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Saving species

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[worldlandtrust.org](http://worldlandtrust.org)

# WLT NEWS



# World Land Trust Spring Newsletter 2025



As spring finally begins, we reflect on a tumultuous past few months in the world of conservation and climate change. Broken political promises, extreme weather events that were once rare phenomena becoming par for the course, melting sea-ice, and reaching the threshold of a global temperature increase of 1.5°C past pre-industrial levels all serve as a stark reminder that not enough is being done. But, amid all this are so many reasons to remain hopeful and remind ourselves and each other of the extraordinary things that can happen when like-minded people take action.

In this newsletter, you will find stories of the impacts your support has made possible. The following pages show what long-standing partnerships can achieve as success builds upon success and the effects ripple outwards. From celebrating more than two decades of partnership with Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), to the recording of species brand new to science, to elevating Indigenous voices in the Amazon. From the majestic African Savanna Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) to Colombia's tiny Cerulean Warbler (*Setophaga cerulea*) songbird, species are thriving as habitats are safeguarded and allowed to flourish. As noted in our previous issue, conservation is the work of decades, centuries even, not years. These stories are a testament to the power of collective action; proof that together, we can turn the tide for nature.

As we welcome spring, we also mark Earth Day: a time to reflect on our connection to the natural world and the urgent need to protect it. This year's theme 'Our Power, Our Planet' is a call to action, a reminder that every choice we make has the power to shape the future of our world. As you read this newsletter, know that by standing together with our conservation partners and all the people they represent, you are part of a global movement for nature and for the world we want to live in and leave behind. From everyone at World Land Trust (WLT) thank you for standing with us and for a thriving natural world. Every acre protected, every species safeguarded, and every future secured is because of your enduring support.

**Dr Catherine Barnard, CEO**

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© Front cover: WTI, species: Golden-Fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*), location: Garo Hills, India. Left: Alejandro Arteaga. Right, from top to bottom: David Bebbler, Barry Mansell, Dudarev Mikhail/Shutterstock, Natura Argentina, Candy Grefa/Nature and Culture International.





# Positive News

## from the Field



Fundación Hábitat y Desarrollo (FHD) has completed its latest WLT-funded land purchase. Supported by Buy an Acre, a staggering 4,500 hectares will be added to the Somuncurá Plateau Reserve in Argentina, which readers of WLT's previous issue may remember as the home of the fascinating El Rincón Steam Frog (*Pleurodema somuncurens*).

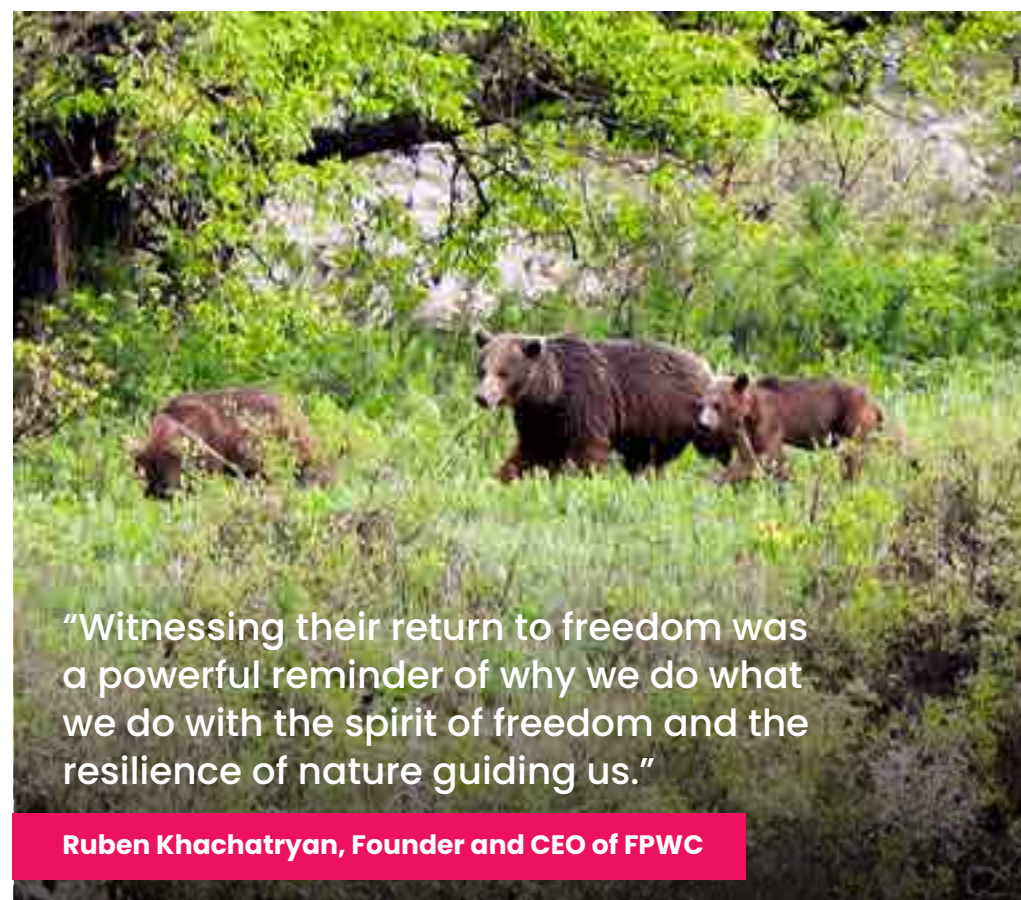


We have now completed the latest and largest addition to Reserva Ecológica de Guapiaçu (REGUA) in Brazil. This huge achievement comes after a long process beginning in 2020.

Now, an area of over 1,600 ha has joined the reserve and will ensure the protection of even more of Brazil's Atlantic Forest — home to the Southern Woolly Spider Monkey (*Brachyteles arachnoides*) and thousands of other species from Jaquar to butterflies.



Our partner Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) celebrated the successful release of two Syrian Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos syriacus*) cubs named Chalho and Lexi back into Armenia's Caucasus Wildlife Refuge. FPWC founder and CEO Ruben Khachatryan told us "Witnessing their return to freedom was a powerful reminder of why we do what we do with the spirit of freedom and the resilience of nature guiding us".



"Witnessing their return to freedom was a powerful reminder of why we do what we do with the spirit of freedom and the resilience of nature guiding us."

Ruben Khachatryan, Founder and CEO of FPWC

As a result of successful biological monitoring by our partner Amazónicos por la Amazonía (AMPA), the first documented report of predation by the *Ancylometes* spider on the *Leptodactylus griseigularis* frog has been published in the international journal *Reptiles & Amphibians*. This is the first time this ecological interaction has been known to take place in the Peruvian department of San Martín and happened in the Concesión para Conservación Áreas Inundables del Bajo Huallaga (CCAIBH), a bustling ecosystem of 6,700 ha protected by the El Porvenir – Pelejo Agro Bio Forest Association (ABIOFORP) with support from AMPA. They explained: "This finding is not only a breakthrough for science, but also an inspiring example of the positive impact of community conservation."

For more news stories from the field scan the code or visit [www.worldlandtrust.org/news/](http://www.worldlandtrust.org/news/)





# Partner Postcards



**We heard from Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (GESG) about the work of their rangers in Mexico's Sierra Gorda.**

In the State of Querétaro, as well as in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, damage from forest fires and negative effects from the use of fire in agricultural burns and the clearing of forests are becoming more frequent.

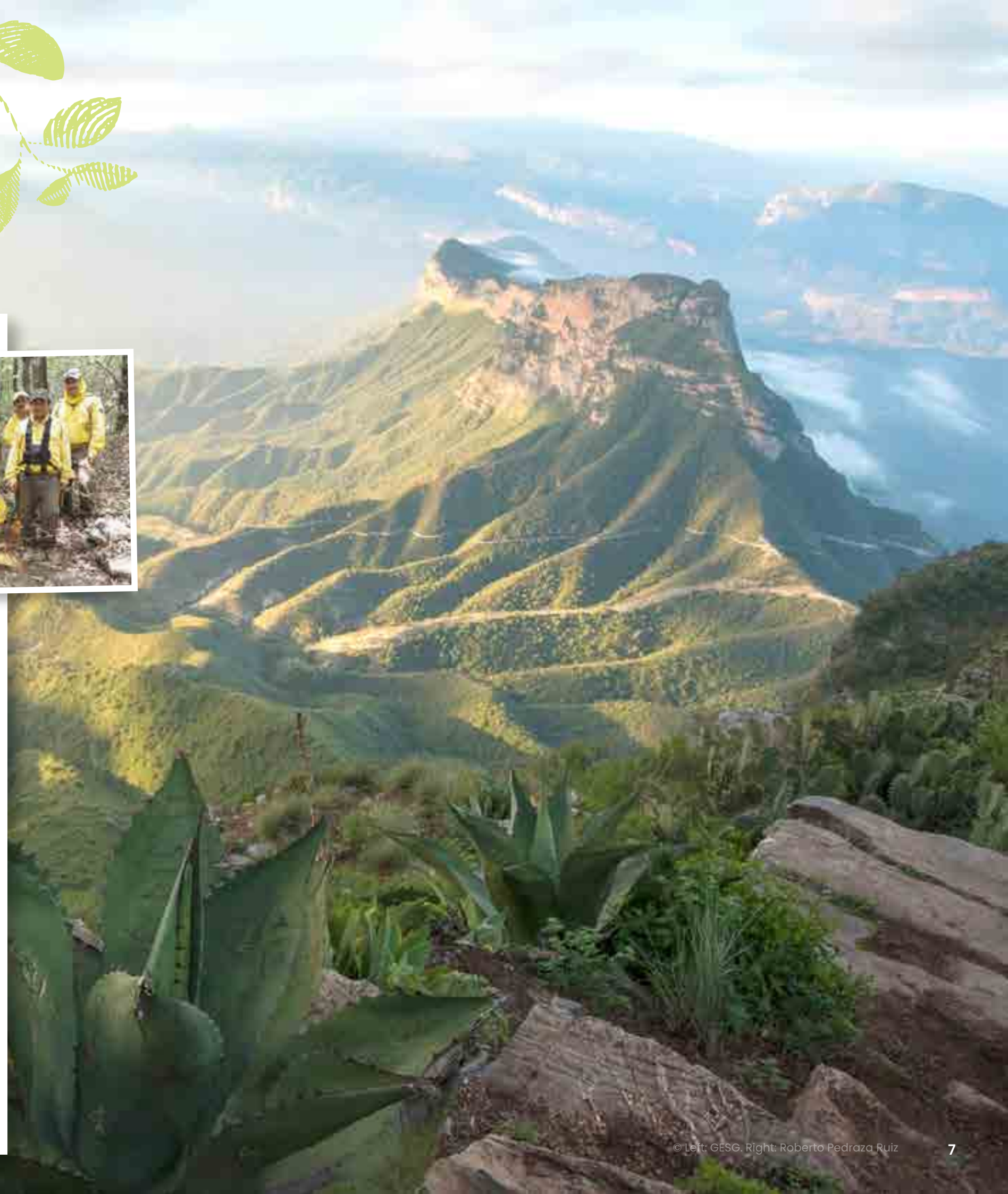
The damage is not only environmental, but also has economic and cultural impacts, and even loss of human lives. Therefore, we established a Forest Fire Protection Plan as a priority to make the problem visible to society, involve community resources and local expertise, and to establish plan of action for preventing and tackling forest fires. Defence against these fires is a complex, multidisciplinary activity that needs people with various technical specialties, resources on a large scale, and above all, commitment and involvement from all levels.



This project is supported by WLT's Carbon Balanced programme as part of the management and protection of the Network of Private Nature Reserves that GESG are responsible for. In the community of Valle Verde, 10 members of the community make up the fire brigade and are supported by Ranger Abel Reséndiz and his unparalleled knowledge of the region and the reserves. The members all have excellent experience and are fast to act in the case of any incidents, but they also take much care in fire prevention actions. This includes clearing roads within reserves so they always have fast access to any area they might be needed, clearing and widening fire breaks in the trees — which they do even during an active forest fire — to stop fires spreading, man the observation tower, and monitor the area so action can be taken swiftly.

This has meant that several fires such as one started by a lightning strike within the Cerro Prieto Reserve, and one near Valle Verde that sprang up after a tree fell on power lines for example, were quickly seen and quelled with the help of other firefighting teams.

The rains have continued through the year but are easing as the effects of autumn become felt. During this time and all others, we conduct our routine surveillance tours. We are pleased to have a permanent ranger presence in all reserves, but special consideration is given to the Las Canalitas Reserve. Here, the unfortunate situation is that illegal logging activities are continuing and are flagrant on the grounds of the neighbouring properties. While this is a disgrace to the environment, we are proud that we are making a difference effectively because, within the borders of Las Canalitas and the difference is stark — there is not a single tree cut. We have achieved this by using deterrents at felling sites that are likely to be targeted by the loggers, so they are discouraged from harvesting wood within our reserves.





# Exciting Things are Happening in Ecuador

The past few months have seen a host of developments for our partner Fundación EcoMinga in Ecuador, from never-before-recorded species to new conservation protections.

A new frog species has been identified by EcoMinga together with biologists from Ecuador's National Institute of Biodiversity. EcoMinga's Reserve Manager and leading amphibian expert Juan Pablo Reyes-Puig is no stranger to new discoveries. In the past 10 years, he has helped identify three new frog species and now, adding to an already impressive list, the Norma Ewing's Rain Frog (*Pristimantis normaewingae*) described this year in the journal *Evolutionary Systematics*. At just over 25 mm long, the new species may be small, but its discovery is significant and highlights the extraordinary wealth of wildlife that still remains to be described within Ecuador.

Speaking about the new discovery, EcoMinga's President Lou Jost said "All the species of this branch of the 'frog family tree' were unknown until a few years ago, and all of them live in the east-central Andes of Ecuador and nowhere else. The species are remarkably variable, which makes them hard to figure out, so DNA analysis has been extremely helpful. This is the first time that all the DNA work was done inside Ecuador (at Ecuador's National Institute of Biodiversity) by Ecuadorians."

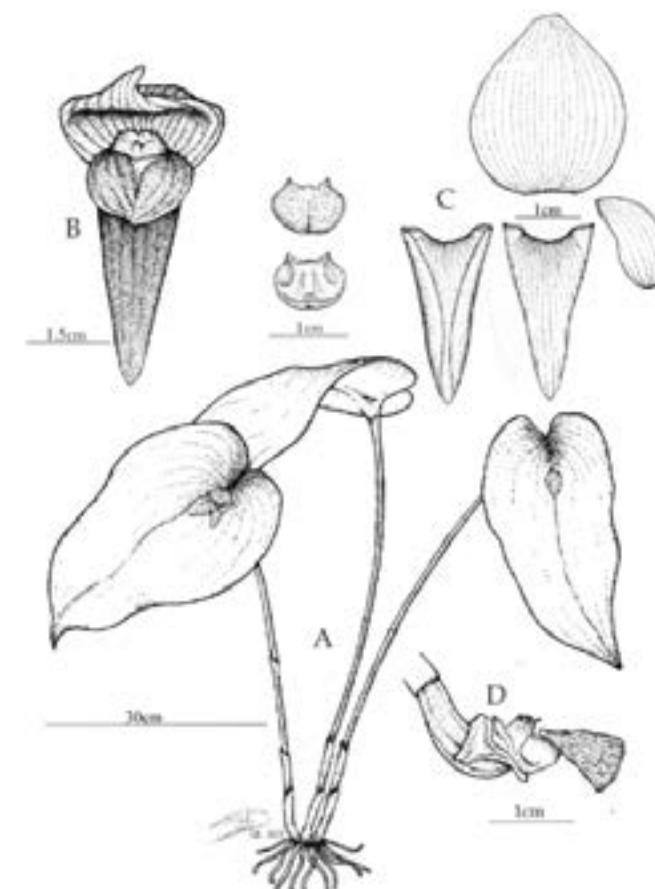
The new frog species was found during a research expedition to a remote mountain called Cerro Candelaria. Located in the Rio Pastaza watershed where the Andes meets the Amazon, this one mountain is a melting pot of biodiversity and the site of many new discoveries. Among the most spectacular of these was EcoMinga's identification of 26 new species of *Teagueia* orchid in 2004. In 2007, WLT funded the creation of the Cerro Candelaria Reserve, enabling EcoMinga to safeguard this extraordinary habitat.

More recently, yet another new species of orchid was recorded by EcoMinga and named *Pleurothallis markgruinii* — in memory of late horticulturist Mark Gruin, who devoted his life's work to protecting nature and supporting conservationists through his work with organisations including EcoMinga, WLT, Rainforest Trust, and ZooAmerica.

EcoMinga's Río Anzu Reserve, which supporters will remember from our 2023 Life on the Edge appeal, has recently been recognised as an Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure (OECM). This landmark status — the first of its kind in Ecuador — highlights the reserve's critical role in protecting wildlife and supporting global conservation efforts.

"This is the first time that all the DNA work was done inside Ecuador (at Ecuador's National Institute of Biodiversity) by Ecuadorians."

Lou Jost, President of EcoMinga



Officially launched in 2018, OECM's are sites outside protected areas that achieve the long-term and effective conservation of biodiversity. Unlike traditional protected areas which specifically target wildlife conservation, OECMs may be managed for many other reasons. These can be cultural, spiritual, or religious, but must also lead to biodiversity protection.

The recognition of Río Anzu as an OECM marks a major step forward for conservation in Ecuador. In a country where mining and oil concessions often threaten critical habitats, the OECM framework highlights the vital contribution of conservation areas outside the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP). OECMs also contribute to the UN's "30 by 30" biodiversity target: a pledge to protect 30% of the Earth's land by 2030.



# Celebrating more than 20 Years of Partnership with Wildlife Trust of India

Since 2003, WLT and Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) have worked together to support WTI's conservation, restoration, and outreach work across India. Having started as a team of just three in 1998, WTI now has 40 conservation projects across 23 states. From mountains to mangroves, and forests to reefs, WTI's tireless work encompasses the incomparable diversity of the sub-continent, and all of the exceptional wildlife found within its habitats.

Recently, our Conservation Programmes Officer Gwynne Braidwood visited WLT's current supported projects with WTI Garo Green Spine and D'Ering-Dibru Wildlife Corridor to monitor progress and see first-hand the thriving results of these projects. Conservation is never complete and there is always more that can be done, more that can be built upon, but long-term partnerships such as this show the impact that can be achieved.

In the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, the Garo Green Spine Conservation Project is working with local communities to connect habitats and reduce human-wildlife conflict. WTI staff specialising in project management, sociology, and biology live locally to the project and know the area, its people, and wildlife to be best placed to manage its resources. Alongside the work of the current phase of the project to secure Nokrek-Emangre corridor, WTI are also working to identify areas that are key for other species within this landscape. Gibbons for example, travel through the canopies, rarely venturing to the ground and so need a continuous forested area to safely pass through. By securing these areas that are key for biodiversity, WTI are working to allow unhindered movement of wildlife within the landscape.

To mark this celebration, we heard from WTI Founder and Executive Director Vivek Menon.

## Tell us about your role with WTI and the partnership with WLT over the years.

I founded the Wildlife Trust of India with three other colleagues in 1998. It began in the spare bedroom of my house, and I ran the organisation as CEO for 22 years. Recently I handed over to a new CEO but continue my roles as founder and executive director.

The partnership started over 20 years ago as myself and the founders of WLT had many interests in common: we were nature conservation entrepreneurs with an interest in writing field guides and an understanding that setting aside land was critical for conservation. One of WLT and WTI's earliest collaborations was the Thirunelli-

Kudrakore Elephant Corridor project in Wayaand, Kerala, set in the Western Ghat hotspot. That acquisition and voluntary resettlement of people for elephants took nearly ten years, but was hailed for being a pioneer of sorts, not only in the private acquisition of conservation land in India, but also in setting standards for voluntary relocation of people if it were absolutely necessary. It also made us realise that acquiring or buying land in India is extremely costly and that resettlement of people would take immense amount of time if attempted. Both these made us take up future projects with a new plan, for both organisations. This was community protection without actually buying land and the only thing possible in northeast India, with land being largely tribal owned and not even controlled by government. We then went on to work together on projects such as buying small land holdings of the last mangroves on the western coast of Kerala and another community-led Sarus Crane protection project in Uttar Pradesh.

## What are the biggest impacts that have been achieved in this time?

The securement of three elephant corridors showing different models: Wayand purchase and resettlement; Mudhalli purchase of agricultural land with no resettlement, and the securement of four corridors in the Garo Hills, community easement and settling aside, are the main impacts in time.

## What gives you hope for the future in terms of conservation and sustainability?

The inherent ethic of the Indian people and government which by and large is pro-conservation, even though the edges are running jagged with conflict and the need for development taking its toll, is a hopeful situation to be in. Also 2000 years of conservation, ancient kingdoms practiced it long before western world coined the word conservation, as well as 200 years of modern conservation, gives India a solid footing. The government putting in large resources also helps.

Since partnering over two decades ago, here are just some of the projects that WTI have undertaken with support from WLT.

2003

A Partnership Begins: WLT and WTI commence our collaboration on the Garo Green Spine project. Over the next 20 years, the partnership helps secure land in Meghalaya's Garo Hills, giving safe passage to the Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) and other wildlife. Bringing over 4,000 ha under protection as Village Forest Reserves and restoring 100 ha with WLT support to increase connectivity of the landscape.



2005

Thirunelli-Kudrakote Elephant Corridor: Connecting the Reserve Forests of Thirunelli and Kudrakote. By linking at least 5,000 elephants, this project has prevented one of Asia's largest elephant populations from splitting apart.



2006

Kannur Kandal Project: Protection of a mangrove area and community conservation area through purchase of 7.5 ha in Kerala.



2016

Mudhalli Elephant Corridor: Part of WTI's 'Right of Passage' project, the corridor was widened to give ease of movement to large wildlife.



2019

Sarus Crane Conservation Project: A project to protect wetlands and their iconic Sarus Crane populations, India's only resident breeding crane, in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Read more on pages 12 and 13.



2020

D'ering-Dibru Saikhowa Corridor Project: Working to connect D'ering Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh with Assam's Dibru-Saikhowa National Park to reduce human-wildlife conflict and promote safe movement of Asian Elephant and other wildlife.





# Dance of the Sarus Cranes

Within the shimmering freshwater marshes of Uttar Pradesh, there is one striking silhouette that is unmistakable to all who live there – that of the Sarus Crane (*Antigone antigone*). Standing at almost two metres tall, with a crimson crown and grey plumage, these cranes are a symbol of grace and resilience embedded in the subcontinent's culture. Though also found across Southeast Asia and Australia, it is in the heart of rural Uttar Pradesh that the world's tallest flying bird has its stronghold, where more than half of the 20,000 individuals in the global wild population reside. And so, in 2013 the Sarus Crane Conservation Project, led by Dr Samir Kumar Sinha, took flight and was later joined by WLT in 2019.

## Hope, Resilience, and Longevity

Unlike many bird species, who are disrupted by human activity and prefer the solitude of less habited areas, the Sarus Crane has lived alongside humans for centuries. The intriguing courtship behaviour of the Sarus Cranes and their commitment to their mates has inspired many enduring myths over the years. Their life-long monogamous bonds are formed when pairs perform an elaborate dancing display of synchronised bowing, wing-spreading and graceful leaps. Having been a fixture of the landscape for countless generations, the cranes hold a revered place in Indian culture and, in 2014, became the official state bird of Uttar Pradesh.

Finding their name from the Hindi *sāras*, derived from the Sanskrit word *sarasa* meaning 'lake bird', the cranes are synonymous with the cool water into which they can be seen dipping their vivid red heads, bare of feathers, during the hot summers. These regal birds, with their persistence and ability to adapt to changing environments, are a symbol of resilience and hope to the people of the plains and their presence is a measure of the health of the wetlands. The wetlands are essential to the Sarus Crane, which spends around 70% of its time in the water. However, wetlands are globally one of the most threatened habitats and, in Uttar Pradesh, fall outside of the safeguarded forested areas.



## Sarus Mitra

At the forefront of the mission to save the Sarus Crane are the people of rural Uttar Pradesh. Supported by WTI, a network of volunteers, known as Sarus Mitra or Friends of the Sarus, diligently watch over crane nests in and around their farms across ten of the state's districts. Any risk to the nests is swiftly responded to by the farmers themselves; in one instance, heavy rainfall caused a nest to float away into deeper channels. Its resident eggs would have been lost if not for a farmer who swam after it and hauled the dense, meter-wide nest back to safety.

**The Sarus Crane, with its majestic presence and vital ecological role, stands as a powerful symbol of the interconnectedness of life.**

The efforts of organisations like WTI show how dedicated conservation work can make a difference in protecting these captivating birds and their habitats. By addressing the threats to Sarus Cranes through habitat restoration, community engagement, sustainable agriculture, and scientific research, WTI is paving the way for a future where cranes and humans can once again coexist. In doing so, we not only safeguard a species but also ensure the health and resilience of our planet's wetlands.



# From Uganda to Tanzania: Defending and Conserving

Conservation Programmes Manager Mercy Kariuki visited Uganda and Tanzania to collaborate with three WLT partners, including WLT's first visit to Environmental Defender's project area in Uganda's Albertine Rift region. She also met with Tanzania Forest Conservation Group (TFCG) and Southern Tanzania Elephant Programme (STEP) to hear of their latest achievements, and our newest partner Reforest Africa. The three partners in Tanzania are collaborating towards a common goal of protecting key landscapes. STEP and Reforest Africa are now working together to manage Magombera Nature Forest Reserve, secured and designated as a protected area by TFCG with WLT's support in 2019. The two organisations are also working in collaboration to restore the Udzungwa-Kilombero landscape.



Environmental Defenders



Section of Nyamukino reserve



Mercy attending Milola Village meetings



Kilombero Elephant Corridor



Mercy with two STEP staff

In 2022, WLT's partnership with Environmental Defenders began in order to support their purchase of the Nyamukino property as part of their plans to create a wildlife corridor between Murchison Falls National Park and East Madi Wildlife Sanctuary. The high biodiversity area of grassland, forests, and streams will be protected as well as restored by Environmental Defenders from their own tree nurseries and seed banks.

Along with WLT Trustee Dr Julius Arinaitwe, Mercy visited the new proposed area next to the already acquired Nyamukino Reserve, met with rangers and staff, and saw first-hand the work that is being done. What stood out most was the commitment of every person working for and with the organisation. Environmental Defenders began as a grassroots environmental justice group, and the passion for protecting the landscape and biodiversity of the Albertine Rift can be seen in every action taken.

In Tanzania, TFCG are in the second phase of their plan for community-based forest management. As the land is owned by local villages, in phase one, TFCG established 10 Village Land Forest Reserves (VLFRs), protecting around 25,000 ha. Under the second phase, TFCG has put efforts to work with six more villages to establish a further six VLFRs that will altogether conserve and protect around 14,800 ha.

The area in which TFCG work is made up of coastal woodland that makes a home for a great number of endemic and threatened species, from the Endangered Rondo Dwarf Galago (*Paragalago rondoensis*) — a bushbaby primate weighing less than 100g to the African Savanna Elephant. Mercy was invited to join the meetings that take place with the people of the villages and saw their unparalleled knowledge of the area and the efforts that go into conserving it.

Elsewhere in Tanzania, Mercy carried out a monitoring visit to the site of the 186 ha Kilombero Elephant Corridor, 76 of which is funded by WLT supporters and will soon become an officially designated wildlife corridor. The area is made up of a wealth of habitats, from lowland to montane tropical forests, as well as the grassland, savannas and shrublands of miombo woodland. These habitats are home to an array of species from the Udzungwa Red Colobus (*Piliocolobus gordonorum*) to the African Serval Cat (*Leptailurus serval*), and, of course, African Savanna Elephant.

Since beginning the project, STEP has recorded an increase in biodiversity within the corridor, showing that wildlife is taking the opportunity to move through the landscape even before the official designation and the protections it will bring. As well as staff and rangers, known as Village Game Scouts, the local people are closely involved with not only maintaining the corridor but improving for both wildlife and people. Scouts are vigilant against animal grazing within the conservation area, and different methods are being studied to encourage more wildlife and especially elephants through the corridor and the road underpass to reduce wildlife conflict and road kills as they cross to Udzungwa National Park.



# The Hairy-legged Vampire Bat of Honduras

The mountains of western Honduras's Trifinio region are a mosaic of streams, conifer, and cloud forests. The trees are a refuge for species from the Critically Endangered Cerro Pital Salamander (*Bolitoglossa synoria*) of the forest floor to the Resplendent Quetzal (*Pharomachrus mocinno*) of the skies. Despite the stunning biodiversity and being the ancestral home of the Indigenous Lenca people, the area is highly fragmented and at continuous risk from expanding agriculture and logging, threatening the species that depend on these unique environments. Our 2025 spring appeal: Save the Cloud Forests of Honduras will support our partner Asociación Ecológica de San Marcos de Ocotepeque (AESMO) to safeguard a target 91 ha of this captivating ecosystem.

**Whether Least Concern (LC) or Critically Endangered (CR), all species within an ecosystem are vital and conservation must not wait until a species is in peril to act. One such species is the Hairy-legged Vampire Bat (*Diphylla ecaudata*, LC).**

## Specialist Blood Feeders

Unlike the Common Vampire Bat (*Desmodus rotundus*), which often feeds on mammals, the Hairy-legged Vampire Bat specialises in drinking bird blood. Using heat-sensitive sensors on their noses, they can locate the warmest spots on a bird's body to make a precise, painless incision.

## Hidden in the Cloud Forest

These nocturnal predators thrive in the cool, mist-shrouded cloud forests of Honduras where thick vegetation and abundant birdlife create ideal hunting conditions.

## Feathery Preferences

While birds are their preferred prey, habitat changes sometimes force these bats to adapt. In agricultural areas, they may target domestic poultry — an unusual shift that highlights their resilience in altered environments.

## Nighttime Navigation Masters

The Hairy-legged Vampire Bat uses a combination of echolocation, memory, and heat detection to find their meals. Once they identify a reliable feeding site, they will often return night after night.

## Social Bonds

These bats roost in small, social groups, often in hollow trees, caves, or even abandoned buildings. They engage in food-sharing behaviours, where well-fed individuals regurgitate blood meals to help less successful roost-mates survive.

## Masters of Microclimates

These bats show a preference for cool, humid environments at higher elevations. However, researchers have also found them in secondary forests and cattle pastures as they adapt to deforestation.





# The Mother of the Forest

## Protecting baobabs in Madagascar

First mentioned in a 14th century travelogue in mainland Africa by the Arab explorer Ibn Battuta, baobabs are one of the most eye-catching trees on Earth. With enormous swollen trunks and a crown of horizontally spreading branches, the “upside-down tree” is well known both in popular culture and local folklore. What has only been explored more recently is where baobabs – which are present today in Madagascar, Australia, and mainland Africa – first originated.

### A birthplace in Madagascar and a voyage by sea

There are eight species of baobab worldwide, some more outlandish in appearance than others but all closely related. Six of these occur in Madagascar, one in mainland Africa, and one in Australia. A 2024 study by an international team of botanists and geneticists – including academics from Madagascar’s capital city Antananarivo –

provides compelling evidence that Madagascar is the birthplace of the baobab, with these first appearing some 21 million years ago. But how did they get to mainland Africa and Australia? This most likely happened during intense storms when Madagascar’s rivers were in flood, a seething mix of rapid water, fallen branches, and – most importantly – baobab fruits and seeds. The seeds were then washed far out to sea and, tangled together with other debris, began to slowly drift across the ocean and towards their new homes.

### The tree of life

In Madagascar’s local language, Malagasy, the baobab goes by the name *renala*, from *reny ala*, meaning “mother of the forest”. With its vast spreading canopy offering habitat for many birds and insects and its roots binding the soil together, it is an apt name. But the baobab gives more than just shelter and stability. The flowers of the iconic Giant Baobab (*Adansonia grandidieri*) provide sugar-rich nectar for a wealth of species, including

bats, hawk moths, and fork-marked lemurs. On the other hand, its large oblong fruits are almost entirely avoided by Madagascar’s diverse animal life, which is in spite of their deliciously sweet taste that has made them a staple in many local jams and drinks. Since humans wiped out many of the island’s largest animals on arrival around 1,500 years ago, it is thought that the role of Giant Baobab seed disperser may have been filled by now extinct species – such as the largest bird to have ever lived, the gigantic Elephant Bird (*Aepyornis maximus*).

The baobab not only sustains a wealth of wildlife but also holds an important place within local folklore. A symbol of wisdom and longevity, baobab groves were often chosen as sites to hold council during major events. The significance of the baobab to local communities is perhaps best exemplified by a tree known as *Tsitakakoike*. This tree, a Giant Baobab, was the world’s largest living baobab until 2018, when – after an estimated 1,400 years – it finally split and collapsed. Its

death was not only a sign of the wider climate crisis – the final blow being three years of unrelenting drought, but also a great loss to the local community, many of whom believed that the spirits of their ancestors had found a home in and among its gnarled and twisted branches.

### Protection for the future

In northwest Madagascar, our partner Planet Madagascar is supporting protection of the region’s precious wildlife in the Ankarafantsika National Park, home to the baobab *Adansonia madagascariensis boenensis*. Between 2022 and 2024, they have been working to restore 150 hectares (371 acres) of key lemur habitat within the park’s Ambanjabe Management Zone.

This work has been successful, enabling the planting of over 60,000 native tree seedlings and providing many local jobs. These efforts will help to secure a bright future for the region’s wildlife and the “mother of the forest”.



# A Feline in the Shadows

The Secret Life of the Southern Tiger Cat



In the heart of the Atlantic Forest in Paraguay, a small cat pads silently through the undergrowth. Barely larger than a household tabby but with the gorgeous rose-petal markings of its South American cousins, this is the Southern Tiger Cat (*Leopardus guttulus*). With only 6,000 individuals left in the wild, the future of this elusive feline is closely entwined with the future of the whole forest. That is why our partner Guyra Paraguay is working tirelessly to protect its increasingly threatened home.

## A forest enigma

Until quite recently, scientists didn't even know the Southern Tiger Cat was a unique species. Little studied and rarely seen, they had always assumed it was a subspecies of its almost identical-looking northern counterpart, the Oncilla (*Leopardus tigrinus*). But in 2013, this long-held assumption was brought into question, with Brazilian geneticists showing that the two cats actually split into distinct species 100,000 years ago.

Although the Southern Tiger Cat is an adept climber and completely at home in a tree's canopy, its prey is usually found on the forest floor. Despite being one of the smallest cats in the Americas, it is an agile and accomplished hunter, pursuing everything from the ordinary – mice and shrews – to the less ordinary – such as butterflies. The Southern Tiger Cat hones its hunting skills early on: at around a week to two weeks old, the kittens' eyes open and for the next few months, they watch and learn from their mothers. While most hunting takes place under the cover of darkness, they can also hunt during the day, their richly mottled fur helping them blend into the broken shadows and patchy sunlight of the forest floor.

## A rival in the undergrowth

The Southern Tiger Cat is an excellent hunter but little match for its larger cousin, the Ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*). For biologists studying both species, a clear pattern starts to emerge: where Ocelots occur in high numbers, the Southern Tiger Cat tends to be quite scarce or to hunt during the day. This phenomenon, a series of behaviours that act to reduce competition, has been termed 'The Ocelot



Effect'. Being bigger and more powerful, the Ocelot takes the top position in the hunting hierarchy and may even kill Southern Tiger Cats that get in their way. This may explain why the Southern Tiger Cat occupies a far larger territory – up to 2,500 hectares (6,178 acres) – than you would expect given its small size. But for this to work, the Southern Tiger Cat needs access to something which is rapidly disappearing: space.

## Saving a forest in fragments

The Atlantic Forest is one of the most threatened forest regions on Earth. In eastern Paraguay, just 15% remains, scattered between protected areas, communal land, and private reserves. This loss of forest habitat is pushing species like the Southern Tiger Cat to the brink, which is why our partner Guyra Paraguay set up the Guyra Reta Reserve in southeast Paraguay. With your generous donations to our Action Fund, this reserve offers a safe refuge for not only the Southern Tiger Cat but also big cats like the Jaguar (*Panthera onca*) and highly threatened birds, such as the Endangered Saffron-cowled Blackbird (*Xanthopsar flavus*).

Together, these efforts will help secure a bright future for the Southern Tiger Cat, enabling it to prowl through the undergrowth for many decades to come.



# Wildlife Corridors

Much of the world's rarest and most threatened biodiversity exists now in small pockets. Even when those pockets are protected, nature rarely thrives as isolated islands surrounded by development or degradation. This is why, as well as protecting land as contained reserves, so much of our conservation partners' work involves not only safeguarding areas but connecting them. We call these connections wildlife corridors; unseen networks that sustain biodiversity beyond the boundaries of protected parks.

**Wildlife corridors are the connection that fasten fragmented landscapes into a living, breathing whole.**

These pathways are not just routes of migration; they are bridges of resilience, enabling adaptation in the face of rapid environmental change. WLT ensures funds are strategically allocated across our network of conservation partners to have the most impact and long-term sustainability.

In Kenya, Big Life Foundation is working with the semi-nomadic Maasai pastoralists to create a corridor within the Amboseli ecosystem to support the migration of elephant and lion populations, as well as the Endangered African Painted Dog (*Lycaon pictus*).

**Corridors are passages of survival; ancestral routes etched into memory, now disrupted by roads, fences, and human ambition.**

In Malaysian Borneo, our partner HUTAN has a very creative solution to the problem of habitat fragmentation. Many tree-dwelling primates cannot swim and use canopies to make their way across rivers. However, as riverside trees are felled so are the means of crossing. By creating artificial canopy bridges, HUTAN are helping reconnect

populations of Bornean Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*) and other wildlife, including Southern Pig-tailed Macaque (*Macaca nemestrina*), Long-tailed Macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*), and Proboscis Monkey (*Nasalis larvatus*).

When a forest is fragmented, the threads of interspecies relationships fray, and corridors become the stitching that holds ecological communities together.



Our 2024 spring appeal: Connecting Ukuwela supported our partner Wild Tomorrow to secure Sisonke farm, the missing piece of the Greater Ukuwela Nature Reserve (GUNR). Now secured, that piece has created an unbroken pathway from the Lebombo Mountains all the way to the Indian Ocean for some of South Africa's most iconic species including Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), Lion (*Panthera leo*), and Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*). Since Sisonke has been brought into the protection of the GUNR, flocks of Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) appeared in large numbers following ecological burns, away from their usual habitat in the wetlands of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park.

**Wildlife corridors reflect a growing understanding that conservation must transcend political and geographical boundaries.**

In Bolivia, Fundación Natura Bolivia (FNB) and Naturaleza, Tierra y Vida (NATIVA) are supporting both the (GAIOC) and Municipalities in the region to protect huge swathes of the Bolivian Chaco forest. Recognised as one of the world's last truly wild ecosystems, the Gran Chaco extends from the base of the Argentinian Andes, through Paraguay and into Bolivia, where the ecosystem's largest remaining intact forests lie. A combination of Municipal Protected Areas and areas recognised by GAIOC will not only preserve this uniquely threatened habitat but also create a connected corridor spanning over 500km around the entire border with northern Paraguay, and link Bolivia's Kaa-Iya and Otuquis National Parks.

To protect a corridor is to honour the instinctive knowledge of creatures who have moved across landscapes for generations, without maps, without borders.

**"The Mesoamerican Biological Corridor was originally proposed in the 1990s and is a key reason why World Land Trust collaborates with numerous in-country organisations who work across borders in Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. Having witnessed some of these projects first-hand, I can honestly say it is imperative to establish these corridors for all wildlife. The pressures on these habitats are ever-increasing, despite the commitments made."**

**Dan Bradbury,  
Director of brand and Communications, WLT**



# A Mosaic of Protection in Argentina

In 2022, WLT partnered with a young and dynamic conservation organisation dedicated to protecting the habitats of Argentina. This organisation is Natura Argentina, which works to conserve the habitats of the rugged and diverse landscapes that define Argentina through local initiatives, letting habitat conservation be led by the people who are closest to it.

During the partnership, WLT has been supporting Natura Argentina with their work to protect the forest of northwest Argentina's Catamarca Province. It falls within the mountainous terrain of the Sierras de Ambato region, where, between the rocky and arid lower slopes and snow-capped peaks, forests brim with endemic life. These transitions zones are a patchwork of habitats, from Monte scrubland to thorny lowland Dry Chaco forest. Towards the higher elevations lie the Yungas forest habitats, a complex mosaic of moist evergreen woodland, montane rainforest, and, higher still, misty cloud forest.

The diversity of the landscape in the Sierras de Ambato is reflected in the flora and fauna that make a home there. The area is a hotspot of endemism and little-known species of plants, amphibians, and reptiles sheltered in the trees and scrub, many of which likely haven't even been recorded yet. Coexisting with them are over

200 bird species and dozens of mammal species. Birds such as the Endangered Chaco Eagle (*Buteogallus coronatus*) can be seen soaring across the mountains while smaller mammals and rodents including Taruca (*Hippocamelus antisensis*) dart between their underground burrows.

As well as its biodiversity value, the project also provides ecosystem services; the forest streams that flow down the mountains as melted snow from the peaks are a vital resource for local consumption and the irrigation of orchards and vegetable fields.

The past 18 months have involved extensive work by the Natura Argentina consulting with communities and local authorities, identifying and prioritising key threats and areas for protection, and advocating for these protected areas with local and provincial governments. The results of this can now be celebrated by the team with the declaration of four municipal reserves — protected areas managed by local public councils — in Catamarca Province. Together, these reserves protect more than 180,000 ha and make up the largest mosaic of Municipal Protected Areas in Argentina.





## WLT's Corporate Partnerships Manager **Tracey Butler** tells us how the corporate community is helping build a sustainable future



Corporate support provides a substantial one third of WLT's income, making this funding stream vital to our mission to help people around the world protect their land.

From WLT's early days, companies with shared values joined us, weaving protection of the natural world into their business model.

Today, within this crucial decade for the planet, businesses are called with increasing urgency to play a significant role in the solution to habitat loss and the climate crisis by taking responsibility for their environmental impact. Our growing community of corporate partners have sustainability strategies in place, seeking new ways to operate their businesses responsibly in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and backing WLT programmes to achieve their environmental targets for biodiversity, climate and local communities.

During my time with WLT, I've found that nothing stands still when working with corporate partners. We collaborate with an amazingly diverse group of companies who support us in a variety of ways. One of the best parts of my role is getting to know each business, to understand what they are looking to achieve and co-design a partnership that works.

Fresh ideas and creative approaches underpin the initiatives through which our corporate partners support our land protection and restoration projects. Businesses contribute to Carbon Balanced in line with their Science-Based Targets (SBTs) and Net Zero commitments. Increasingly, we are seeing companies conducting biodiversity assessments to understand and address their impact on local wildlife and simultaneously fund the protection of biodiverse tropical habitats to protect threatened species.

We celebrate the growing number of our corporate partners who support us through platforms such as 1% for the Planet and those who have achieved B Corp certification, joining the global movement of businesses aiming to do things better and achieve high standards of social and environmental performance.

I am inspired every day by the companies who have consistently supported us for years and decades, and the powerful partnerships we continue to forge, working together effectively to protect habitat and wildlife around the world.

# Friends of Arrierito Antioqueño

In the subtropical forests of the Central Cordillera's northern slopes — the highest mountains of the Colombian Andes — our partner Fundación ProAves's Arrierito Antioqueño Reserve is protecting the myriad enigmatic species that make a home there.

Within the forest, 11 endemic bird species can be found. For eight of the species, Arrierito Antioqueño is a refuge from the habitat loss that has left them threatened with extinction. One such species is the Critically Endangered Antioquia Piha (*Lipaugus weberi*). With its cinnamon feathers and copper crown, this small but loud bird — its calls can be heard up to 100m away — only inhabits a tiny portion of the Cordillera's humid montane forests. As well as the residents, Arrierito Antioqueño hosts 28 species of migratory bird such as the Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*).

The forest also echoes with the sounds of more than 20 species of amphibian, five of which are threatened with extinction. As night falls, the Nocturnal Harlequin Toad (*Atelopus nocturnus*) emerges onto low branches that overhang streams. It is the only nocturnal species of this highly endangered genus and known only from the Arrierito Antioqueño Reserve.

This reserve is the first strictly protected area of these dense montane forests in the municipality of Anorí, in Colombia's Antioquia department. In a joint effort between American Bird Conservancy and the Action Fund, WLT Friends have supported the expansion of this refuge with the purchase of two properties that will increase the protected area by more than 50%. With this, the habitat and the incredible biodiversity within it will be monitored and safeguarded from threats. With the expansion, ProAves is beginning its Biotic Exploration project which, even in its early stages, has recorded 190 species of flora, 104 species of birds, 28 species of amphibians and reptiles, and 22 species of mammals.





WLT's Senior Technical Officer **Leila Pain** explains what goes on behind the scenes of our partner projects and how we monitor the impact of your support



"We are really fortunate to be working at a time of technological change, so we have a huge amount of global data at our fingertips."

Leila Pain, Senior Technical Officer, WLT

#### What is your role within WLT?

I am the Senior Technical Officer in WLT's Programmes team. In a nutshell, I work with spatial data to help understand and illustrate the importance of projects proposed to WLT. I also use it to inform the monitoring of partner reserves that we have previously supported.

#### What is the process for mapping a project area?

Fortunately, in most cases our partners provide us with maps for proposals. Alongside invaluable local knowledge, they help us understand and visualise projects and make the job of mapping straightforward in most cases. We then use a number of global datasets with information on elevation, habitat type, and land cover, and satellite imagery to really help build the picture. We use this information to predict species numbers in proposed project areas and use modelling tools to help determine the level of threats and the urgency of action. This spatial analysis helps the team to review and prioritise conservation projects.

#### How do you monitor the ongoing impact of projects?

We are really fortunate to be working at a time of technological change, so we have a huge amount of global data at our fingertips. Even in the last few years there's been leaps in the quality of satellite imagery and data, much of which is freely available.

Satellites are equipped with sensors that can detect wavelengths far beyond what we can see and allows us to understand information that is otherwise invisible to us. By combining visible light, infrared light, and thermal bands we can produce images that allow us, for example, to detect changes

in vegetation and fire activity. We can then process this data to monitor changes and create early alert systems.

These tools are part of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and the great thing about GIS is that you can immerse yourself in this data. Sometimes the most powerful means of monitoring a site is just simply to regularly check in with recent satellite imagery and monitor any changes. There is, of course, nothing better than boots on the ground to understand how reserves are faring, but leveraging remote sensing tools complements our partners physical presence and ensures that we have eyes on even the most remote areas.

#### What are the biggest challenges?

Clouds!

Nothing prevents consistently gathering remote data more than a cloud obstructing the view of the earth's surface. While there are methods for filling in data gaps and radar technology can penetrate cloud coverage — clouds are still a limiting factor. Unsurprisingly, this is a problem for monitoring tropical rainforests!

#### What gives you hope for the future with regards to sustainability and conservation?

I have a background in economics, and it's hard to constantly see 'take-make-waste' consumption models that have little regard for sustainability.

However, I genuinely believe that attitudes are starting to change with people increasingly invested in making choices that have positive environmental impact. We are seeing these priorities trickle into the investment decisions and goals of large corporations. It's inspiring to get to work with passionate people who are helping to implement conservation and ensure that benefits reach the local communities who steward some of the most beautiful and diverse areas in the world.

I've also just this morning found a tiny patch of frogspawn in my pond for the first time, nothing quite like the start of spring to get you feeling hopeful!



# The Indigenous Communities of Orellana



**Jaime Toro, Coordinator of the Amazonian office at Nature and Culture Ecuador, tells us about his work with Indigenous communities and the Ecuadorian government to create collaborative conservation efforts and what the funds from WLT's 2024 autumn appeal are supporting.**

"Our focus is the Amazon Platform for Forest, Climate, and Human Wellbeing Initiative. Through the Platform, we have already created three Provincial Protected Areas and brought 4.2 million ha under protection status. Adding Orellana will bring us to 5.5 million ha and bring us closer to our goal to create the biggest connectivity corridor in Ecuador.

My first connection with nature came from my studies as a forest engineer. When I started with Nature and Culture in Ecuador, I realised how important the protection of natural resources is for local people. Working in the Amazon, I have really learned the value of nature due to my relationship with the Indigenous Nationalities, as they have such a strong connection to everything the forest gives them. We have so much to learn from the role they play in protecting this land.

Within the Amazon, along with increased farming and the opening of roads without proper planning, one of the biggest concerns is destructive activities such as oil and mining. This harms the natural resources of the ecosystem and impacts negatively on the Indigenous people that live there. As an organisation, our premise is that conservation must protect natural and cultural resources, but at the same

time contribute to improving quality of life for local people. That is specifically important in the Amazon as most of the population are Indigenous people. So, we have been working very closely with the subnational government and Indigenous groups.

The forest is not only their house but where they find everything they need to survive and live in harmony with the land – it's their pharmacy, their local market. They have been caring for it for generations.

While the Amazonian basin in general is very important for all Indigenous people, the Ecuadorian Amazon has gone a step forward because, in 1992, the Ecuadorian state acknowledged the property of these collective territories in the name of the Indigenous people. Historically, protected areas have been established without a proper process of consultation – so Indigenous people haven't really been involved in the decision-making for conservation of their territories.

The best way to create inclusive conservation is through trust, and the more dialogue between the Indigenous cultures and the governments, the more we can generate that trust. Each trip we take to Orellana is a new adventure. We get to admire a diversity of species, which is of course wonderful, but most importantly for me, we meet Indigenous people who are approaching conservation with strength and responsibility. It's about trying to unify and find common ground in the planning of the provincial government and the planning of each Indigenous people. It's an exercise of collaboration, of co-governance, and of trust, to make decisions together".

"The forest is not only their house but where they find everything they need to survive and live in harmony with the land – it's their pharmacy, their local market. They have been caring for it for generations."

**Jaime Toro, Nature and Culture Ecuador**



In Orellana, one such indigenous community is El Eden, a Kichwa community of approximately 500 people including a Women's Association who are working together to grow produce sustainably. The women of the association each work in different areas to grow crops and fruits and run small businesses producing ice creams, arts and crafts items, and clothing to generate sustainable income. El Eden is a thriving example of the enterprises that can emerge if Indigenous communities are given support and training.



# Bridging Art and Conservation

## An Interview with Creative Director and WLT Ambassador Jonny Lu

To bring you more behind the scenes glimpses at the incredible people who make up the WLT community, we spoke with Ambassador Jonny Lu, Creative Director and founder of Jonny Lu Studio. Beginning with a passion for science and marine biology in Australia, his love for photography led him away from the lab and into the world of design. Now based in London, he has spent over a decade running his own creative agency, fusing artistic expertise with a deep-rooted love for nature. It was early in his agency's existence, working from a small studio in Dalston, that he first encountered WLT and joined our mission to fund the protection of endangered habitats and wildlife worldwide.



"I was immediately struck by WLT's mission and felt compelled to contribute. When the founders asked if I'd be interested in visiting one of the conservation projects, I said yes without hesitation. I put together a small team, and we set off for Ecuador.

The project was led by botanist Lou Jost, President of Fundación EcoMinga, and it took us deep into the cloud forests of Baños in central Ecuador. The experience was very challenging—high altitude, cold nights, rain, and rugged terrain. None of us knew what to expect, but the reward for our efforts was incredible. Lou, who has spent decades studying orchids, guided us through the forest, pointing out tiny species that we would have walked right past. Seeing the world through his eyes was transformative; it made me realise just how much is still being discovered, how much we overlook, and how fragile ecosystems are. What also struck me was the human side of conservation. Many of the rangers working with

Lou had once been hunters, relying on unsustainable hunting and farming to survive. Rather than simply stopping those activities, the project focused on helping them find sustainable alternatives, ensuring that they could continue to live and work in the region while protecting the land instead of damaging it.

When we returned, we presented the short film we made about the project 'Orchids of Baños' to Sir David Attenborough. He was incredibly supportive and even

recorded the introduction to the film for us. That was a pivotal moment for me, it made me realise that conservation isn't just about protecting species, it's about people too.

Since that project, I've continued working on conservation-focused initiatives, including Deeper Green and Ciento por Ciento with Colin Dodgson. These projects aim to engage people with environmental issues in new ways, using design and photography to create an emotional connection with nature. There is a contrast between scientific and artistic approaches to storytelling. Many of the photographers I collaborate with use film and analogue techniques, prioritising mood and emotion over technical detail. This sometimes leads to a few raised eyebrows at the more abstract, art-driven imagery, but at the same time, this work has helped broaden the audience for conservation. Publications such as fashion magazines that wouldn't normally cover environmental issues have been incredibly supportive, featuring these projects and helping to amplify the message.

For me, this is what it's all about: expanding the reach of conservation through storytelling. By working with photographers who usually shoot for Vogue, i-D, or Louis Vuitton, I'm able to bring these stories into cultural spaces where they might not otherwise be seen. Looking ahead, I hope to continue blending art and environmental advocacy. Whether through design, photography, or storytelling, my goal is to create work that not only raises awareness but also sparks a real, emotional connection to nature, because that's what drives action."

## Read, Listen, Learn

Continue your journey with these books, podcasts, and documentaries recommended by WLT staff

### Books

- The Gardens of Mars: Madagascar, an Island Story, John Gimlette
- The Flow: Rivers, Water, and Wildness, Amy-Jane Beer
- Lost Rainforests of Britain and Ireland, Guy Shrubsole
- Rewilding the Sea, Charles Clover

### Podcasts

- This Natural Life, Adjoa Andoh
- The Climate Question, BBC World Service
- The Rewild Podcast, James Shooter

### Documentaries

- Escape from Extinction: Rewilding
- David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet
- My Octopus Teacher



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a future for one of Colombia's  
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