



## *FROM THE IRF PRESIDENT: World Ranger Day Celebration and Cause for Concern*

On the International Ranger Federation's (IRF's) World Ranger Day, we have an opportunity to reflect on the exceptional work carried out by rangers, and those that continuously put their lives at risk and remain at the forefront of conservation.

We also get to give recognition and our full respect to those rangers that lost their lives in the preceding year and acknowledge the many growing challenges and threats to rangers globally. Unfortunately, over the past year we have seen the highest number of recorded ranger fatalities since we started the Roll of Honour (137 deaths). We know that this number could be considerably higher, as not all ranger deaths are reported or publicised. The number is still unacceptably high, with 1013 recorded ranger deaths over the past decade. This is of major concern.

We, as the ranger family, share in the loss of our colleagues and their families, and look to honour them on World Ranger Day for all that they had contributed to the profession and conservation.

Of the seven IRF regions, Asia had the greatest number of rangers killed, making up 48% of all ranger deaths, whilst Africa had the second highest number of ranger deaths, at 30% (See Roll of Honour Breakdown below). The main cause of death on duty for rangers was homicide (43 deaths: 31% of all deaths) with these deaths also occurring mostly in Africa and Asia. In addition, the environment in which rangers work can be hostile and dangerous, threatened by the very animals that they serve to protect. Animals accounted for the second highest cause of ranger fatalities, with 24 deaths (18% of all deaths).

At the IRF World Ranger Congress in Nepal last November the [Chitwan Declaration](#) aimed at addressing the many threats and issues faced by rangers, that if implemented, could lead to reduced ranger deaths and increased effectiveness. We have set out some ambitious actions to professionalise the sector and support those working on the frontline.

The Declaration will be used to guide the IRF's work for the next five years. But to achieve significant impact on many of the actionable points, it will take a collective effort of like-minded people and organisations. It is for this reason that the IRF, together with its charitable arm the Thin Green Line Foundation, are developing new alliances and partnerships. An example of this is the Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA) which has been established with a vision that the ranger workforce should become a network of well-supported, professionally competent, mandated, motivated, responsible and representative rangers working effectively as custodians of biodiversity and the life systems upon which we all depend.

## ***And then there was COVID-19...***

We were extremely fortunate to have hosted the 9<sup>th</sup> IRF World Ranger Congress, Nepal, in November, 2019 where over 550 rangers from around the world came together, before international travel effectively ended. The COVID-19 global pandemic is an unprecedented event with equally unprecedented impacts. For rangers around the world this has created new challenges and threats.

For the most part, rangers have been classified as essential services allowing them to continue their invaluable work. However, funding constraints have resulted in many rangers being affected in their security of employment and their operational ability. What we do not know is how long this will last for. But what we do know, which Plowright *et al* (2017) and Faust *et al.*, (2018) point out, is that the world is paying a heavy price for the exploitation of wild species and wild places, deforestation, uncontrolled expansion of agriculture, intensification of farming, and infrastructure development which have increased and modified the interface between people and wildlife. This is creating a 'perfect storm' for the spill over of diseases from wildlife to people. We hope that the world takes a greater appreciation of the value of protected and conserved areas and the people who protect them, and realise having a minimum of 30% of the Earth protected by 2030 is a real necessity. A more tangible link to why the world needs rangers has become more visible but right now, rangers need the support of the world (see [Editorial Essay: COVID-19 and protected and conserved areas](#)).

To achieve this, COVID-19 or no COVID-19, we need empowered and well supported rangers, operating in a more secure workplace that are more effective and are ambassadors for the profession to inspire the next generation.

On behalf of IRF and the Board we thank all those that are taking the time to voice their support for rangers. Thanks too must go to all that are running programmes to keep rangers operational and effective through this difficult time. There are many innovative programmes being developed to help rangers around the world. The IRF, Thin Green Line Foundation and Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC) recently facilitated a round table discussion to see how the international community can support rangers and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. Also keep a look out for the Wildlife Ranger Challenge which we and the Thin Green Line Foundation are involved in.

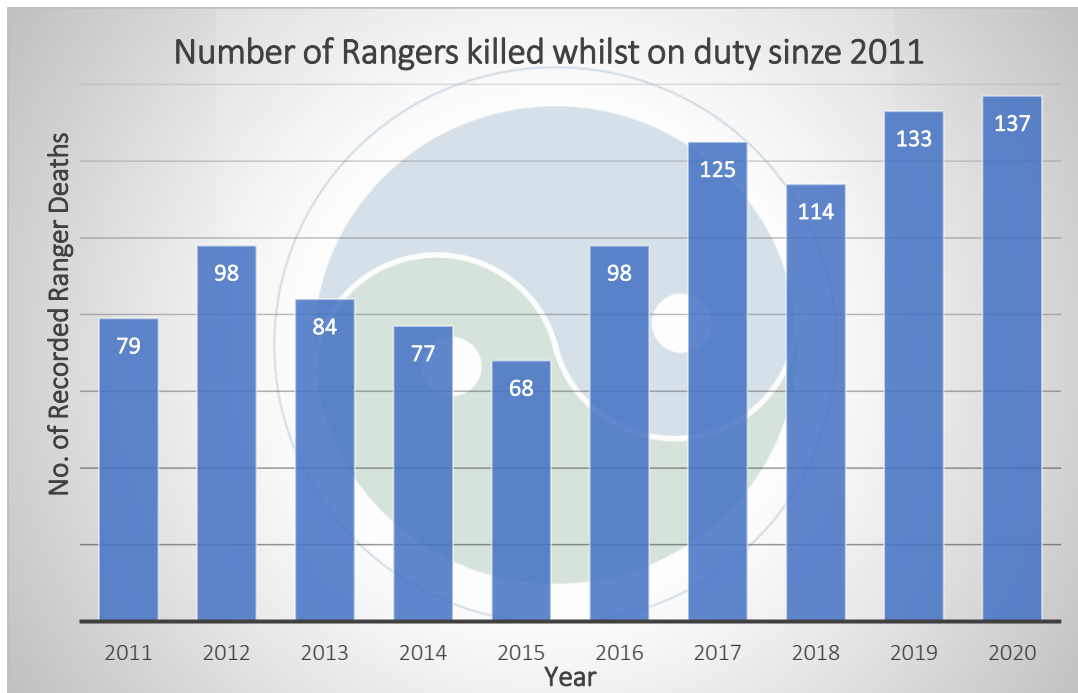
Finally, a thank you to the ranger families for their support and the sacrifices that they live with continuously and we wish all rangers a celebratory day (as best as you can under the current circumstances) where every ranger can feel that the role they play is valued.

## ***#WORLD RANGER DAY!***

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## Roll of Honour 2020 breakdown



### 2020 summary of causes of death

Accidents	Drownings	Illness/ natural causes	Wildlife attack	Homicides	Total
33	14	23	24	43	137
24%	10%	17%	18%	31%	

### 2020 summary of Fallen Ranger data by region

Africa	Asia	Central America	Europe	North America	Oceania	South America	Total
40	66	4	2	4	5	16	137

### REFERENCES

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