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WLT NEWS



World Land Trust Spring Newsletter 2026



We may have seen a wet start to the year in the UK, but as spring blossoms here across our partner network your support is helping make amazing things happen this year. Fledglings are flying the nest in record numbers in Bolivia, the magnificent Royal Bengal Tiger was seen for the first time near one of Wildlife Trust of India's (WTI's) wildlife corridors, and the fruit trees of the Caucasus will soon be in full bloom. Important though these are, World Land Trust's (WLT's) work is not just built on single isolated moments though. It is defined by long-standing relationships built on trust and a deeply held shared purpose. This is evident in our partnership with Reserva Ecológica de Guapiaçu (REGUA), and their work in Brazil's Atlantic Forest that we are supporting with WLT's 2026 Spring Appeal.

Lesser known perhaps than its neighbour the great Amazon Rainforest, the Atlantic Forest of Brazil is one of the most highly biodiverse forest ecosystems on Earth, and its wildlife abundance rivals that of the Amazon. Having partnered with REGUA for two decades now, we have seen how REGUA exemplifies what sustained conservation can achieve. We have seen our partner grow from a single reserve to a landscape-scale restoration effort, combining land purchase and forest regeneration with scientific research, all the while becoming a cornerstone of the local communities and embedding conservation in the land.

None of this happens without you. Your support enables WLT to commit for the long term and stand alongside partners as their work evolves. In the following pages, you will read more about the projects you help make possible, and the enduring difference that patient, principled conservation can make.

Dr Catherine Barnard, CEO

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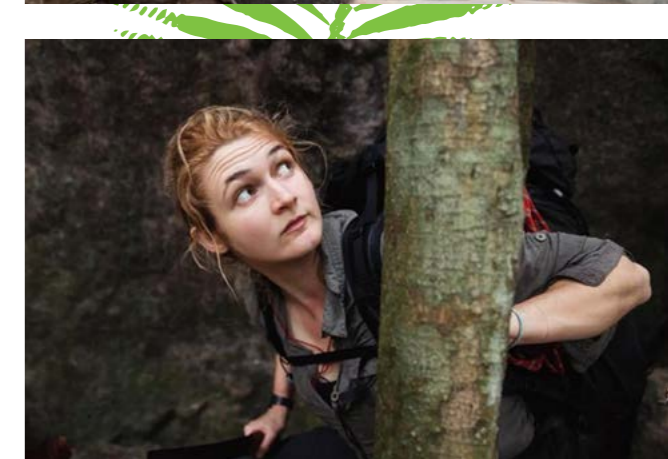
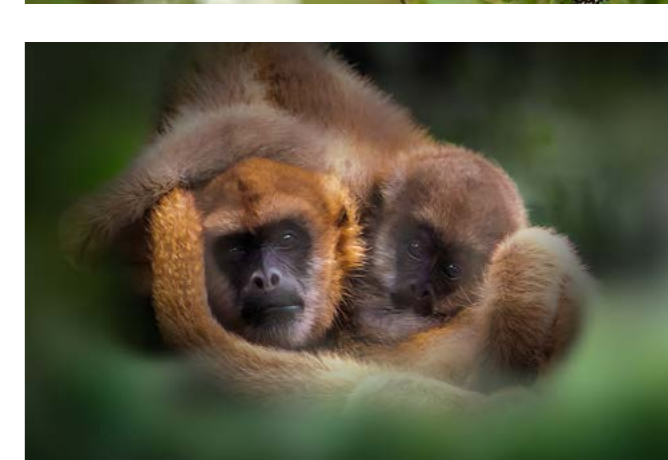
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© Cover: M Gustafson (Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, *Bradypus variegatus*)
Page 2: Joel Trick (Baltimore Oriole, *Icterus galbula*)

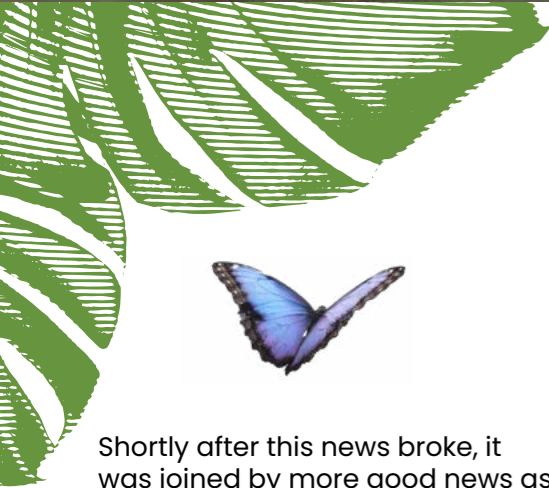


Positive News

from the Field



Exciting news has reached us from the lush cloud forests of Ecuador: the Río Machay Reserve, created by our partner Fundación EcoMinga (EcoMinga) with WLT support, has now been officially declared a Wildlife Refuge. Spanning 1,160 ha (2,866 acres) in the upper Pastaza River basin, Río Machay protects a rich mosaic of habitats, from cloud-draped forests to expansive páramo grasslands. These ecosystems provide shelter to at least 35 threatened species, including the iconic Spectacled Bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*) and the Endangered Black-and-chestnut Eagle (*Spizaetus isidori*).



Shortly after this news broke, it was joined by more good news as EcoMinga's Río Manduriacu Reserve was also officially declared a Wildlife Refuge, a powerful endorsement of our partner's conservation leadership in the region. Established to safeguard the last known population of the Critically Endangered Tandayapa Andes Toad (*Rhaebo olallai*), the reserve has since revealed multiple species new to science, including amphibians, orchids, small mammals, and magnolias, many of them endemic to this single region of cloud forest. This includes nine species of glass frog, more than in any other of EcoMinga's reserves.



Following 2025's Save the Cloud Forests of Honduras appeal, our supporters raised £443,540 to help our partner Asociación Ecológica de San Marcos de Ocotepeque (AESMO) purchase 91 ha (225 acres) of vital and vulnerable forest in Honduras' Trifinio region. Now, AESMO has successfully secured three of the four properties funded by the appeal. The land secured through the appeal funding so far will make a huge difference for both wildlife and local people – protecting the homes of species like the Cerro Pital Salamander (*Bolitoglossa synoria*) and Golden Cheeked Warbler (*Setophaga chrysoparia*), as well as preserving essential clean water for surrounding rural communities.



After two years of work by our conservation partner Hutan and many other stakeholders, including Indigenous and local communities, the Kinabatangan region has been designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. This is one of 26 new Biosphere Reserves and covers 413,866 ha (1.02 million acres) of forests, wetlands, and villages in Malaysia's Kinabatangan region. The Biosphere Reserve connects the Heart of Borneo, a transboundary rainforest conservation area, with the Lower Kinabatangan–Segama Wetlands. This is a highly fragmented landscape profoundly transformed by past human activities, where conservation and development need to go hand in hand to restore forests, protect wildlife, and sustain cultural heritage.

Elsewhere in Malaysian Borneo, Hutan is partnering with TRAILS, an innovative research programme, on a potential sustainable future for palm oil. Their early studies have shown that Oil Palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), the trees that produce the palm oil on which many local people rely for income, can be grown alongside native tree species. If Oil Palm in the future could be grown with native tree species instead of the monoculture plantations that drive deforestation, it could have profound impacts on the conservation of species like the Bornean Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*).

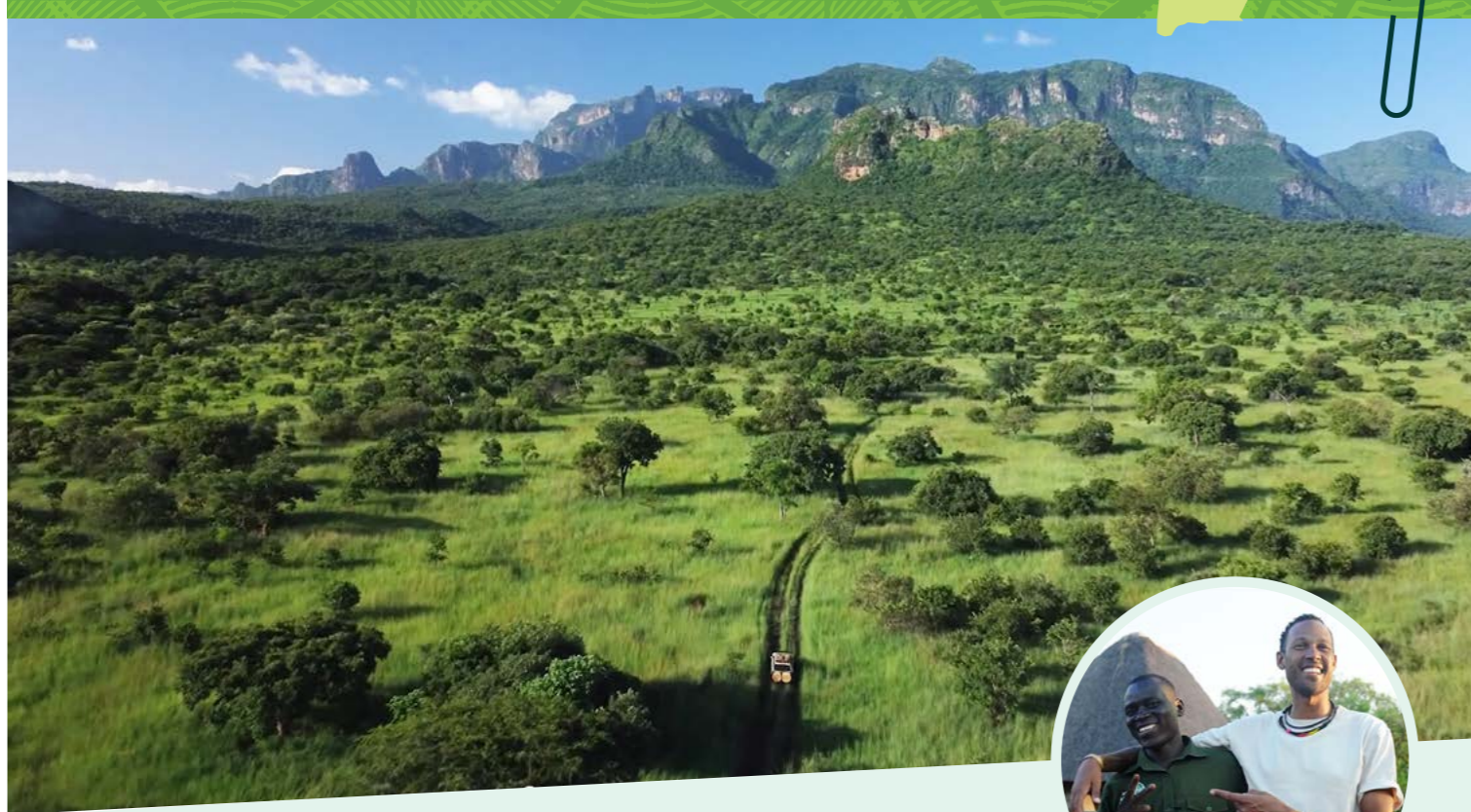


For more news stories from the field scan the QR code or visit www.worldlandtrust.org/news/



Partner Postcards

Uganda



The People of the Mountains

I am Lokoru Emmanuel. I am a community conservationist here in Moru Adjo for the Kara-Tunga Foundation. At the same time, I am also a site guide.

Here we do many different activities. One of the main things we do is community sensitisation meetings on environmental issues. We also conduct patrols, where we spot and record common wildlife species within the landscape.

The community places pressure on the forest. People cut down trees to produce charcoal, which supports their livelihoods. They sell charcoal for small amounts of money to buy essential items for their households.

Sometimes, through sensitising communities, we explain the importance of having trees and maintaining forest within the landscape.

My future goal is to see a green environment across the landscape, which can attract wildlife species and help promote tourism in the region.

We also have the Kara-Tunga Eco-Camp, which is located in Moru Adjadore in the Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve, looking out towards the hills of Mount Kadam. This area is one of the Central Forest Reserves managed by the National Forestry Authority.

In the future, I hope to see more tourists visiting. There are many activities they can take part in. For example, we offer bush walks, birdwatching, and cultural activities with nearby local villages. We also organise walking safaris.



The Landscape we Guard

I am James Anyekan, and we are here at Nadiket Eco Camp with the Kara-Tunga Foundation where I work as a patrolman.

We carry out a range of activities including community engagement, encouraging people not to cut trees or burn charcoal. When these conversations are successful, we begin to see changes. For example, we notice that there is no longer smoke rising from charcoal burning in those areas, which shows that people are starting to stop these activities.

We also encourage communities to take part in tree restoration, raising seedlings that can later be planted to restore the landscape.

I enjoy this work very much because we see real results. Through my work I have learned many lessons about how to conserve the environment, including the different names of trees and the different species of birds and animals that live here.

When I look out across the landscape now, I feel proud. It is green and thriving, and that is what I love to see.

Here in our plant nursery, we grow tree species such as *Terminalia brownii*. First, the seeds are planted in nursery beds, where they can germinate and begin to grow. When the shoots appear and the young seedlings start developing their first leaves, we prick them out. This means carefully lifting each small seedling from the bed and transferring it into its own seedling bag so it has enough space to grow.

After that we continue potting and watering the seedlings, helping them grow stronger roots and stems. After around three weeks, the young trees are already growing taller and stronger in the nursery, ready to continue developing before they are eventually planted out in the landscape as part of conservation and restoration efforts.

In the forest islands and rolling savannahs of Bolivia's Beni region, each October marks the start of the breeding season for one of the world's rarest birds. The Blue-throated Macaw (*Ara glaucogularis*), with its namesake vibrant turquoise plumage was once so rare as to be thought extinct until its rediscovery in 1992.

To the southeast of Barba Azul where the Macaws roost and feed, the Laney Rickman Reserve is home to Asociación Armonía's Nest Box programme. Here, each breeding season, César Flores Aguilera, a former rancher and now a ranger with over 14 years of experience, builds artificial nest boxes for macaws to safely lay their eggs. The team recorded the highest number of fledged Blue-throated Macaw ever achieved in a single year, making 2025 their second record-breaking season in a row. Now, there is much excitement as the breeding population returns for the 2026 season, with high hopes for the species' recovery.

A nest box may seem a simple solution to have so much impact, but the programme has been an unprecedented success, and in a species so rare, every chick that flies the nest is an incredible victory. The Blue-throated Macaw is a very particular species, preferring to nest almost exclusively in *Attalea phalerata* palm trees, known locally as *Motacú*. However, *Motacú* is one of the most economically important palm species in Bolivia, with its leaves harvested to thatch roofs and its timber used in construction. The larger the palms, the more sought after they are for timber, meaning Blue-throated Macaws find their nesting sites are vanishing.

And so, each year at the Laney Rickman Reserve, once the breeding season begins, the rangers saddle their horses every five days to check more than 140 nest boxes. If eggs are found, cones are placed around the bases of trees with occupied nest boxes to prevent predation from the ground. This keeps the nests safe from predators like big cats and snakes but, unbeknownst to the rangers, camera trap footage showed that inquisitive Capuchin Monkeys had learned to drop in from above and steal the eggs. The rangers quickly moved to include trimming back any branches close enough for the monkeys to swing from to their maintenance list.

The Macaw pairs stay with the nest throughout the breeding season, with one parent caring for the chicks inside the nest box while the other forages for food and keeps watch outside. While

Blue-throated Macaws are less territorial than other Macaws, the reserve staff have discovered that they will defend their nests aggressively. In 2025, 32 eggs were laid. Of these, 24 chicks hatched and 19 successfully fledged. Since the nest box programme began in 2005, a total of 164 Blue-throated Macaws have fledged in the wild. This means that today, almost one in four of the individuals alive was born in one of these nest boxes.

But this year was not without its own new challenges. Camera traps recorded some in-fighting between older and younger breeding pairs, which led to the younger pair struggling to access their nest to feed their chicks. However, the parents refused to abandon their nest, and, after careful consultation, the team decided the best way to help was to temporarily hand-feed the chicks when the parents couldn't get to them. This proved to be an excellent solution as, within days, both chicks had fledged successfully and joined their parents.

Nearby, in another nest, an inexperienced pair raised a healthy chick but failed to widen the nest entrance, a behaviour that normally allows chicks to leave safely. Luckily, Ranger César saw the problem early and climbed up to the nest to enlarge the opening himself. The following day, the chick flew for the first time. But still, not every story ended well. In one case, three chicks were lost to what was likely predation by an owl, a reminder that even protected nests cannot remove all natural risks. These moments show us why close monitoring remains essential, especially for species in such low numbers.

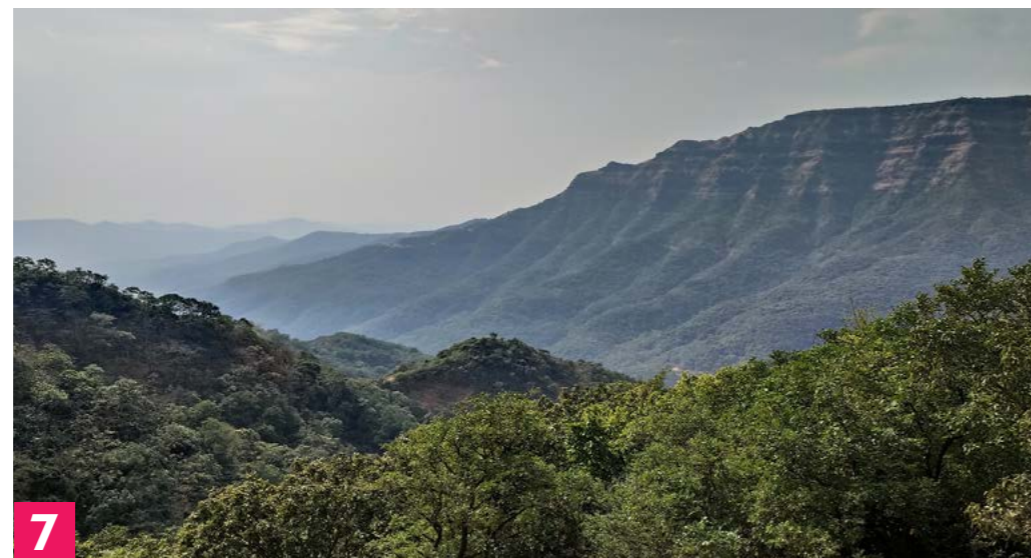
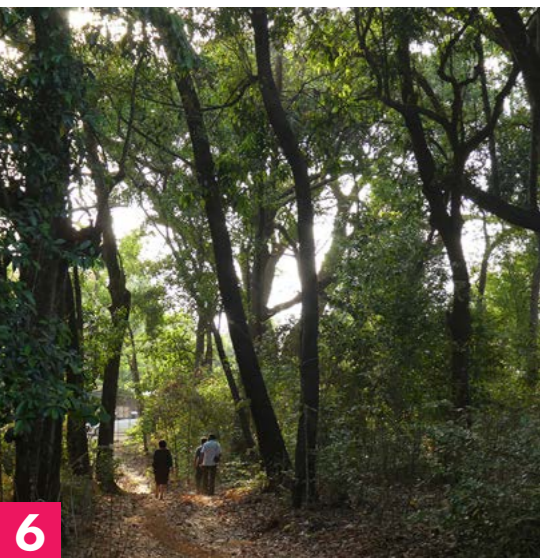
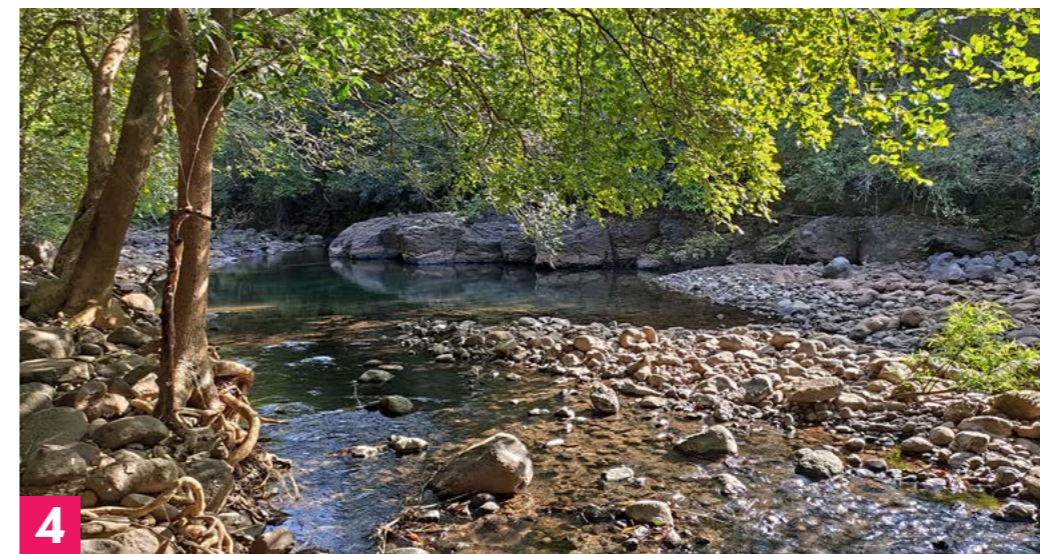
Over the past two decades, the impact of the programme has been profound and had more success than even the team at Asociación Armonía could have anticipated. Blue-throated Macaw are a sensitive species, very particular about their diet, habitat, and breeding and nesting sites; it took 16 years to reach the first 100 fledged macaws. Now, at this current pace, the next 100 are expected in just six years, and we look forward to the milestone of 200 fledged birds that is now anticipated by 2027.

Another Record Year for Bolivia's Blue-throated Macaws

Partner in the Spotlight: **AERF**

Along the western coastline of India, the forested slopes of the Western Ghats, an ancient mountain range, are one of the world's most extraordinary biodiversity hotspots. With exceptional levels of endemism, the forests are home to thousands of plant and animal species and help regulate the seasonal monsoon rainfall that supplies water to millions of people across the Indian subcontinent. Here, Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF) works with local communities to protect the Sacred Groves, forests that not only sustain wildlife, water sources, and rural livelihoods, but hold thousands of years of cultural sanctity to the people of the region.

1. Archana Godbole, Director of AERF, within a Sacred Grove site
2. Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) in the Sacred Groves
3. Seedling distribution
4. Stream within the Sacred Groves
5. Brown-woolly Fig (*Ficus drupacea*) in Kulye Sacred Groves
6. Old growth forest within a Sacred Groves site
7. View of Bamnoli Dang
8. AERF Nature Connect team at the processing factory
9. Bronzeback Tree Snake (*Dendrelaphis tristis*)
10. Local community



The tree that feeds a mountain

In the remote Caucasus mountains, Caucasian Juniper (*Juniperus polycarpos*) trees provide a winter food source for herbivores like the Bezoar Goat (*Capra aegagrus*). This in turn supporting the recovery of one of the world's rarest big cats.

The Caucasian Juniper

In the rugged Caucasus mountains, a small evergreen tree plays a huge role in holding an entire ecosystem together. Exceptionally hardy, the Caucasian Juniper survives where few other trees can – on dry, exposed slopes that receive little rainfall and spend much of the winter beneath snow.

With each tree growing slowly and forming vast juniper forests, their blue “berries” – which are in fact not true berries at all but female seed cones – provide a rare and vital winter food source. Together with its needle-like leaves and bark, the Caucasian Juniper offers a lifeline for many species.

One of these is the iconic and exceptionally agile Bezoar Goat.

The Bezoar Goat

With its dramatic and striking scimitar-shaped horns, the Bezoar Goat is one of the Caucasus region's most distinctive mountain animals. Travelling in small herds and feeding on shrubs and fruiting trees, this goat makes its home in an extraordinary landscape of steep rocky slopes at elevations of up to 4,000 metres.

With the ground liable to give way at any moment, they have evolved the remarkable ability to traverse almost vertical rocky terrain with astonishing ease. Highly sure-footed, they can also leap up to two metres in a single bound.

It is just as well they are so agile, because another species also roams these mountains and takes a keen interest in their presence.

The Caucasian Leopard

The Caucasian Leopard (*Panthera pardus ciscaucasica*) is one of the world's rarest big cats. In Armenia, just 10-15 are thought to remain, prowling quietly through remote ravines and fragments of intact forest. Classified as Endangered, few people have ever seen one, with most records coming from camera traps.

In 2013, one such camera trap showed a leopard inside our partner Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Asset's (FPWC's) Caucasus Wildlife Refuge, confirming the conservation importance of this extraordinary reserve.

An interlinked ecosystem

The protection of the Caucasian Juniper supports an entire ecosystem of herbivores and predators, of which the Bezoar Goat and Caucasian Leopard are just two.

That is why FPWC is restoring degraded areas of the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge through planting a wealth of native species. In 2025 alone, they restored 60 ha (148 acres) of land by planting 157,107 native trees. In addition to Caucasian Juniper, they planted fruit trees like Wild Apple (*Malus orientalis*) and Cherry Plum (*Prunus divaricata*) which, when fully grown, will provide an abundant food source for the region's extraordinary wildlife. By restoring the migratory routes of threatened species like the Bezoar Goat and Caucasian Leopard, FPWC is strengthening the entire high-mountain ecosystem, one sapling at a time.



Butterfly Wings and Many Other Tiny Things

Much of conservation understandably focuses on the large iconic species we all know so well, but in a healthy ecosystem, every species is important. Sometimes, it is the smallest species that might otherwise be overlooked, that makes all the difference. This is the case with the insects of the world. Often working in their thousands, and even millions, they are nature's engineers: they pollinate, improve soil quality, control pests, recycle dead material, and keep their habitats healthy at a fundamental level. One insect you may recognise is the Migratory Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus plexippus*), but how well do you know it?

The Migratory Monarch Butterfly is a large brightly coloured butterfly known for its vivid orange wings, veined with black and edged with white spots.

Migratory Monarchs are native to North America and southern Canada but migrate to the warmer climate of Mexico and coastal California to see out the winter cold.

No one butterfly makes the entire round trip. The summer generation can live up to eight months and travels south from Canada to the over-wintering site in Mexico. But the returning winter populations live just two to six weeks and can take up to four or five generations to fly back to the north.

Migratory Monarchs navigate by their own sun compass. Using their antennae to guide them, they combine the position of the sun with their internal circadian clock, allowing them to stay on course as the sun moves across the sky.

Migratory Monarch caterpillars feed on the toxic milkweed plant (*Asclepias*). They are safe from its toxins but eating it makes both the caterpillars and the adult butterflies toxic to many predators.

The toxins, however, do not keep them safe from all predators. The Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) has learned to selectively eat less poisonous body parts.

When the colonies gather to spend the winter in Mexico, Migratory Monarchs cluster so tightly on Oyamel Fir trees (*Abies religiosa*) that branches can bend or break under their combined weight.

The Migratory Monarch chrysalis is a beautiful jade green with gold metallic spots that reflect sunlight.

With favourable winds, migrating Monarchs can cover 80–130 km per day, an extraordinary feat for an insect that weighs less than a gram.

There are around 300 million Monarch Butterflies in the world, but they exist in a delicate balance and are listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN red list. But even with these global numbers, as habitats change and weather worsens, their range becomes more limited. Some migratory populations are now even considered Critically Endangered in parts of Mexico where they once flourished. One of the most effective methods for their conservation is protecting their overwintering spots such as those in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve in the Querétaro State of Mexico managed by our partner Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (GESG).

A Ghost Returns

A camera trap blinks in the darkness of an Assamese forest. For a fraction of a second, the flash catches something extraordinary and confirms what conservationists had dared to hope.



The photograph is grainy, amber-lit, taken in the dead of night by a motion-sensor camera secured to a tree. It shows a Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*) moving through the undergrowth of the Dibru Saikhowa National Park in Assam. So named for its subpopulation native to the Indian subcontinent, it is unhurried, enormous, and entirely indifferent to the lens. The animal does not know it has just made history. But the conservationists who retrieved that image from WTI's camera trap network certainly do.

The sighting, captured in coordination with the Tinsukia Wildlife Division and led by WLT partner WTI's Deepankar Barman alongside Forest Department officers Debasish Dutta, Bibison Tokbi, and Diganta Gogoi, is far more than a striking photograph. It is proof that the Dibru–Saikhowa National Park, and in turn the Dering–Dibru Saikhowa Corridor that connects it to the wider landscape are achieving its goal of being a refuge and a pathway for some of the most iconic and threatened wildlife on Earth.

The Dibru–Saikhowa National Park sits in the far northeast of Assam, a semi-evergreen and grassland forest within the boundaries of the Brahmaputra and Lohit rivers. The Dering–Dibru Saikhowa Corridor links the park to the broader landscape of the Dehing Patkai forests. The land between them is a mosaic of tea gardens, villages, agricultural land, and remnant forest, exactly the kind of contested, complicated terrain that wildlife corridors must navigate in modern India. It is recognised as a key indicator species, meaning that the presence of a Royal Bengal Tiger in this landscape is a signal of the wider ecological health of an entire system. The same camera trap survey captured Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Hog Deer (*Axis porcinus*), Sambar (*Rusa unicorn*), and Porcupine (*Hystrix indica*), an incredible myriad of species that shows just how valuable this landscape is to nature.

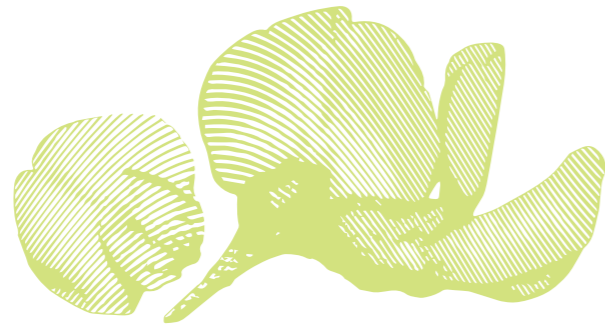
This matters because the Royal Bengal Tiger is, above all, a creature of space. A single male can range across 60 to 100 km² and the females require large, stable territories to raise cubs through the two years it takes them to become independent and leave their mothers.

A reserve alone, disconnected from the rest of the landscape, is not enough, no matter how well protected. Young tigers, denied the ability to disperse into new territory, can face starvation from prey scarcity and conflict with rival older tigers, or may be forced into more populated areas where they may encounter human-wildlife conflict. The wildlife corridors that connect protected areas are an essential lifeline for the species.

The Royal Bengal Tiger is the second largest wild cat in the world, second only to the Siberian Tiger subspecies to the North. An adult male can weigh an astonishing 220 kg and stretch over three metres from nose to tail. Instantly identifiable by their stripes, no two tigers share the same pattern, and their individual stripe patterns are as unique as fingerprints. What is truly incredible is that these very stripes help the tigers blend into tall grass and dapples forest light, making them disappear into the landscape as they stalk their prey. When hunting, these carnivores often eat 40 kg of meat in a single sitting after a successful kill, then go without food for days afterwards. It may also surprise some that they are excellent swimmers and will seek out water to cool off when the Indian sun is at its height. It has been reported by many that a tiger's roar can carry more than three km through dense forest, a warning to anyone to stay alert.

At the start of the twentieth century, it is thought that there were as many as 100,000 tigers ranging freely across Asia. However, by the 1970s, that number had collapsed to fewer than 2,000 due to hunting for sport and traditional medicine and being displaced by agriculture and development. The Assam sighting is a reminder of the tangible, meaningful change that can happen with effective and community-led conservation. But the work is not complete yet, corridors like the Dering–Dibru Saikhowa route pass through land that is vulnerable to degradation, and every season brings new pressures. What may seem like a small change to the landscape from livestock grazing or settlements can result in fewer crossing points and cut the delicate thread that is a safe, recognised route for wildlife. This is why your support of WTI and all their work has been so essential, with every glimpse of wildlife caught on camera reminding us of what is at stake.

Somewhere in the forests of upper Assam, a tiger is moving through the dark. It does not know about the people who fought to keep its path open. But it is walking the path they helped create.



The Vibrant World of the Quartz Renosterpea

There is a small, yellow-flowered shrub growing in South Africa's Overberg region that is found nowhere else on Earth. Not in any other country, not in any other province, not in any other reserve, its entire world is one hillside. This hillside is found on the Haarwegskloof Reserve, an extraordinary area managed by our partner Overberg Renosterveld Trust (ORT). The reserve forms the largest existing connected stretch of the Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld ecosystem, a habitat that has already declined by more than 95%. It is here, on the quartz-strewn outcrops, that the Quartz Renosterpea (*Polhillia curtisiae*) is found.

The plant is a small shrub of the pea family, a cousin to familiar plants like rooibos, wisteria, and garden sweet pea. It grows low and close to the ground with silvery-haired leaves and vibrant yellow flowers. For most of the year, the arid plains of the Overberg are somewhat grey and muted. In fact, Renosterveld, the unique vegetation type that defines the ecosystem, translates to 'rhinoceros field' in Afrikaans for its resemblance to Rhinoceros hide. But, when the winter rains do their work and the temperatures rise, the plains erupt in a blanket of colour, and the Quartz Renosterpea joins the tapestry.

The Quartz Renosterpea was formally recorded to science in 2013 and was named in honour of

Dr Odette Curtis-Scott, founder of ORT. It was one of five new species described for the first time in a single survey of a patch of Renosterveld. That same patch was found to be home to more than 40 species. This little shrub had been growing on its hillside, unrecorded by science, for millennia. The Quartz Renosterpea is Endangered and belongs to one of the most endangered plant groups in the entire country. Half of its species are found in the Overberg region's Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld, and all of them are threatened with extinction. The Overberg's plains were once an extraordinary lowland wilderness, grazed by Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*), the now extinct Quagga (*Equus quagga quagga*), and Bontebok (*Damaliscus pygargus*), but are today among the most intensively farmed landscapes in South Africa. The fertile clay soils that make Renosterveld botanically exceptional are the same soils that made them agriculturally irresistible.

This is why the home of the Quartz Renosterpea, the Haarwegskloof Reserve and the cluster of properties that connect to it, most recently the Goereesoe farm, are so important. They are the last refuges for plants that have nowhere else to go. Some, like the Quartz Renosterpea, exist only here and so many others may still await discovery. So far, ORT researchers have found more than 10 new species in fragments of veld that farmers had walked past for generations. With your support, species like the Quartz Renosterpea will continue to bloom.



Dr Odette Curtis-Scott, ORT Founder

Journey Through the Mata Atlântica

In Brazil's Atlantic Forest, the Mata Atlântica, life persists in fragments after centuries of extraction.

Facing the Serra do Mar mountain range, the forest is a lasting legacy to the people of the state of Rio de Janeiro. The Atlantic Forest is remarkable due to its magnificent quantity of biodiversity. Stretching from coastal dunes and mangroves up into cloud-draped mountains, this ancient forest has been evolving for more than 180 million years, producing an extraordinary concentration of life. In the mountains of Rio de Janeiro state, our partner REGUA has spent the last 25 years turning what began as a private estate into a thriving reserve and a living laboratory for restoration, research, and education. Today, REGUA helps protect a connected mosaic of forest across a 40,000-ha (98,800-acre) watershed, including a core reserve of around 15,000 ha (37,000 acres). The rivers that rise here supply clean drinking water to more than two million people downstream. Forested slopes filter rainfall into the soil, recharge aquifers, and reduce the risk of destructive floods that grow more severe each year with global climate change.

Once stretching unbroken along the Atlantic coast, the forest now survives as a mosaic, but it is slowly being knitted back together.

"The forest and nature will always survive, and if I was a forest I would look at humanity and say, be careful, you need me. It's not the other way around. Nature will continue for millions of years. This world will continue for millions of years. We tend to think of the precariousness of life, yes, but it will slowly, through the waves of microorganisms, from fungi, to plants, and harder things, start colonizing and recolonizing. I don't think we can extinguish life on this beautiful planet that we live in. But I think we need nature more and more every day. And I think nature will always tell us, be careful, you need me more than you think"

Nicholas Locke, REGUA President

In the Mata Atlântica, survival depends on the connections between forest fragments, species, and people

The biodiversity of the reserve is truly remarkable, with 490 bird species; 4% of the world's total bird population resides here. Along with 73 species of amphibians, 430 species of butterfly, 240 species of dragonfly, and 61 mammal species, the reserve is a wellspring of wildlife. Restoration here means hundreds of native tree species are replanted to mirror the original forest, allowing insects, birds, and mammals to return in waves, rebuilding the system from the soil up.

This is a biome that has been reduced to a fraction of its original extent but still supports extraordinary levels of endemism under constant pressure from cities, farms, and infrastructure.

Just as important is REGUA's work with people. Former hunters now serve as rangers and guides, students and researchers arrive from around the world, and local children step into the forest to experience it first-hand. REGUA shows that conservation works best when it invites people in, builds understanding, and most importantly gives nature the space and time to recover. With the help of our Spring Appeal: Connecting Brazil's Atlantic Rainforest, REGUA can purchase the 180-ha (444-acre) Hermes plot and bring this vulnerable habitat under the protection of the REGUA reserve.



"I visited the Hermes plot and it is where the stakes of this work come sharply into view. The property is owned by one family who have cared for it for half a century. The land straddles a narrow valley and is wrapped on both sides by other plots owned by REGUA. A small stream begins higher up and runs through the Hermes plot into the basin of the Guapiaçu watershed. To stand there and hear that water is to understand the heart of this project. Protect the valley and you protect the flow. Safeguard the forest and you safeguard the source. The conservation benefits are as clear as the water running through the centre of it. Leave it unprotected and it will almost certainly be developed and lost. But protect it and it becomes a permanent piece of living infrastructure for the watershed and a safe passage for wildlife that needs connected forest to survive".

Dan Bradbury, WLT Director of Brand and Communications



Four Hours on Foot: Conservation in Argentina's High Andes

Natura Argentina meet up with Nicolasa Bazan, a remarkable woman who, even at 72 years old, lives alone in a remote outpost high in the Argentinian Andes.

High in the rugged mountains of the Sierra de Ambato, conservation is shaped as much by people as by landscapes. Over the past two years, Natura Argentina has been working to establish the region's first protected areas: a connected network of Municipal Reserves. Their teams have met with everyone from community leaders and Indigenous peoples to local farmers and mayors, taking the time to understand the people who call these mountains home.

One of these voices belongs to Nicolasa Bazan.

Nicolasa first came to the Sierra de Ambato as a child, when her father moved the family into the mountains. She left school early to help in the countryside, learning how to herd animals, gather firewood, and grow vegetables. Together, the family planted a wide variety of fruit trees – walnuts, peaches and figs – and somehow managed to coax bountiful harvests from the thin, stony soils.

Each autumn, the temperatures fell and snow dusted the mountain's highest peaks, turning the air sharp and still. Nicolasa and her family would then draw on a rich store of preserved fruit: shelves of dried almonds and figs, quince and apple jams. They also cooked *arope* for anyone who got a cold: a thick medicinal syrup made from the fruits of the Prickly Pear (*Opuntia ficus-indica*).

Now at 72, Nicolasa is the only one still here. Her parents have long since passed on and her brothers and sisters eventually moved away. But despite limited mobility and failing eyesight, she is never tempted to leave. She continues many of her old routines, cooking her own meals, washing her clothes, and tending the remaining fruit trees. When she needs a doctor, her brother rides up from the nearest village and takes her there on horseback, a 7 km journey down a rough, winding mountain track. But otherwise, Nicolasa stays at her rural outpost, deeply attached to its vast skies, silence, and sense of space.

And although she lives alone, she enjoys receiving visitors from nearby villages and towns. They hike

to see her, bringing small gifts and an interest to learn more about her way of life.

It is precisely this kind of understanding that Natura Argentina has also sought to build. By speaking directly with residents like Nicolasa, they have been able to collectively shape conservation plans that reflect and respond to local needs and histories.

Thanks to this commitment, Nicolasa's beloved rural home is now protected for generations to come, as part of the Mogote de la Cruz Reserve. This is one piece in a wider mosaic of Municipal Reserves that Natura Argentina has helped establish across the Sierra de Ambato.

For Natura Argentina, Nicolasa's story is a reminder that effective conservation depends not only on science, but also on the voices of those who live closest to the land.

And if you ever happen to visit, you will find Nicolasa there – warm and welcoming, offering oranges, mandarins, and walnuts, and a lifetime of stories.

With grateful thanks to Natura Argentina for providing their field notes and to Nicolasa Bazan's generous permission to tell her story.



Landscape of Sierra de Ambato

“The forests of Belize are a key part of WLT’s history and vital for biodiversity conservation in Central America, and WLT once again stepped up to collaborate with other international funders and two of our conservation partners – Programme for Belize and Belize Maya Forest Trust – to secure the permanent protection of these areas”.

Richard Cuthbert, WLT Director of Conservation

The Forest Will Continue

World Land Trust returns to Belize

In 1989, a huge tract of rainforest was put up for sale in Belize, a magnificent swathe of green across a landscape of long-abandoned Maya settlements and temples.

This forest was a testament to what nature can do when it is given free rein to flourish: a living, breathing, photosynthesising wilderness. But it was about to be sold, and almost certainly felled, until passionate conservationists came up with a way to save it.

102,441 ha (253,138 acres) were under threat at a total cost of around £6.3 million, but at a unit cost of just £25 an acre. Most people cannot afford to buy a rainforest. But a lot of people could afford £25. And so, Programme for Belize was born, and from it, WLT. Among the people reading this article there are some who remember that moment, who sent in their cheque and got their certificate, together helping to create the Rio Bravo Conservation Management Area.

When it was first created, the boundaries of this new reserve existed on maps, but on the ground the forest extended all around it. Now, farms

push up against it on every side, and those paper boundaries have come into physical existence in an alarming way.

But WLT has never stopped working in Belize. In 2020, we came together with other conservation organisations to protect the Belize Maya Forest, adjoining Rio Bravo. Alas, the cost was no longer £25 an acre, and it took many determined funders working together to secure this key habitat corridor covering 95,612 ha (236,263 acres). This new protected area became a central part of a vast forest network called the Selva Maya – 15 million ha (38 million acres) of parks and protected areas across Central America.

In Belize, one key gap remained in the heart of the Belize Maya Forest and Rio Bravo protected areas: a 1,950-ha (4,818-acre) property known as Sierra de Agua Central and two parcels of 486 ha (1,200 acres) together known as Rough Mile Work, which lie to the southeast of Rio Bravo. Situated between the two reserves, it was vulnerable to agricultural clearance and creation of a road to bring destruction and threats of wildfire and hunting into the heart of the forest. And in 2024 it came up for sale. We had to help protect these areas and complete our original vision, with WLT once again partnering with other funders to secure the Sierra De Agua Central and Rough Mile Work parcels.

Satisfyingly, WLT’s contribution came from some of the people who first supported us in 1989. This was the last chance for these forests, and we had the resources to take that chance because of supporters who left us a gift in their will. Not everyone who sent in £25 back in 1989 is here to support our work today, but they were still able to finish what they’d started, healing the hole at the heart of Rio Bravo.

We’d like to thank them for their belief in WLT. Because of them, the forest will continue. It will last longer than any of us.



Original Programme for Belize Certificate. Credit: Hilary Hunt.



Supporter Celebration: David Scott and Rachel Rowlands

Our long-term donors make an extraordinary difference to our work at WLT. Along with fundraisers, they are champions of the work our partners do, often giving their immense support to projects with elements close to their hearts. Whether it is a favourite species, a treasured memory of a place they have visited and determined to help protect, or being moved by one of our public appeals, the significant support of donors over many years provides a major driving force for our work.

Two such supporters are David Scott and Rachel Rowlands, whose commitment to fundraising for the projects WLT supports has spanned over the past two decades. In this time, it has taken many forms – from tackling the 3 Peaks Challenge and running the world’s largest half-marathon dressed as Elvis, to donating proceeds from their business, Kew Brewery. Their creativity, dedication and enthusiasm have played a huge role in helping protect some of the most threatened habitats and wildlife in the world. WLT spoke with them about their journey:

Can you introduce yourselves and describe your support for WLT?

“We’re Dave and Rachel, long-time and passionate supporters of the excellent WLT. I think we first started supporting WLT back in 2004 and have done so in the form of both conventional charity giving, and some more wild and whacky fundraising attempts in the past.”

What sparked your passion for environmental conservation?

“It’s difficult to pinpoint one particular moment. We both always cared about wildlife and nature and enjoyed being outdoors. I’d say that it was through the steady build-up of awareness that all was not well with the planet as this became ever more obvious in the late 1990s. And the desire to be involved in something worthwhile, something that really mattered.”

Why were you drawn to WLT in particular, and what has made you stay with us over the years?

“Two things particularly attracted us to WLT. One was the ‘gift acre’ scheme, which seemed a brilliant way to give a meaningful present to someone. The other was the role and

endorsement of Sir David Attenborough, someone we both hugely admire. His statement that, “*The money that is given to the World Land Trust, in my estimation, has more effect on the wild world than almost anything I can think of*”, really resonated and feels just as true today as it ever has.

We both also like the fact that WLT seems very focused, very ‘no nonsense’ in its approach, and simply gets on with things. There doesn’t seem to be the frippery and waste that one feels could be the case with some of the better-known environmental charities. It helped too that John and Viv Burton were such passionate campaigners and vibrant characters.”

Conservation can sometimes feel overwhelming – what gives you hope for the future?

“Yes, it can be difficult to remain positive when it comes to conservation. We both have our doubts about the willingness of humanity to take seriously the environment that we all rely on for our clean air, water, and food. And I think we do both fear that despite the efforts of good people, things are still unfortunately going backwards in a lot of ways. But the work of WLT especially, and of other environmental charities and campaigners, gives me hope. And the obvious results and benefits from that work – seeing woodlands and habitats regenerate, and steadily filling with wildlife, including endangered species – are hugely rewarding.”

“Every WLT project has real, tangible and beneficial outcomes. I can think of no better charity to support.”

David Scott and Rachel Rowlands



WLT at IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025



Late last year, WLT's Conservation Team joined thousands of conservationists, researchers, Indigenous leaders, and policy experts for the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi. The 2025 Congress is the largest global gathering for nature and together, attendees set out a collective vision for the next 20 years of conservation.

Over 20 of WLT's conservation partners were also present, a rare opportunity for face-to-face connection with our incredible network. WLT's Senior Conservation Programmes Manager Charlotte Beckham and Carbon Programme Manager Mary McEvoy told us about the experience.

What were the main themes running through this year's Congress?

Mary: This Congress had a real emphasis on Indigenous Peoples and local communities – not just as participants but as leaders in conservation. The sessions gave space for them to express their perspectives in their own ways.

One that stood out began with a Māori woman performing songs and animal sounds representing the forests of New Zealand. It was incredibly powerful and a reminder of how conservation and culture are intertwined.

There was also a strong effort to make sure young people are meaningfully included, again not as a token presence but with genuine space to share their perspectives.

Charlotte: I completely agree. That theme of meaningful inclusion ran throughout.

Another key theme was ensuring protected areas are truly effective, not just existing on paper. There was a lot of discussion about improving management and governance to make sure these areas deliver real conservation outcomes.

As part of this, we co-hosted a session on the role of privately protected areas in global conservation. Many privately protected areas are delivering vital conservation outcomes but are not generally recorded at the international level, for example in the 30 x 30 target: an initiative to designate 30% of Earth's land and ocean area as protected areas by 2030. This was a fantastic opportunity to highlight the significant contribution of private protection towards wider conservation aims.

From representing WLT in the exhibition hall, what kind of conversations stood out?

Mary: I think we were both really impressed by the quality of the projects and prospective partners who came to talk to us. People are doing such amazing work and often in very difficult circumstances. The inspiration in the room was palpable.

Charlotte: And every conversation felt worthwhile. Each was with someone interesting, with a clear overlap or opportunity to collaborate. There was this real attitude of "Let's do something practical and positive."

Previous conferences have sometimes felt slightly split between hands-on conservation and the more government-focused aspects, but this one felt more integrated and holistic.

How were the conversations with WLT's existing partners?

Charlotte: For me, it was a chance to catch up with specific partners about ongoing projects and challenges – conversations that can be difficult to have online. We also had the opportunity to meet co-funders and collaborating partners like Rainforest Trust, American Bird Conservancy, and IUCN Netherlands. Having the time and space to discuss ideas and how best we can utilise our combined resources to have a greater impact on conservation is invaluable.

Mary: I had a lot of discussions focused on carbon methodologies and project feasibility. One partner we're working with is in the process of developing a carbon project, and it was really helpful to discuss that face to face. That conversation may well not have happened online, so it is really invaluable to be together in person.

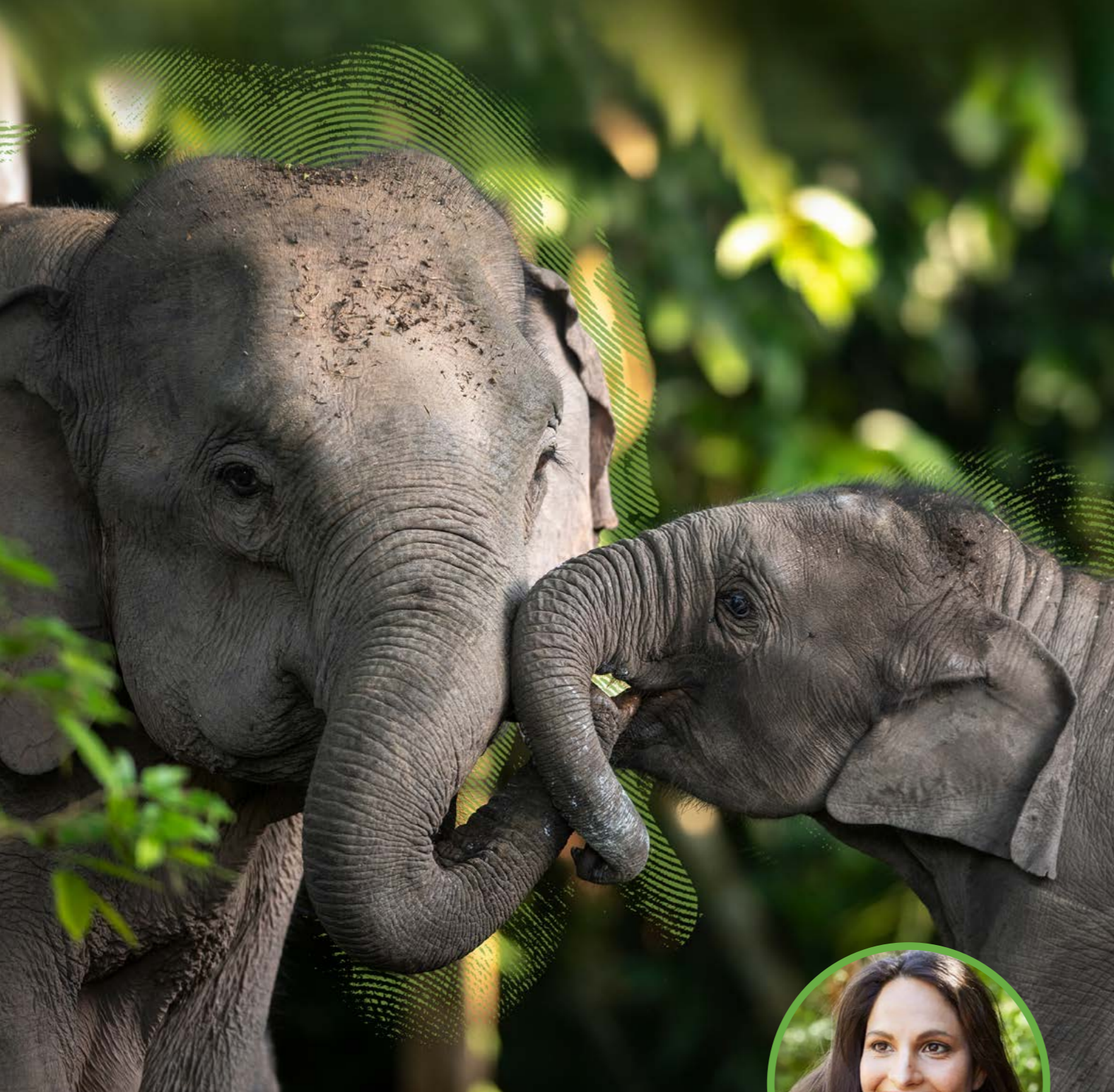
It's about connection. We left feeling part of a much larger movement – and proud that WLT and our partners are helping lead the way.

I also focused on finance-related sessions, exploring how conservationists can better connect with the financial world. It's a very different language and pace, but crucial if we're to access funding for biodiversity and climate goals.

During the event, WLT's partners were elected to IUCN Council and Commission positions. Can you tell us more about this?

Charlotte: Yes, so this was an excellent example of the influential role of WLT's partners in international conservation. Vivek Menon from our partner WTI was voted as the head of the Species Survival Commission, succeeding Dr. Jon Paul Rodríguez from our partner Asociación Civil Provita (Provita), who has led in this role for the past nine years.

In addition, Ruben Khachatryan from FPWC was elected as one of three Regional Councillors for the East Europe, North, and Central Asia region. Madhu Rao, a member of WLT's Conservation Advisory Panel, also continues in her role as Chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA).



In Conversation with
**WLT's Conservation
 Advisory Panel Member
 Dr Nisha Owen**

Long before any project reaches our supporters, months of work and collaboration goes on behind the scenes to ensure that our supporters' funds have the greatest and most lasting impact for nature and local partners alike. To make this happen, WLT is supported by some of the most esteemed minds in conservation – the Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP). Drawing on a broad range of scientific and practical knowledge, the panel lends their expertise to provide independent advice on proposed projects.

WLT spoke with Dr Nisha Owen, Executive Director of Global Greengrants Fund UK and a WLT CAP member. A conservation scientist by training, she chairs the IUCN SSC Phylogenetic Diversity Task Force, working to ensure that evolutionary history is better reflected in conservation decision-making. Previously Director of Conservation at On the EDGE Conservation, she helped develop the Zoological Society of London's (ZSL's) EDGE of Existence programme. Through this, she helped create conservation and storytelling initiatives with organisations including United for Wildlife and the National Geographic Society. Her incredible career bridges science, philanthropy, and storytelling, with a commitment to supporting locally led conservation and protecting species and ecosystems that are truly irreplaceable.

As a member of WLT's CAP, you are often weighing urgent action against long-term ecological value. What kinds of decisions are hardest to make when land protection is urgent, but resources are limited?

The decisions are less about choosing the 'best' option for allocating resources and more about using whatever resources are available in the smartest way, it's not 'either/or'. Conservation needs aren't interchangeable: different places, partners, and threats require different support. The panel's job is to understand what each partner actually needs to succeed, sometimes that's funding for land purchase, sometimes it's capacity, governance, or long-term management, and then back those needs in a way that makes the best impact.

Your work emphasises evolutionary distinctiveness. If we lose a species that is evolutionarily unique, what are we really losing in ecological, cultural, or even ethical terms that isn't captured by extinction statistics alone?

If a species is evolutionarily distinct, it means it is unique in the tree of life. A species with very few close relatives represents a deep, unique branch of evolutionary history. If it disappears, you don't just lose one species, you lose an irreplaceable lineage that took millions of years to form. A good example

of this is elephants, there are only three species left: African Bush Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), African Forest Elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), and Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) and there is nothing "elephant-like" in the world. If we lose them, we lose a whole branch of animal evolution that can never be recovered. Beyond biology, some species have shaped human stories, livelihoods, and relationships with places for generations, especially within Indigenous cultures, so the loss is ecological and cultural at once.

You've worked closely with grassroots and community-led initiatives. What do international conservation organisations most often misunderstand about local leadership even when intentions are good?

Conservation has to be rooted in justice. Local and Indigenous communities in many high-biodiversity places often have long-standing stewardship embedded in culture, knowledge, and daily practice. The common failure can be treating that expertise as consultation rather than leadership. Conservation must focus on international organisations supporting what communities are already doing and backing them with funding, protection, and autonomy. This is already being done in many instances, and while it still has a long way to go, there is a broader shift in conservation toward equity and justice in who sets priorities.

If you could redesign one aspect of conservation funding, what would you change first?

Building on that point, the clearest implied reform is shifting money and decision-making power closer to the ground with flexible funding that partners can use for the realities of running conservation such as staff, governance, community engagement, monitoring, legal costs, etc. Strong local institutions and long-term capacity are conservation outcomes in their own right because without them, even successful interventions can unravel.

If you could ensure that one idea or principle meaningfully shaped conservation practice in 20 years' time, what would you want it to be?

As we've already spoken about, leadership should sit with the people who live in, know, and depend on the places conservation is trying to protect. International NGOs, funders, and technical experts should be accountable supporters rather than default decision-makers. If that principle were more embedded, it would reshape planning, management, and measures of success toward long-term stewardship rather than short-term interventions.



In Conversation with Lucy Shepherd

We spoke to one of our newest Ambassadors who readers may recognise from her work with the likes of Channel 4 and the BBC: explorer Lucy Shepherd. From Arctic expeditions to walking across the Serengeti, her journeys are driven by the deep urgency to protect the world's most fragile places. Here, Lucy tells us about the childhood spark that set her on this path and the extraordinary journey she has had so far.

You've spoken before about how your relationship with the natural world began very early. What do you remember most vividly from childhood?

I think, like a lot of kids, I spent most of my time just playing outside. I grew up in rural Suffolk and I was an only child, so a lot of that time was spent in my imagination, climbing trees, roaming fields. That was my escapism. I loved adventure stories, but I never thought of exploration as something you could actually do as a career.

As I got older, into my teenage years, I became aware that sense of awe and curiosity was starting to fade. I noticed it happening and I really wanted to hold onto it. That urge to leave home and explore became very strong. When I was 15, I went to Scotland on a two-week adventure school programme, and that was the moment I realised: this is my thing. It was also the first time I heard the word "expedition" used seriously, and I understood that these kinds of journeys were still possible.

And that led quite quickly into your first major expedition?

Yes. Not long after, I saw an advert for an Arctic expedition. It was ten weeks long and only ten people were selected. I worked incredibly hard to get on it and was lucky enough to be chosen straight after school.

That expedition changed everything. It wasn't just the adventure that drew me in, but the feeling of being somewhere so delicate and fragile, yet also quite frightening. I came back feeling almost confused by how urgent everything felt to me, from climate change to nature loss, and how little that urgency seemed to register elsewhere. People said, "What an amazing once-in-a-lifetime experience," but I couldn't stop thinking: how do I keep going? How do I see more of these places that feel like they're in trouble?

At what point did that turn into something you realised you wanted to do full-time?

Very gradually. For a long time, I didn't say it out loud because it sounds unrealistic. I was just trying to find ways to keep going, to learn, to meet other explorers, to network. It was never about money.

Around 2015, I finally admitted to myself that this was what I needed to do. But it took years after that before I earned anything, and even longer before I could go full-time. It's been a slow process of doors closing, trying again, working things out. But even if it all stopped tomorrow, I'd still do this. I'm not a scientist or an academic, but I love storytelling. I always had a camera in my hand. Adventure can draw people in, but storytelling is how you change perspectives.

When you're planning an expedition now, how does that process begin?

It usually starts with a gut feeling. Sometimes it's just a place name, sometimes a landscape. If that early research phase excites me, if it feels iconic or almost mythical in a way, then I start digging deeper.

For television, I'm involved in everything: developing the idea, organising the expedition, putting the team together, filming, writing. It's very small teams and a lot of trust from the people I work with. You never really know what's going to happen out there, and that's what I love. Adventure storytelling has become very glossy and over-scripted. I think we've lost some authenticity, and I'm trying to bring that back.

Being physically present in these environments, has that changed how you feel about conservation?

Absolutely. You can't unsee things once you've been there. Whether it's illegal gold mining polluting rivers in the Amazon, or returning to the Arctic year after year and watching the landscape change, it's impossible not to feel it deeply.

I often feel like I'm grieving what's already gone. What frustrates me most is how often we frame environmental collapse as something for our children or grandchildren. That disconnects us. This is happening now. If you speak to people living in the jungle, or communities in northern Norway, they'll tell you, often with tears in their eyes, how their livelihoods are already changing. There's a ticking clock. We know there are tipping points, and the priority has to be stopping things from getting worse. But I don't believe doom-laden storytelling works either. That frustration I feel has to be turned into fuel.

You've had some extraordinary encounters with wildlife. Is there one that stands out?

There are so many, but one that's very vivid because it's recent was during my last expedition for Channel 4, walking across Tanzania. When we reached the Serengeti, I assumed the wildlife would keep its distance. That's not how it works. We were travelling through extremely remote areas, far from tourist routes, and there are a lot of lions there.

One night, a male lion came right up to my tent and lay down between mine and my teammate's. He rolled over, completely at ease, while a whole pride was nearby. We'd been taught never to move or make a sound. I lay there convinced no one would ever believe this if I survived it. Eventually they moved off, and only then did we breathe. Even the guides I was with had never experienced anything that close. It was terrifying. But it also showed how alive that landscape still is when it's protected.

Read, Listen, Learn

Books

- Into the Wild, Lucy Shepherd
- Underland, Robert Macfarlane
- The Living Mountain, Nan Shepherd

Podcasts

- Future Ecologies
- Lore of the Land, Aboriginal Carbon Foundation
- Emergence Magazine Podcast

Documentaries

- Breaking Boundaries, The Science of Our Planet
- Into the Ice
- Honeyland

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