

NEWSLETTER



THE EAST AFRICAN WILDLIFE SOCIETY

East African Wild Life Society | P.O.Box 20110-00200 Nairobi, Kenya Riara Rd, Kilimani, Nairobi | Tel: +254 (020) 3874145 | Mobile: +254 (0) 722 202 473 /+254 (0) 734 600 632 | Email: info@eawildlife.org

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SWARA 2025-4 ON SALE!

COP30 Ends with Major Finance Gains, but No Clear Fossil-Fuel Phaseout



PHOTO BY HERMES CARLUZO/COP30

Leaders pose for a photo during the U.N Climate Change Conference COP 30.

COP30 concluded in Belém, Brazil, on November 22, after two weeks of negotiations that delivered major advances on climate finance and implementation, but stopped short of a clear commitment to phase out fossil fuels. UN climate chief Simon Stiell said the summit showed momentum toward a new low-emissions economy, even as critical gaps remain.

Countries agreed to mobilise at least US\$1.3 trillion per year by 2035 for climate action, alongside pledges to double adaptation finance by 2025 and triple it by 2035. The Loss and Damage Fund, agreed at COP28, was formally operationalised. Governments also launched the Global Implementation Accelerator to speed up national climate plans and the Belém Mission to 1.5°C to keep the Paris temperature goal within reach. For the first time at a COP, parties committed to counter climate disinformation.

Despite calls from more than 80 countries, the final decision did not include a fossil-fuel phaseout roadmap, instead reverting to language on “transitioning away from fossil fuels.”



Scientists warned that continued reliance on fossil fuels risks severe impacts on ecosystems, including forests and coral reefs.

The final COP30 agreement brings together decisions on mitigation, finance, adaptation and trade issues, and declares the shift to low-emissions, climate-resilient development “irreversible.” Brazil also announced upcoming roadmaps on ending deforestation and guiding a just transition away from fossil fuels, underscoring that while COP30 delivered important finance signals, much of the work now lies in implementation.

Forest Challenge 2025: A Decade of Teamwork and Conservation in Kereita Forest

Over 250 participants from more than 30 corporate partners gathered on November 29, 2025, in Kereita Forest, Kiambu County, for the 10th edition of the Forest Challenge. Under the theme "Greening Kenya, One Tree at a Time," the event combined fun, adventure, teamwork, and environmental action to celebrate a decade of restoring forests and empowering communities.

The 9.44-kilometre obstacle course tested endurance, strategy, and resilience. Teams carried stretchers across uneven terrain, balanced on narrow beams, hopped through sacks, and swung across bridges, climbing and crawling their way to the finish line. Each challenge reinforced the event's core purpose: connecting people, and conservation while highlighting the importance of protecting and restoring Kenya's forests.

At the conclusion of the day, champions were recognized for both performance and contribution. Air Travel and Related Studies earned the Forest Champion Award for exceptional performance, with Kiambu Water & Sewerage Company and Kenya Wildlife Service securing first and second runners-up positions. The COSMOS Foundation received the Forest Conservation Award for the highest sponsorship, while Kevian was recognized with the Forest Stewardship Award for impactful in-kind contributions.

Participants also took part in a ceremonial tree-planting exercise, symbolizing the direct impact of their efforts. Proceeds from the event will support the procurement and nurturing of indigenous seedlings in degraded forest areas, with participants invited back next year to plant alongside communities living adjacent to the forests.

Over the past decade, the Forest Challenge has grown into a movement for environmental action. Spearheaded by the East African Wildlife Society (EAWLS) in partnership with the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and Kijabe

Environment Volunteers (KENVO), the initiative has helped plant over 105,000 indigenous trees, rehabilitate 105 hectares of degraded land, create green jobs for local communities, and absorb thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide, demonstrating the power of collective action in safeguarding Kenya's forests.



Participants take on physical challenges and teamwork exercises, including tree planting, during the 10th edition of the Forest Challenge in Kereita Forest.

EAWLS Participates in the 3rd Blue Economy Innovation & Investment Summit

The East African Wild Life Society (EAWLS) took part in the 3rd Blue Economy Innovation & Investment Summit, held from September 24-26, 2025 at Pride Inn Paradise Hotel, Mombasa. Convened by Sote Hub and partners, the event brought together more than 1,000 global and regional stakeholders to accelerate Africa's transition toward sustainable use of its aquatic and ocean resources. With Kenya's economy projected to grow and the Blue Economy increasingly recognised as a driver of inclusive green growth, the summit provided a timely platform for collaboration and investment.

At the summit, EAWLS convened a well-attended side event on Marine Plastic Pollution: Innovative Solutions for African Ocean Countries – Reflections from UNOC-3 & INC 5.2, attracting over 40 participants. The session highlighted rising concerns around marine plastics and underscored the urgent need for African-led, rights-focused approaches that go beyond industry-driven, downstream responses.

Speakers emphasised the importance of governance frameworks that centre community livelihoods, justice, and long-term ocean health, especially as pollution continues to threaten biodiversity and coastal economies.

The dialogue explored how African governments, negotiators, and conservation actors can shape stronger positions as global discussions on a plastics treaty advance. It also examined persistent policy gaps, emerging case studies from across the continent, and opportunities to strengthen circularity systems. Insights from the session will inform policy briefs and shared recommendations aimed at guiding national decision-makers on tackling marine pollution and safeguarding critical ocean ecosystems.

The summit also spotlighted a new wave of opportunities in blue investments, deep technology, climate resilience, circular economy innovation, and ocean governance. These discussions highlighted high-potential sectors for youth and women's employment, including eco-



TOP & BELOW: EAWLS Marine Project Officer Kevin Lunzalu addresses participants during the 3rd Blue Economy Innovation & Investment Summit in Mombasa.



tourism, renewable energy, ocean technology, sustainable fisheries, waste management, and blue agriculture, reinforcing the Blue Economy's role as a catalyst for inclusive development.

EAWLS Marine Project Officer, Kevin Lunzalu, also featured in the plenary, where he shared perspectives on marine pollution trends in the Western Indian Ocean and the importance of coordinated regional responses. His contribution reinforced the EAWLS's call for science-driven, collaborative action to address escalating environmental threats across shared ocean spaces.

Through its participation and thought leadership, EAWLS reinforced its commitment to advancing ocean conservation, promoting evidence-based policy, and supporting Africa's shift toward a more resilient and inclusive Blue Economy.

EAWLS, A Leading Voice at the 13th WIOMSA Scientific Symposium



Right - Left: EAWLS Marine Project Officer Kevin Lunzalu, EAWLS Executive Director Nancy Ogonje, Fauna and Flora Project Manager Lenice Ojwang and EAWLS Programmes Manager Jabes Okumu, pose together at the 13th WIOMSA Scientific Symposium in Mombasa.

The East African Wild Life Society (EAWLS) participated in the 13th WIOMSA Scientific Symposium, held in Mombasa, Kenya, from September 28, to October 3, 2025. The event, themed “One Ocean, One Future: Connecting People, Policy, and Science for a Thriving Western Indian Ocean,” brought together more than 1,400 delegates from across the region.

Recognized as the largest open scientific conference in the Western Indian Ocean and endorsed as a UN Ocean Decade Activity, the triennial symposium provides a vital platform for scientists, policymakers, and conservation stakeholders to exchange

knowledge and collaborate on solutions to the region’s most pressing marine and coastal challenges.

At the symposium, EAWLS, together with Fauna & Flora International and partners, led a session on strengthening seagrass management, conservation, and policy across the Western Indian Ocean. The session also featured progress updates from EAWLS’s PEW-funded Blue Carbon Ecosystems project, which seeks to integrate mangroves and seagrass ecosystems into national climate and biodiversity policies, enhance coordination through a national Blue Carbon Working Group, and build capacity among civil society and coastal communities.

EAWLS experts featured across several other events. Programmes Manager Jabes Okumu joined a panel on regional seagrass conservation, where Executive Director Nancy Ogonje delivered a keynote address highlighting the importance of blue carbon ecosystems for climate resilience and sustainable development. Marine Project Officer Kevin Lunzalu also spoke at a UNESCO-organized side event on the role of early-career ocean professionals in advancing marine science.

Through these engagements, EAWLS underscored its growing influence in marine policy, science, and conservation across the Western Indian Ocean.

Elephants Learn to Ignore Drones, Opening New Doors for Research



PHOTO BY JANE WWW.HD/SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

A Drone and bull elephant in Samburu National Reserve.

Elephants in Kenya have demonstrated an ability to adapt to and ignore surveillance drones, a discovery researchers say could revolutionise wildlife monitoring and unlock new secrets about herd behaviour.

A study published Thursday in *Scientific Reports* by conservation group Save the Elephants (STE) and the University of Oxford found that while drones were once viewed primarily as a tool to scare elephants away from crops, the animals can quickly habituate to the devices if flown correctly.

The findings mark a significant shift in conservation technology. Drones, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), produce a buzzing sound often compared to swarms of bees—a noise elephants naturally fear. Consequently, drones have been widely used as a deterrent to drive herds away from farms and human settlements.

However, the new research indicates that when drones are flown high and steady, rather than aggressively, elephants learn to disregard them within minutes.

“We found that not all elephants were disturbed, and those that were became less agitated both during a single flight and over repeated exposures,” said lead

author Angus Carey-Douglas of Save the Elephants. “Our results suggest that these habituation effects may last over many months if not years.”

The research team conducted 35 quadcopter drone trials on 14 known elephant families in the Samburu and Buffalo Springs National Reserves in northern Kenya. While about half the elephants initially showed mild signs of disturbance—such as trunk lifting or pausing—these reactions diminished rapidly, usually fading within six minutes.

This tolerance opens the door for drones to serve as non-invasive observation platforms. Since the 1960s, elephant behaviour has primarily been studied from ground vehicles or stationary platforms. Aerial perspectives offer a new way to quantify social interactions within a herd.

“New technologies are expanding our ability to perceive, analyse and understand the wild world in a way that was previously unthinkable,” said STE CEO Frank Pope. “This study promises to open a new window onto how elephants work.”

The data gathered by on-board cameras and sensors is already yielding results. The team reported gaining new insights into elephant sleeping

habits under the cover of darkness using thermal cameras. They are also developing AI-enabled software capable of automatically determining the age and sex of individual animals from the aerial footage.

“This research demonstrates the power of a new and rapidly evolving technology that allows us to probe ever deeper into the secret lives of elephants,” said study co-author Professor Fritz Vollrath of Oxford University’s Department of Biology.

The study was supported by the Colossal Foundation, an organisation known for its “de-extinction” technology efforts. Matt James, the foundation’s Executive Director, noted that tools developed for genetic resurrection are proving vital for protecting existing biodiversity.

Despite the promising findings, researchers cautioned that drone use must remain strictly regulated. In Kenya, recreational drone flights are prohibited in national parks to prevent unnecessary stress to wildlife. The STE study was conducted under special permits from the Kenya Civil Aviation Authority and the Wildlife Research and Training Institute.

EAWLS Hosts JRS-Supported Master's Students to Advance Lake Ol Bolossat Research



The East African Wildlife Society (EAWLS) welcomed four Master's students supported by the JRS Biodiversity Foundation Field Scholarship on September 25, 2025, for an interactive session at our boardroom. The visit formed part of the ongoing project "Unlocking Biodiversity Data to Facilitate Designation of Lake Ol Bolossat as Kenya's 7th Ramsar Site," which aims to strengthen scientific understanding of the lake and inform policy and community-led conservation strategies.

During the session, the students presented their research on Lake Ol Bolossat's ecosystem and engaged with EAWLS Executive Director, Ms. Nancy Ogonje, alongside partners from the Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies. Discussions



focused on how their findings can guide conservation priorities, shape policy, and inspire local stewardship of this critical wetland.

Earlier in the year, EAWLS also launched a citizen science initiative, training seven community scouts around the lake. Using the SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) mobile application, scouts collect daily

Top Front Row: EAWLS Executive Director Nancy Ogonje (Left), alongside Professor Thuita Thenya (Right), Director of Wangari Maathai Institute, Master's students, and EAWLS staff, during an interactive session at EAWLS offices.

biodiversity observations, track wildlife movements, report illegal activities, and monitor habitat conditions. This program strengthens surveillance, raises conservation awareness, and fosters active local participation in wetland management.

By supporting both emerging researchers and community monitors, EAWLS continues to generate credible data that guide management decisions, inform policy, and advance the long-term goal of designating Lake Ol Bolossat as Kenya's seventh Ramsar Site, ensuring its ecological integrity and protection for future generations.

EAWLS Strengthens Lake OI Bolossat Conservation Through Multi-Stakeholder Workshop

The East African Wild Life Society (EAWLS) convened a two-day multi-stakeholder workshop on October 8 to 9, 2025 in OI Kalou, Nyandarua County, bringing together over 40 partners to advance the long-term management of the Lake OI Bolossat ecosystem. The workshop was part of EAWLS's ongoing project, "Unlocking Biodiversity Data to Facilitate the Designation of Lake OI Bolossat as Kenya's 7th Ramsar Site," funded by the JRS Biodiversity Foundation and implemented in partnership with the University of Nairobi, the Wangari Maathai Institute, and the Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI).

Using the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT), participants assessed the current management of the lake and its catchment, highlighting key successes, identifying critical gaps, and validating priority actions to protect this fragile ecosystem. By the conclusion of the workshop, stakeholders had developed practical, evidence-based recommendations to improve coordination, strengthen governance, and promote sustainable use of natural resources.

The workshop drew representatives from national government agencies,



including Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Kenya Forest Service (KFS), National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), National Land Commission (NLC), Ministry of Interior, WRTI, and the Wangari Maathai Institute, as well as the Nyandarua County Government. Local community-based organizations and NGOs were also actively involved, including the Lake OI Bolossat Community Conservation Group (LOCCOG), Crane Conservation



EAWLS staff and participants at the Lake OI Bolossat workshop assess biodiversity data and map out conservation strategies.



Volunteers (CCV), Friends of Kinangop, Friends of Lake OI Bolossat, OI Bolossat Community Forest Association, Kirima Muruai CFA, OI Bolossat Water Resource Users Association (WRUA), and the Beach Management Unit (BMU).

Through this collaborative approach, the project is generating critical biodiversity data while empowering communities to take an active role in the lake's conservation. By combining evidence-based research with local stewardship, EAWLS and its partners are laying the groundwork for sustainable management and advancing the goal of securing Lake OI Bolossat's designation as Kenya's seventh Ramsar Site.

EAWLS and The Intrepid Foundation Strengthen Ranger Capacity at Ol Kinyei Conservancy

The East African Wild Life Society (EAWLS), in partnership with The Intrepid Foundation (TIF) through the Conservancy Rangers Program, conducted a field mission to Ol Kinyei Conservancy in the Maasai Mara ecosystem from October 27 to 30, 2025. The visit aimed to reinforce ranger capacity by delivering essential equipment, welfare supplies, and improved tools to support effective wildlife protection and conservancy management.

During the visit, rangers received cameras and binoculars donated by ICU CLOM East Africa, equipment that will strengthen wildlife monitoring, documentation, and anti-poaching operations. Energy-saving jikos were also distributed to women and ranger households, helping reduce reliance on firewood, curb deforestation, and safeguard vegetation that sustains the conservancy's wildlife.

The occasion was attended by Ms. Biheng Zang, General Manager of The Intrepid Foundation, joined by Samuel Karani, Angela Musila, and Collins Odhiambo from the Intrepid East Africa team. Ms. Zang underscored the vital role conservancy rangers play in safeguarding wildlife, which in turn supports community livelihoods



EAWLS and The Intrepid Foundation boosted ranger capacity at Ol Kinyei Conservancy, delivering equipment, energy-saving jikos, and engaging communities to support wildlife protection.

and ensures the long-term viability of responsible tourism in Kenya.

Covering 18,700 acres, Ol Kinyei Conservancy forms an important corridor for wildlife movement within the larger Mara ecosystem, while providing land-lease benefits to the Maasai community. Since its establishment in 2017, the Conservancy Rangers Program has worked to enhance ranger skills, improve household stability, and strengthen wildlife protection across partner conservancies including Suswa, Ol Kinyei, and Enonkishu.

EAWLS remains committed to expanding this work by fostering strong partnerships with communities and conservation actors. Through sustained investment in ranger capacity and welfare, EAWLS continues to advance long-term protection of Kenya's wildlife within and beyond formally protected areas.



EAWLS-MEEP Champion Elephant Conservation in Mount Elgon

On November 20, 2025, the East African Wild Life Society (EAWLS), through the Mount Elgon Elephant Project (MEEP), held a strategic meeting with Samuel Amana, Chief Warden of Mount Elgon Conservation Area, in Mbale, Uganda. Programmes Officer Ann Mukaindo represented EAWLS, alongside MEEP Project Manager Lizbeth Mate and Project Officer Rhoda Dhiwa, to discuss ways to strengthen collaboration in elephant conservation following recent sightings on the Ugandan side of Mount Elgon National Park.

Since 2017, MEEP has been monitoring elephants across the Mt. Elgon ecosystem, generating critical data that informs human-elephant conflict response strategies. The project is implemented in collaboration with EAWLS, Mt. Elgon Foundation, KWS,



EAWLS and the MEEP team during a meeting with Chief Warden Samuel Amana (Left) in his office.

KFS, national museums of Kenya, local administrations, and other stakeholders, aiming to foster harmonious coexistence between elephants and local communities.

A key milestone for MEEP has been the installation of beehive fences around

farms frequently raided by elephants. Using elephants' natural fear of bees, the fences have significantly reduced crop invasions while also providing income for communities through honey and other bee products.

Pioneering Elephant Conservationist Dr Iain Douglas-Hamilton Dies at 83

Dr Iain Douglas-Hamilton, the renowned Scottish zoologist who transformed global understanding and protection of African elephants, died in Nairobi on December 8, aged 83. He was the founder and president of Save the Elephants and one of the most influential figures in modern wildlife conservation.

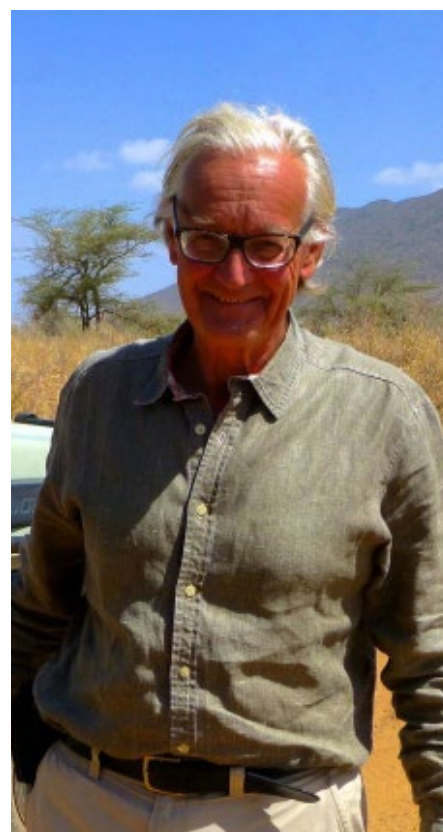
At just 23, Douglas-Hamilton launched the first scientific study of wild elephant social behaviour, laying the foundation for contemporary elephant research. His work soon evolved into advocacy as elephant populations were devastated by ivory poaching in the 1970s and 1980s. His evidence-based documentation of the crisis played a key role in securing the 1989 international ban on ivory trade.

In 1993, he founded Save the Elephants, pioneering the use of GPS tracking and aerial surveys to monitor elephant movements — tools that are now standard across conservation practice. STE's work has focused on protecting elephant habitats,

understanding elephant intelligence, and promoting coexistence with communities.

When poaching resurged between 2010 and 2012, killing an estimated 100,000 elephants, Douglas-Hamilton again helped galvanise global action. His 2012 testimony to the US Senate contributed to the closure of major domestic ivory markets, including China's in 2018. In 2013, he co-founded the Elephant Crisis Fund, which by 2025 had supported more than 500 projects across 44 countries to combat the ivory trade and advance human-elephant coexistence.

Douglas-Hamilton received numerous international honours, including the Indianapolis Prize (2010) and appointment as Commander of the Order of the British Empire (2015). He is survived by his wife Oria, daughters Saba and Dudu, and six grandchildren. His legacy endures in the survival of Africa's elephants and the global movement to protect them.



The Late Dr Iain Douglas-Hamilton

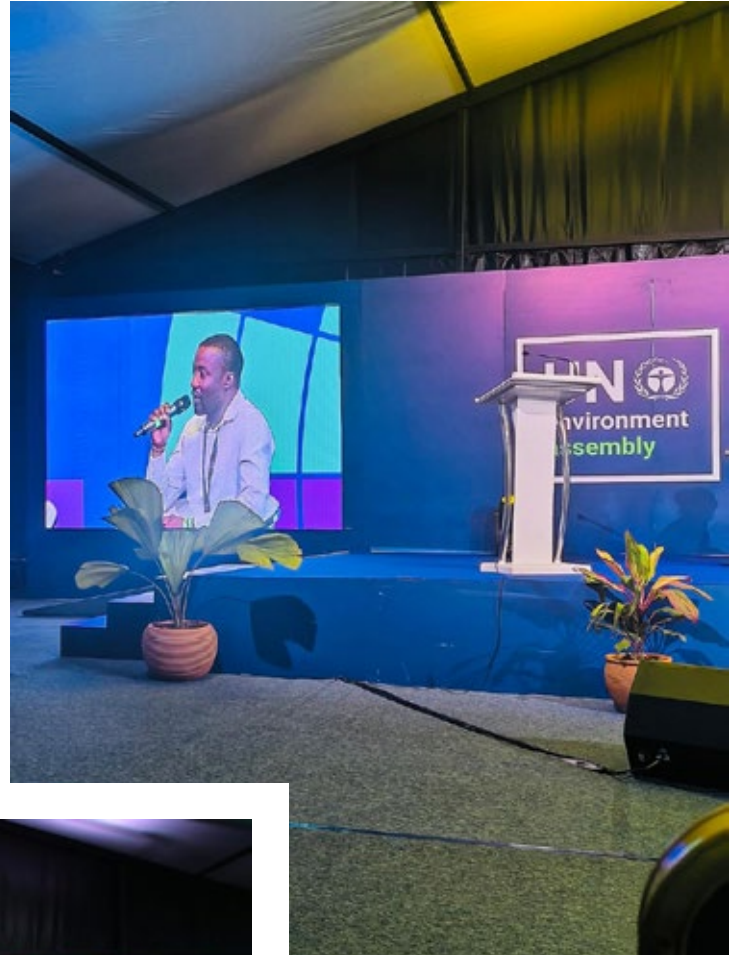
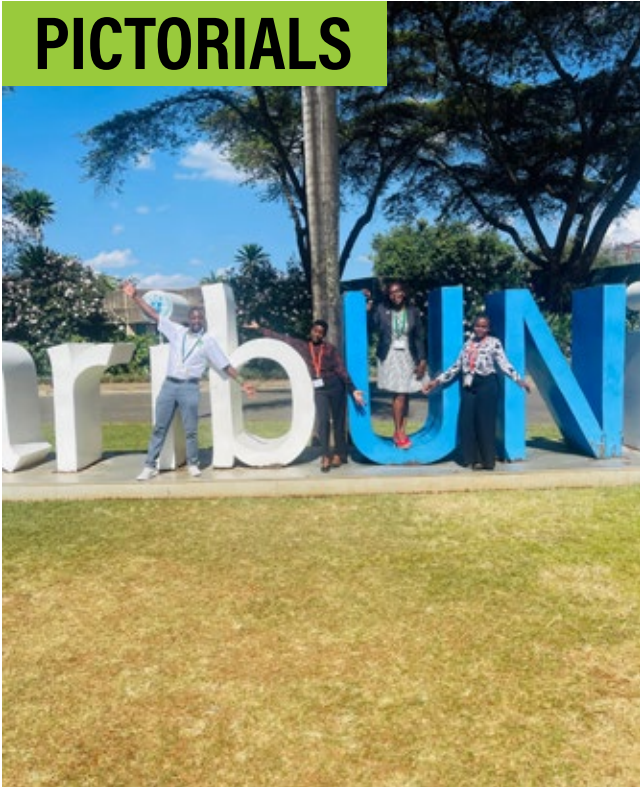
PICTORIALS



EAWLS at 3rd African Youth Summit on Biodiversity

EAWLS at the 3rd African Youth Summit on Biodiversity (October 20–22, 2025, Kigali, Rwanda). EAWLS participated in policy dialogues, innovation labs, and collaborative sessions, contributing to a youth position paper later presented at the first Africa Biodiversity Summit in Gaborone, Botswana. Represented by Vincent Fibanda, Project Assistant for the Young For Nature (YONA) Programme.

PICTORIALS



EAWLS at UNEA 7

EAWLS at the 7th United Nations Environment Assembly (December 8-12, 2025, UNEP Headquarters, Nairobi). EAWLS participated in policy dialogues, side events, bilateral meetings, and stakeholder engagements, contributing to discussions that led to the adoption of Kenya's three key resolutions on antimicrobial resistance, sustainable AI systems, and sustainable solutions through sports. EAWLS also advanced work on marine plastics in collaboration with Wetlands International Eastern Africa. Represented by Marine Project Officer Kelvin Lunzalu, Programmes Officer Ann Mukaindo, Policy & Advocacy Officer Theresa Aoko, and Policy & Advocacy Mentee (Marine Programme) Diana Anyoso.



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“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children”
(Native American saying)