

Protecting Africa's wildlife is a dangerous business. Every year an estimated 40 rangers lose their lives to poachers in search of ivory and rhino horn. NABU International - Foundation for Nature (BirdLife in Germany) has launched a unique support programme to provide financial assistance to the families that are left behind. Bushmeat poaching and illegal killing of high value species such as elephants and rhinos are soaring. Poaching gangs increasingly employ sophisticated weapons and equipment, which leaves Africa's chronically underfunded rangers dangerously exposed. But the human casualties of wildlife conservation are often forgotten. Rangers killed or severely injured while carrying out their duties leave behind families that are not only devastated by grief but suffer severe financial hardship as a result of losing their main bread winner, said NABU International Foundation president Thomas Tennhardt. NABU International's Ranger Family Support Fund was launched in Ethiopia last week. It was initiated in response to a generous 50,000 Euro legacy donation. The Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) was first to benefit from the newly established fund. Poachers killed 35 Ethiopian rangers and seriously wounded 34 since 1989. In the past five years alone, six men received serious or fatal wounds. Awash National Park, 200 kilometres east of the capital Addis Ababa and home of the Critically Endangered Oryx, appears to be a particularly dangerous place for rangers. NABU President Thomas Tennhardt presented the organisation's gift to bereaved ranger families in the presence of the Ethiopia's Minister of Culture and Tourism, Mr. Amin Abdulkadir. "It is partly for a sad reason that we have come together here and I wish that we could have met under happier circumstances. But we have gathered here also to honour the heroism of our scouts, who work and risk their lives in the frontline of conservation," said Minister Abdulkadir who is responsible for the country's national parks. Prompted by the inauguration of the family support fund, the Minister intends to create a life insurance policy programme for the country's ranger force. "This new initiative will be an excellent opportunity to build cooperation with EWCA on wider conservation activities in Ethiopia at Protected Area Networks that are also Important Bird Areas," said Mengistu Wondfrash, Executive Director of the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, BirdLife in Ethiopia. NABU International is planning to expand both the financial and geographical scope of its Ranger Family Support Programme in the future.