



CONSERVATION OPTIMISM

ANNUAL REPORT
2020



CLICK ON THE PICTURES TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR TEAM MEMBERS

THEORY OF CHANGE



OUR VISION

We believe a planet on which people and nature both flourish is possible.

As we hear of forests burning and species going extinct, it can be hard to remain hopeful. However, amongst the stories of loss, there are also many inspiring stories of hope that are awaiting to be shared, learned from and replicated. Conservation Optimism is built on the belief that empowering everyone to make a difference for nature while also learning from the successes and failures within the conservation sector are key to securing our planet's future.

The [Conservation Optimism](#) movement began in 2017 with the first Conservation Optimism Summit. As the community we started online in the lead up to the summit rapidly grew, it quickly became apparent that our work would not be done after the three-day event. Rather, with our help, the conversations and collaborations that started there continued to grow and blossom across continents, disciplines, and sectors.

With over 12,000 followers on Twitter, our channel is a way for people to easily find stories of conservation optimism. Every single day people are using our hashtag to share successes from the conservation sector or to reach out for support when facing challenges. We also amplify under-represented voices by allowing people to write blogs on our website and then sharing it with our wider community on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Supported by the University of Oxford and Synchronicity Earth, our movement aims to achieve improved trends for species and ecosystems worldwide. One aspect of achieving this mission involves ensuring that the stories that generate optimism get amplified and heard, and that even when headlines are unavoidably grim they are not told without an action step. This way, people from every walk of life are empowered to act for nature instead of being left feeling depressed and powerless.

However, Conservation Optimism is more than our online hub. It's a spirit and an ethos that many organisations are embracing as we all move forward to build a more effective, more inclusive, and more active future for conservation. To this end, we are working to build robust reciprocal relationships with those institutions, collectively called the Conservation Network of Optimists Worldwide or ConservationNOW, that uphold our vision. Our theory of change highlights the different activities and outputs that are essential to achieving our vision.

To achieve our vision, we are fostering an online community of conservation optimists from around the globe.

CLICK ON THE PICTURES TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR TEAM MEMBERS



CELEBRATING DIVERSE CHANGEMAKERS

IMPACT

At Conservation Optimism, we believe that it's important to celebrate those who are making a difference for conservation, and help tell the stories of the individuals who are out there working tirelessly to protect plants, animals, and ecosystems around the world.

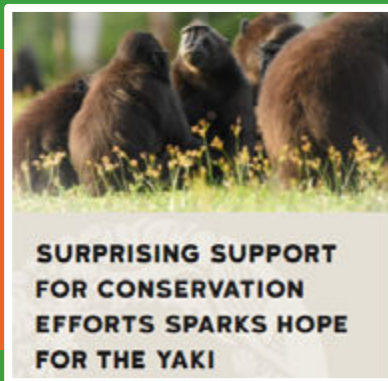
BLOGS

Blogs help us amplify our community's voice and promote their stories within the wider Conservation Optimism community. Anyone can write a blog and our contributors are welcome to submit a blog in any language. With the revamp of our website, our readers are now able to sort our blogs by world regions, species, focus or biomes, making it easier to find the perfect content for them. Our blog coordinators are always happy to chat with our members and prospective writers about potential blogs and to accompany them through the process. This year we focused on the following categories of blogs: Reasons for Optimism, Humans of Conservation, Creative Conservation, Conservation & Wellbeing, Plant Optimism and Regional Hubs. We also recently expanded the team and welcomed three new blog coordinators and a new Indian Hub coordinator.

GOOD NATURED PODCAST SERIES

We launched our podcast, "Good Natured", in May 2020 with an interview with Caleb Ofori-Boateng, an amphibian conservationist from Ghana. For each new episode, we invite our listeners to join us for uplifting chats that shine a light on conservation challenges but focus on those who are actively striving to make a positive impact.

Each episode so far featured an interview with an inspiring individual who is making important strides for conservation, from scientists to artists, activists, and beyond. Each conservationist spoke about their struggles, their successes and their hopes for the future of nature. The podcast, now available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts, already has over 220 subscribers who are regularly tuning in. Despite having to move away from the studio due to the pandemic, the team quickly adapted to move the recording process to their respective homes and have produced 11 episodes this year.



Having to move our activities to the virtual world came with some challenges but also allowed us to reach new audiences. Our film festival, for example, was viewed by more than 600 people which is much higher than what we could have accommodated if the event had happened in person. The podcast series also allowed us to highlight a range of conservationists in a completely new format to thousands of listeners.

"In the mentoring session Lucie Muir [2019 Mentor] gave me advice on my films, helped me get work experience on natural history programmes and helped me to make contacts. She is a wonderful person and gave me a great boost in the industry. And to this day, she is still looking out for me. I really could not imagine a better mentor!"

- Yaz Ellis
2019 Winner for Student Film

"The Film Festival was a great experience! It was useful to be connected to the Conservation Optimism team and have our networks connect in a way that may not otherwise have happened. It was sad that we couldn't do it in person at a physical event, but the virtual festival worked well and allowed our international audience to be involved as well. Having the mentoring session with Damon was very useful. We are still in touch and opportunities are still developing from it, which is exciting. I hope to get involved again next year!"

- Leo Plunkett
2020 Conservation Optimism Film Winner

IN 2020 WE PUBLISHED OVER 75 BLOGS AND HAD STORIES FROM EVERY CONTINENT ON A RANGE OF TOPICS AND SPECIES



2020 FILM FESTIVAL

The films we received in 2020 were assessed by the Conservation Optimism team and a screening of the shortlisted films took place on YouTube on May 29th. The public vote revealed Leo Plunkett with Saving Aru (Conservation Optimism) and Yeliz Motro with the animated short 'Escape' (Students) as our 2020 winners. They won a 1.5-hour mentoring session with filmmaking experts, Damon Gameau for Leo and Jeronimo Prieto for Yeliz. The film screening has been viewed over 600 times since premiering in May.

In the lead up to the screening, we also ran a series of live Q&As with wildlife filmmakers and photographers Sophie Darlington, Rohit Varma and Radha Rangarajan, and Keith Scholey. We asked them about their respective fields of expertise and also dived into what makes each of them optimistic about the future of nature.

Our first film festival in 2019 had been coupled with a strong artistic presence, from live street art painting to an exhibition of UV screen prints. We were keen to use the festival again to feature the work of various artists and did so by launching a virtual exhibition on our website on the day of the festival. The exhibition showcased artworks and photos from a diversity of illustrators, drawers and photographers and highlighted the work of students who were exhibiting their work for the first time.

GOOD NATURED IN NUMBERS



TRANSFORMING CONSERVATION STORYTELLING



IMPACT

At Conservation Optimism, we know that the way we frame issues is of critical importance to how they are received and acted upon by others. This is why we developed the Positive Communication Toolkit in collaboration with our members and also teamed up with international media platform [INKLINE](#) to run a workshop with UK-based journalists around the topic of solutions-based coverage of the climate crisis.

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT

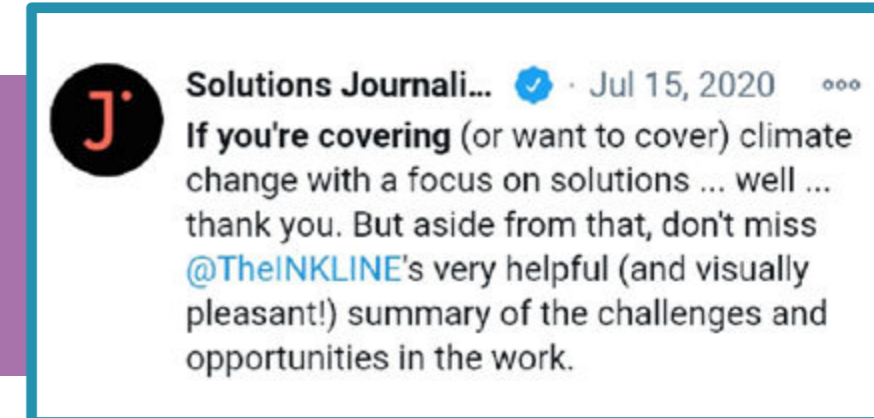
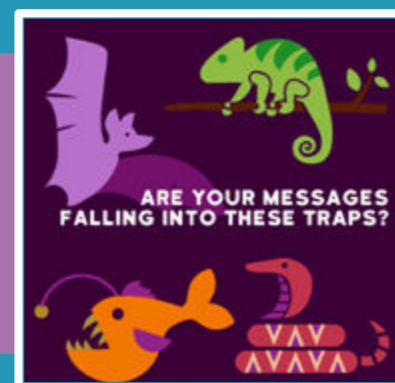
We are in active dialogue with our over 100 members and working to develop content to support them and the conservation sector as a whole in the areas of need that they help us to highlight. When 70% of them told us that they needed help with framing their communication messages, we got to work and reached out to framing expert Ralph Underhill from Framing Matters.

We invited our ConservationNOW members to join us for a special one-day workshop with Ralph to provide us with an intro to framing and to allow us to discuss some common pitfalls to move away from the doom and gloom narrative.

Our [Positive Communication Toolkit](#) was produced using examples shared by our members during the workshop. It encourages readers to think about why they are communicating and what the values and beliefs underpinning their messages are. Finally, it provides them with some communication traps and will dive into how to avoid them.

WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS

INKLINE, an international media platform, ran a series of workshops titled 'Covering the Climate Crisis from a Solutions Lens' as part of their Solutions Journalism Network's LEDE Fellowship in 2020.



In 2020 we developed our Positive Communication Toolkit in collaboration with Framing Matters and our ConservationNOW members. The toolkit was well-received and has become our most popular page on the website. We also developed new relationships with UK journalists and activists through the co-organisation of a workshop with INKLINE and Climate Outreach.

"As wildlife professionals engaging with varying audiences across a range of channels, we have found the toolkit a critical resource for our engagement strategies. It can help those with little or no funding, to be able to create useful and meaningful postings around conservation and the environment. We have been able to use its core principles through our messaging on social media, website and on-site posters/boards. It is an informative and definitive resource that can help a little - go a long way.

Whether you are trying to impact on behaviours, funding or societal change, the toolkit provides insightful and scalable advice, for any organisation, or individual involved in conservation efforts. Show it to your teams, add it to your favourites, or stick it to the wall behind your screen, this toolkit is exactly what conservation professionals need to increase their engagement and help with their impact."

- Brian Heppenstall, Senior Countryside Ranger

WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS IN 2020

How can we make climate change solutions more prevalent in the news?

The findings from our workshop with INKLINE and Climate Outreach suggested the following:

- Finding a **human narrative** to link from the individual to broader problems
- Fostering **longer-term projects** with experts on
- Fostering more **creativity and artistic collaboration**
- Building and nurturing **relationships** between journalists, activists, and scientists

We had the opportunity to team up with them and with Climate Outreach, the first British charity to focus exclusively on public engagement with climate change, for their first workshop which took place virtually for UK-based participants on 30 April 2020. From apocalyptic headlines to photographs of forests burning down, the coverage of the climate crisis in the British media can leave audiences feeling overwhelmed and prone to burnout. How can we move away from the doom and gloom narrative and embrace a solutions lens?

The workshop dived into this question by looking at how we can facilitate greater knowledge between activists, journalists and scientists to help make solutions more prevalent in the UK's media landscape. When asked why climate change solutions are not more prevalent in the news, attendees identified the following points as playing a key role: the challenges of covering solutions, the limitations of the journalism system, the issues of clarity, the limitations of the academic system and the commercial aspects of the journalism sector.

The group then decided to focus on finding ways to mitigate the first two points (Challenges of covering solutions and Limitations of the journalism system) and identified a series of ways to address those. The full report is available [here](#).

IN 2020 THE TOOLKIT WAS VIEWED OVER 2,500 TIMES AND WE RAN 3 TRAINING SESSIONS WITH COMMUNICATORS

"My goal as an environmental communicator has always been to frame biodiversity loss and climate change through positive and solutions-focused messaging. After years of emphasizing doom and gloom in the environmental field, I believe that we have an opportunity to change the conversation and frame science in ways that more engaging, relatable, and empowering for audiences.

The toolkit not only gave me the confidence to embrace this messaging style, it also outlined the marketing tools I needed to make my positive communication strategy effective. The many examples of framing nature and adjusting language-use helped improve my writing while encouraging me to think about how my messaging could better relate to my audience. I found it so helpful, that I even integrated its teachings into my undergraduate course on foundations in communications for environmental science."

- Jaime Clifton-Ross, Communications and Outreach Curator, National Environmental Treasure, Associate Faculty, School of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads University

SUPPORTING AND EQUIPPING CONSERVATIONISTS

The relationship between wildlife trade and COVID-19 is much discussed in social media, and the broader relationship between pandemic disease and destruction of the natural world also gained salience in 2020. However, these discourses are often poorly informed by evidence, and present a bleak picture of the future of the planet, our own health, and that of society. We wanted to present an informed counter-narrative to empower young people.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE DURING THE PANDEMIC

As COVID-19 has continued, the recognition of its mental health implications has grown and a group that we identified as virtually unconsidered in April was teenagers and young adults. Globally, many young people were already under immense psychological strain as a result of the climate and ecological crisis. COVID-19 added another layer of pressure.

This is why we decided to bring together a team of wildlife trade researchers and the Conservation Optimism team to provide evidence-based and hopeful stories and online engagement. This project was made possible thanks to a grant we were awarded through the University of Oxford's COVID-19: Economic, Social, Cultural, & Environmental Impacts – Urgent Response Fund which was funded by the Higher Education Innovation Fund and ESRC Impact Acceleration Account.

AS PART OF THIS PROJECT, WE DEVELOPED THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

- A series of podcast episodes featuring inspiring interviews with conservationists from all walks of life. From climate psychotherapist to tech entrepreneur Megan Crompton, those episodes explore a range of issues such as the psychological

impact of the climate crisis, and how to address it but also stories of hope and optimism to show our young audience that there are people out there who are working towards making the planet a better place for future generations.



- A series of articles on our website, disseminated through our social media channels, about the wildlife trade and emerging infectious diseases, and how to change our behaviour to reduce the risks of future pandemics. We also reached out to students from the University of Oxford and asked them to share the way they experienced nature during lockdown and their testimonies emphasised how important their interactions with nature had been for their mental health during this unsettling period.

- A dedicated FAQ section which gives evidence-based but hopeful and action-orientated responses to the questions and concerns of young adults, in the spirit of Conservation Optimism. As part of this FAQ, our team also developed an infographic titled 'Wildlife Trade: Your Round the World Trip in 16 Species'. Featuring 16 different species of wildlife that are traded around the world, this



infographic aims to help teenagers and young adults to understand a bit more about a few of the plants and animals that humans hunt, catch, farm, collect, buy and sell and why there are still reasons to be optimistic.

- A Live Q&A with experts to answer young people's questions around the topic of wildlife trade and eco-anxiety on Instagram.

- Testimonies from the Conservation Optimism community. We asked our community to share with us their favourite memories of encountering wildlife and experiencing nature and shared those voice notes, written text, and tweets in a blog post.

THESE RESOURCES CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#).



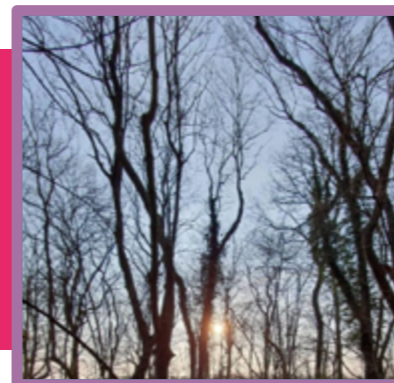
IMPACT

COVID-19 made us focus on a brand new audience: teenagers and young adults. By doing so, we gave a platform for our audience to share their stories of interacting with nature during lockdown highlighting how important spending time outdoors is for our wellbeing. We also collaborated with a range of researchers and brought aspects of their research to an audience they hadn't tapped into before.

"The Good Natured podcast offers an inspirational and accessible platform to conservation optimists with a fascinating range of backgrounds and perspectives. The eco-anxiety episode was particularly useful for me as a conservationist-turned-psychologist. It opened my eyes to an exciting new field and I wrote to Caroline Hickman, the star of the episode, the same day. The podcast has broadened my horizons and encouraged me to expand my network - I'm sure I'm not the only one who can say that!"

Matt Alcock, BA Biology Graduate

OUR RESOURCES HAVE BEEN VIEWED BY 750 PEOPLE ON OUR WEBSITE



AS PART OF THIS PROJECT WE WORKED WITH RESEARCHERS

8



WE COLLABORATED WITH A TOTAL OF ACADEMIC GROUPS

5

AND DEVELOPED NEW RELATIONSHIPS WITH ORGANISATIONS

4

FOSTERING WELLBEING AND COMMUNITY

This past year has made it clear just how important community is for all of us, and from our social media communities, to our network for aligned organisations and our regional hubs, we have been working to provide support and encouragement to our members.

REGIONAL HUBS

We launched our first regional hub in 2020 in...India! The [Conservation Optimism India Hub](#) aims to facilitate the formation of a network of individuals that supports each other, empathises with each other's realities, learns from failures, and uses informed optimism to catalyse their actions. The hub quickly took off through a brand new [Instagram channel](#) and the team has been busy raising awareness about various environmental challenges going on in the country. They started a segment on Instagram titled Humans of Conservation which captures the moments of joy and sorrow, hardships and successes and overall experiences in our world of conservation. By providing a platform for every voice to be heard, the team believes that we will cumulatively make a positive impact for nature and for people's lives.

The team also developed a project called 'When Life Gives You Lemons' in collaboration with Café Oikos, a café/bookstore in Bengaluru which organises public talks on ecology and allied fields by researchers in India. They put together some stories of what is motivating people during the pandemic; helping them turn their conservation lemons into various and interesting forms of lemonade. The Conservation Optimism India Hub has developed a strong relationship with ConservationNOW member Nature inFocus and frequently write co-branded blogs for their website.



CONSERVATION NETWORK OF OPTIMISTS WORLDWIDE

Our Conservation Network of Optimists Worldwide (ConservationNOW) has reached 100 members in 2020 and has spread to cover every continent. Our members are working to inspire, motivate, equip, support, and empower conservationists around the world, and they've joined this network so that collectively we can all be more effective at sharing our successes, broadening our reach, and maximising our impact. We were thrilled to allow our members to start interacting this year through a room on the WildHub platform and are looking forward to seeing what collaborations can come out of this space. We are currently working towards developing a mentoring programme and a webinar series specifically tailored to our members to support them as much as possible. 2020 also marked a milestone for ConservationNOW as we reached 100 members in November!

EXPANDING THE TEAM

We expanded her team this year to increase our capacity to foster a sense of community within the Conservation Optimism movement. We now have a dedicated volunteer in charge of our Conservation Optimism Facebook group and our WildHub Room, and another volunteer dedicated to our Instagram channels. This will allow us to increase the engagement between different members of our community and hopefully will foster more collaborations and exchange between our ConservationNOW members.

IMPACT

This year saw us launch our first Conservation Optimism Regional Hub in India and the new Instagram page quickly took off. The hub already had quite an impact within their community and curated a large amount of blogs this year. 2020 was also a big year for ConservationNOW as we reached 1,000 members. The increase in activity led us to add 17 new members to our team to keep up with the flow of blogs and new projects.

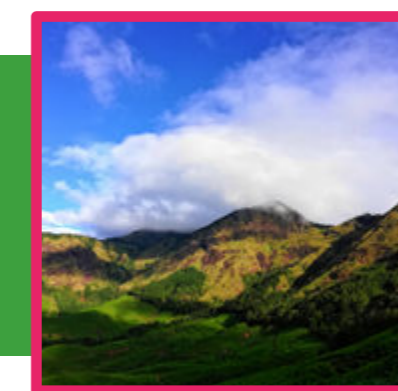
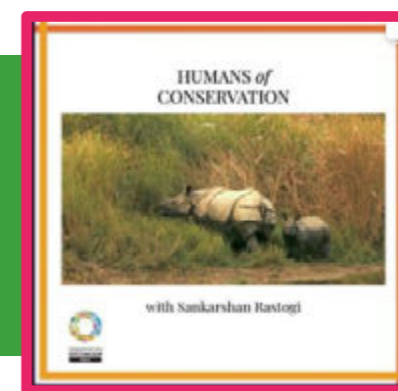


 **FOLLOWERS**
1,600

 **A VIDEO FROM THE 'WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS' SERIES WAS VIEWED**
7,500 TIMES

ONE OF THEIR INSTAGRAM POSTS REACHED 3,000 ACCOUNTS 

17 HUMANS OF CONSERVATION STORIES WERE PUBLISHED 



IN 2020 OUR NETWORK WENT FROM 58 MEMBERS TO 103

This year we were joined by:

7 INDIA HUB MEMBERS

4 BLOG COORDINATORS

3 DATABASE CURATORS

1 INSTAGRAM CURATOR

1 COMMUNITY MANAGER

1 CREATIVE COMMS OFFICER

DIGITAL CONSERVATION OUTREACH

Conservation Optimism is working hard in the UK and beyond to reach our vision of a planet on which people and nature both flourish. In 2020, our team has been busy running digital outreach events and developing educational resources to help parents and teachers during the lockdown.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Outreach has always been a core part of our activities in previous years and this year was no different. When the pandemic hit, we quickly adjusted by focusing our efforts towards creating virtual activities and educational resources.

Before lockdown, we were working on a series of posters around ten species associated with stories of optimism for the Iris Festival of the Future, a local event taking place in a school in Oxford. With the event being postponed we decided to repurpose the resources we had been working on and made them available to parents, teachers and educators on [our website](#). Thanks to the Conservation Optimism community, the posters are now available in Bahasa Indonesia, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. We also developed a quiz and colouring sheets to be used alongside the 10 posters.

The Kids' Corner quickly became the most popular section on the website with over a thousand views in a few months and opened the door to new collaborations. We then teamed up with Penguin Watch to create a series of posters tailored for children for World Penguin Day. This series included nine species of penguins from around the globe and came accompanied by colouring sheets again. The collaboration also led to the creation of two infographics showcasing what penguinologists wear in cold climates versus hot climates.

We also worked in close collaboration with the Oxford Museum of Natural History in 2020 and created a virtual Conservation Optimism trail featuring specimens from their collection and then adapted the script to create a series of mini-animated videos for their children's digital platform.



CONFERENCES AND TALKS

The team was busy in 2020 taking part in various talks and conferences. In October, we recorded a session for Wildscreen Festival. We invited the attendees to join the Conservation Optimism team to get a deep-dive into the Positive Communication Toolkit that they developed in partnership with Framing Matters and to hear from Ed, the designer and illustrator behind the innovative print series Under The Skin and the official illustrator for Wildscreen Festival 2020.

We also partnered with the Bio-Diverse Festival in October to bring an inspiring day full of positive and optimistic conservation stories and research from minority and underrepresented conservationists. The Bio-Diverse Festival & Conservation Optimism Twitter Conference 2020 aim was to amplify minority groups who are making a significant contribution and impact in conservation all over the world, and to create a diverse conversation and discussion involving everyone affected by and working in conservation.

In November, we then ran a roundtable session at Communicate 2020 highlighting why different team members feel optimistic about the future of nature and how to harness that optimism to empower people to act for nature.

IMPACT

2020 was quite a pivot year when it comes to our digital offering. To adjust to the cancellation of many of our in-person events, the team quickly adjusted and created a range of content to support parents and educators with optimistic resources throughout the year.

“I WANTED TO SAY HOW IMPRESSED I WAS BY THE SESSION THAT THE CONSERVATION OPTIMISM TEAM RAN AT THE COMMUNICATE CONFERENCE - NOT JUST THE SESSION REALLY BUT THE FACT THAT SUCH AN ORGANISATION EXISTS AT ALL.”

- MARTIN BRASHER, TRUSTEE AT THE BRISTOL NATURAL HISTORY CONSORTIUM

“Our strategic plan aims to engage adult audiences with the current biodiversity and climate crises across a range of formats and working with Conservation Optimism has allowed us to offer our audiences large events such as the Film Festival, to engage with artists whose work deals with conservation issues and to take part in tours and other activities that enable them to view our specimens on display from a different, more relevant and well-informed perspective.

During this year's first national lockdown Conservation Optimism were the first external organisation to directly approach us to offer some digital engagement content using our virtual digital tour to develop an online Conservation Optimism tour of exhibits that the public could no longer visit and see for themselves.”

- Chris Jarvis, Education Officer for Adult and Primary Education at Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH)



“Conservation Optimism created some wonderful animated videos about optimistic conservation. In previous years, the Museum has hosted Science Fairs which showcase current research and give families a chance to meet scientists and experts. Julia, the Programme Manager, had offered to run Optimistic Conservation tours at the event in March, which was sadly cancelled due to COVID-19. Conservation Optimism's work to adapt her stories to animated videos has been truly amazing. The new videos form part of our first online Super Science Saturday.

The Families and Education Officer anticipates that these videos will encourage visitors (both regular and new) to visit the Museum webpage and learn about Science Remotely. We hope that this will excite families, offer them entertainment from their homes and build key science skills such as confidence, observation and 'talking science.'”

- Ana Wallis, Part-Time Assistant Access & Outreach Officer (STEM) at Oxford University Museum of Natural History

IN 2020 OUR KIDS' CORNER HAD OVER 1,500 PAGE VIEWS



CONSERVATIONOPTIMISM.ORG



ADMIN@CONSERVATIONOPTIMISM.ORG



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