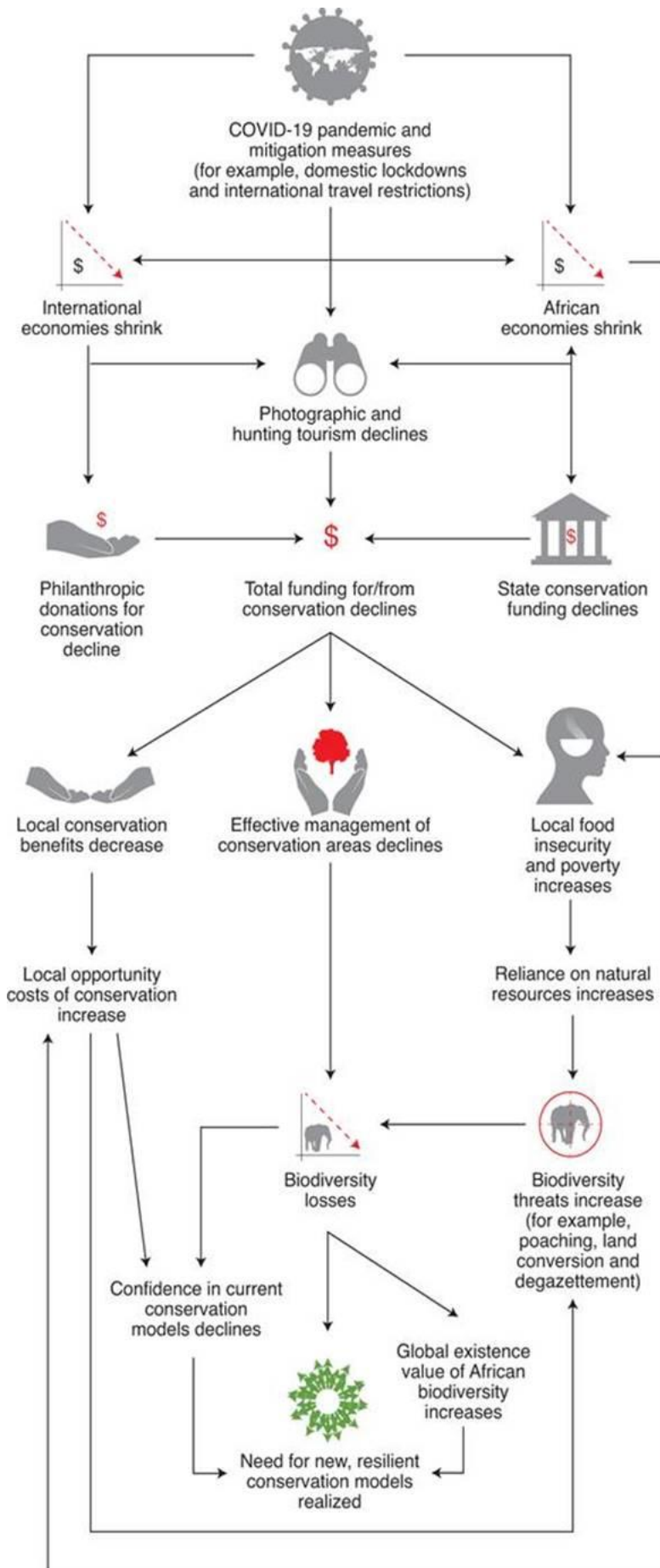
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Reduced conservation funding and restrictions on movement have made it difficult for rangers and other management personnel to secure Africa's vast protected area estate during the COVID-19 crisis.

Photo: © Morgan Trimble

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Schematic of the potential cascading impacts of COVID-19 on conservation in Africa.

Image: Nature Ecology and Evolution: Conserving Africa's wildlife and wildlands through the COVID-19 crisis and beyond

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