



# CONSERVATION OPTIMISM

ANNUAL REPORT  
2021



# THEORY OF CHANGE



WE WERE JOINED BY THE FOLLOWING NEW TEAM MEMBERS IN 2021. YOU CAN SEE OUR FULL TEAM [HERE](#).



As time comes to reflect on 2021, we want to thank all the conservationists around the world who have been working hard to protect nature while coping with the fall out of a global pandemic. With many of us facing lockdowns and restrictions in the way we could connect with other people and nature; it has never been more important to support each other and to find ways to remain optimistic.

Conservation Optimism has come a long way since its very first Summit in 2017. From a one-off event, it turned into a powerful international community with a growing number of team members and Regional Hubs! We're so incredibly grateful to our global volunteers who make Conservation Optimism a vibrant and inclusive movement.

Supported by the University of Oxford, Synchronicity Earth, and the Whitley Fund for Nature, we aim to achieve improved trends for species and ecosystems worldwide. We work towards this goal by focusing on four key strands: 'Celebrating Diverse Changemakers', 'Transforming Conservation Storytelling', 'Supporting and Equipping Conservationists', and 'Fostering Wellbeing and Community'.

In 2021, we have seen our team increase drastically, allowing us to amplify more voices and stories than ever before. We now have over 45 team members based in Germany, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Slovenia, Sweden, the UK, the US. Our Network of Optimists Worldwide (ConservationNOW) increased by almost 40% bringing us close to 150 members. We launched a series of webinars and workshops specifically tailored to put a spotlight on our members and provide them with the skills they said they needed support with.

We were also thrilled to launch a new Regional Hub in Pakistan, joining the UK and India Hubs, and to onboard a new Sweden Hub. We had a global impact by delivering various virtual training sessions this year. But we wouldn't be able to achieve any of our goals without our supportive online community and so were pleased to see a 20% increase of our following across our different platforms.

While 2021 threw many challenges at us, it also allowed us to have the third edition of the Good Natured Film Festival as both an in-person event in Oxford and a virtual one on YouTube. Being able to meet our Overall Winner and have one of our judges there to hand her prize in the beautiful setting of the Oxford Museum of Natural History was quite frankly pretty magical!

We can't predict what 2022 will bring us but we are so grateful for the incredible community we have built in the past five years. We're looking forward to share even more stories of optimism next year and to keep proving that everyone can make a difference for nature.



MEET OUR PAKISTAN HUB TEAM MEMBERS

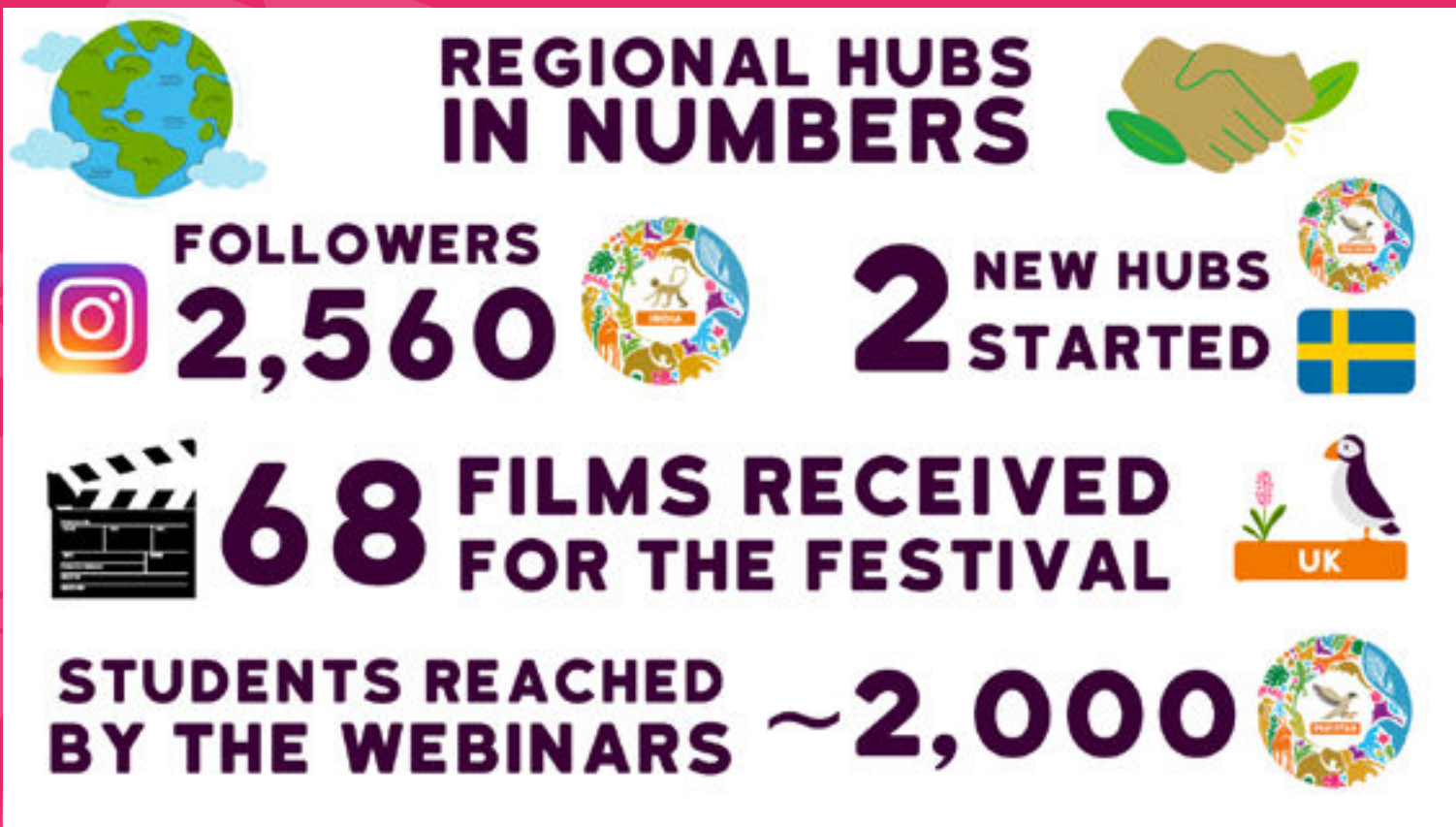


# FOSTERING WELLBEING AND COMMUNITY

The past two years have made it clear just how important community is for all of us so we have been working to provide support and encouragement to as many people as possible in 2021.

## REGIONAL HUBS

2021 was a big year for our Regional Hubs and saw the launch of the Pakistan Hub and the Sweden Hub. The [Pakistan Hub](#) is one of the first initiatives in the country aimed at engaging with the youth, who make up the majority of the country's population to make them custodians of their local biodiversity. They have been focusing this year on running webinars for students on the topic of wildlife conservation and provided students with internship opportunities. The Sweden Hub came to life in the second part of the year and intends to create awareness by spreading positive conservation news and activities in Sweden. Their aim for 2022 is to create an overview of the stakeholders and their conservation focus and to connect organisations to our ConservationNOW network. The [India Hub](#), which launched in 2020, also had a great year and has been focusing on building its online community on Instagram by running themed weeks and by starting an Instagram Live series with a range of Indian conservationists. The [UK Hub](#) has been focusing on running internships, school workshops, producing the second season of the Good Natured Podcast, and organising the third edition of the Short Film Festival. Those activities are covered in more depth later in this report.



## OUR NETWORK

After celebrating our 100th member last year, we have been pleased to see a steady increase of our membership and now have a total of 143 organisations signed up. We have been strengthening the links between our members by running our webinar and workshop series and by also allowing them to advertise job opportunities, grants, and other information with the overall network. We also started running Instagram Takeovers on our channel allowing members to post content about their work and activities and hence allowing our wider audience to know more about our members. The takeovers were such a success that we are hoping to run them more regularly next year hence building the online community associated with the network.



## SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Studying a conservation degree can be mentally difficult when faced with the doom and gloom narrative of what is going on in the sector. But adding the pressure of the pandemic and online classes to the mix made it a whole different experience. To help students around the world keep going in those difficult conditions, we ran some sessions around the topics of resilience and how to maintain an optimistic frame of mind. We made those sessions highly interactive and asked the students to share their strategies to cope when things get tough, and you can see some of their suggestions on the word cloud below.





# CELEBRATING DIVERSE CHANGEMAKERS

One of our goals is to amplify as many voices as possible within conservation. Throughout 2021, we have shared many optimistic stories as blogs, podcast episodes, films, and webinars. We tried to ensure that we had a good diversity of authors, podcast guests, and webinar speakers but also a good geographic range of stories being shared.

## BLOGS

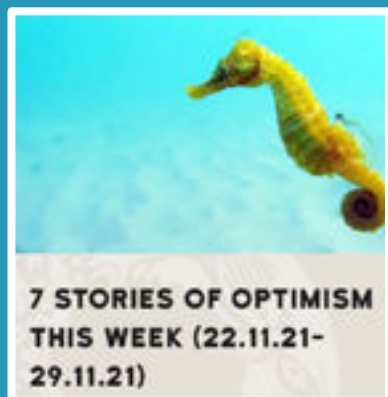
Blogs help us amplify our community's voice and promote their stories within the wider Conservation Optimism community. Anyone can write a blog and our contributors are welcome to submit a blog in any language. We have published over 100 blogs this year from all around the globe.

2021 saw us launch a new series of regular blogs titled '7 Stories of Optimism This Week'. The series allows us to share a weekly dose of positive stories from the conservation sector and to put a spotlight on the people who are sharing those stories within our community as their posts get embedded on our website and they get tagged when we share the weekly blog on our social media platforms.

## GOOD NATURED PODCAST

Last summer we launched the second season of our podcast "Good Natured". In addition to our regular full-length episodes, we also incorporated four mini episodes called Nature Notes, where people shared an experience they had in nature with our audience. For each of our full-length episodes, we invited 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.

In 2021, we interviewed a range of conservationists from penguinologist Tom Hart to activist Sofiya Shukhova. Some of our guests told us about the wonders of grasses and others shared their best science communication tips with us. Find out more by listening to the podcast on Spotify or Apple Podcasts! The rest of season 2 will drop in January and February 2022 so stay tuned for more.



## PUTTING A SPOTLIGHT ON CONSERVATIONISTS

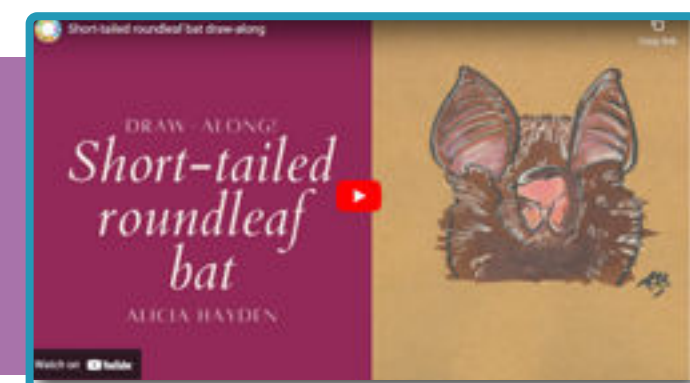
We teamed up with the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) this year to put a spotlight on their 2021 Whitley Award Winners. Five micro-interns from the University of Oxford were selected to help us create new infographics and fun resources about the six winners for our [Kids' Corner](#). Each winner inspired a poster full of information and fun facts and a draw-along video of the species they are working on. The micro-interns also designed a quiz for children to find out which Whitley Winner they might be.

We have also been busy developing a brand-new toolkit with WFN. We interviewed 13 of their previous winners and asked them what their advice to budding conservationists would be when it comes to collaborating, communicating, managing projects, taking care of their mental health, and fundraising for their work. The winners featured in this toolkit are from all around the world and we can't wait to share their pearls of wisdom with all of you. We are aiming to have the toolkit out by February 2022 so keep an eye out for it!



## DATABASE

We have been working in the background this year to create a database of positive stories. Our team has been testing different vetting systems and filters to make the database a reality and we are hoping to fundraise for it and launch it in 2022.



Our goal is to have a searchable database of optimistic stories from around the globe and to include filters such as geographical location or species to make it as easy as possible for people to find the examples they need. We believe that it would be a useful resource for both teachers who are in need of positive content for their classes but also for conservationists who may need a morale booster or examples to follow! In the longer run it will also form an important resource for understanding what makes a project likely to be successful, and what success means.



# TRANSFORMING CONSERVATION STORYTELLING

We have been working with journalists, science communicators, and filmmakers to shift the conservation narrative away from the doom and gloom. From running training sessions about our Positive Communication Toolkit to organising the third edition of our Good Natured Film Festival, we engaged a range of international audiences in 2021 and spread our ethos far and wide.

## PODCASTING MENTORING

We ran a [podcasting mentoring programme](#) for the Department of Zoology of the University of Oxford as part of a project funded by the Departmental Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund. As part of the programme, the Good Natured Podcast hosts and producers Julia Migné and Sofia Castelló y Tickell, mentored four students and staff members in telling a three-minute nature-related story and recording it on audio. They had the opportunity to attend two workshops: one on positive communication and another on storytelling and podcasting tips. They were then tasked with drafting their stories and recording their mini-episodes with Julia and Sofia mentoring them throughout the process. The mini-episodes were then released as Nature Notes on the Good Natured feed. PhD Student Joe Woodman said:

"I feel like I've learned a lot! It was a really exciting and useful process learning how to transform a personal experience into an engaging story. [...] The scheme itself has taught me a number of new techniques that I will be sure to use in any future science communication that I do."



## MEDIA OUTREACH

In 2020 we teamed up with international media platform [INKLINE](#) to run a panel discussion on climate crisis reporting in India. The panel included the following speakers: Archana Soreng - Climate Activist. Member of UN Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, Harini Nagendra - Professor of Sustainability at Azim Premji University, Lead Author on the IPCC AR5, Rishika Pardikar - Independent Wildlife & Climate Change Journalist, and Sahana Ghosh - Contributing Editor at Mongabay India, Solutions Journalism LEDE Fellow 2019. The video has been viewed by over 400 people and is available [here](#).

## POSITIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT

The [Positive Communication Toolkit](#) that we developed in 2020 in partnership with Framing Matters is still our most used and appreciated set of resources. The appetite for the toolkit is such that we had volunteers translating it for us in 2021 into Indonesia Bahasa, Spanish, and Portuguese! The English version has been downloaded almost 3,000 times since March 2021, the Bahasa version 400 times since May, and the Spanish version 200 times since June. We are in the process of finalising an invited paper for Tropical Conservation Science based on the Toolkit that will spread the word even further.

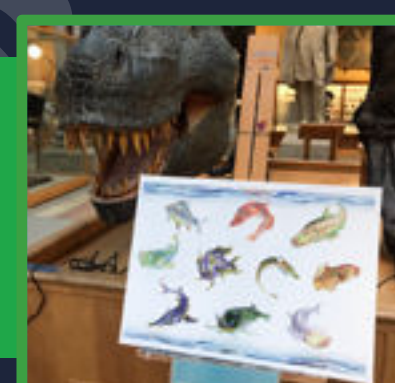


## 2021 FILM FESTIVAL

The films we received in 2021 were judged by our wonderful panel of experts composed of broadcaster and biologist Lizzie Daly, director and producer Chris Renaud, wildlife photographer and filmmaker Luke Massey, and TV presenter and wildlife filmmaker Malaika Vaz. The screening of the shortlisted films took place in October at the Oxford Museum of Natural History and on [YouTube](#).

Our winners in 2021 were Lauren Cook (Animation and Overall Winner), Katie Garrett (People & Nature), Willow Machado, Aimee Ham, and Sabrina Crockton (Students), Richard Scrase (Life on Earth), and Marcel Barelli (Public's Favourite). The category winners won a 1.5-hour mentoring session with filmmaking experts and the Overall Winner and Public's Favourite won some filmmaking equipment kindly donated by our sponsor Manfrotto. The film screening has been viewed over 550 times since premiering in late October and the in-person screening gathered a hundred attendees.

This year, we also teamed up with conservation NGO [Shoal](#) and launched an [art challenge](#) around their Lost Fishes campaign. The winners were announced on YouTube by the panel of judges composed of explorer and audio-visual artist Ivan Mikolji, fisheries programme manager Dr. Eleanor Adamson, and TV presenter Jeremy Wade and the shortlisted artworks were exhibited at the Oxford Museum of Natural History as part of the Film Festival.



"Alli Sadegiani was very generous with his advice and even offered an additional session to show me the ropes with a new animating software which he thought would help advance my work. I found it really enlightening to learn about life as a professional animator and how he was animating the characters in some of my favourite films!"

- Lauren Cook, 2021 Overall Winner



# SUPPORTING AND EQUIPPING CONSERVATIONISTS

We are passionate about creating resources to empower people from every walk of life to act for nature. In 2021, we focused our efforts on providing support to our 140+ ConservationNOW members while also training the next generation of conservationists through our micro-internship opportunities.

## SUPPORTING OUR MEMBERS

**Webinars & Workshops:** This year saw the launch of our [webinar and workshop series](#). The initial idea was to have both series be by members and for members, but we have since opened up the webinars to anyone who wishes to attend. In total, we ran nine webinars and three workshops in 2021 and reached a few hundreds people through the series. We found that the webinars are a great way for our members to share the work they are doing with an international audience and gives attendees a chance to ask them questions and learn from their experience. Our workshops are aimed at smaller groups of up to 15 people and allow our members to share specific skills, such as photography or storytelling, with their audience. The workshops were tailored based on what our members told us they needed support within our annual members' survey.

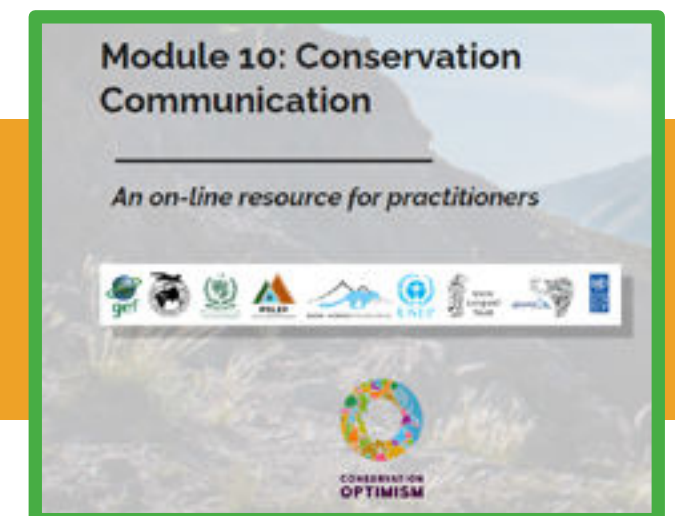


**Mentoring Programme:** We have also started working behind the scenes to develop a mentoring programme, which will make its official debut in February 2022. This scheme will be designed to pair members up so that they can exchange skills and knowledge with other conservation professionals. Each pairing will last for two months, and the paired organisations will be encouraged to meet virtually two to eight times over this period. Our Community Team will be providing each pair with prompts and suggestions for topics to talk about to help kickstart the mentoring process.

## PROVIDING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Our UK Hub put a strong focus on running internships through the University of Oxford in 2021 and worked with the Internship Office to run two Crankstart internships and two micro-internships throughout the year. The Crankstart Scholarship provides a programme of enhanced support to UK residents from lower-income households who are studying for their first undergraduate degree and encourages them to apply for paid vacation internships. The Micro-Internship Programme offers two to five-day voluntary learning and development opportunities, which aim to develop their employability skills, add to their CV, and offer them the opportunity to make new professional contacts.

We hosted a total of [11 interns](#) through these two programmes. Taras and Mia joined us during the Christmas and Easter breaks and worked on assessing the impact of our Positive Communication Toolkit, while Layla, Hannah, Alicia, Isobel, Jennifer, Emma, Liz, Amy, and Isabel created a range of resources for our [Kids' Corner](#) section in collaboration with the Whitley Fund for Nature and Seabird Watch during their micro-internship. The feedback from the students was very positive with all the micro-interns rating their overall experience five out of five and commenting on how much they learned about science communication in such a short amount of time. Based on the numbers of internships we ran and on the overall feedback from the students we were thrilled to receive the Gold Standard Internship Host Award. We were also delighted to have a few of those students joining the team as volunteers following the internships.



Following the success of our Positive Communication Toolkit in 2020, we kept running regular training sessions on the topic of framing and communication traps. One of the sessions we ran was part of a module on conservation communication developed by the [Snow Leopard Network](#) and was done in collaboration with our India Hub. We also wanted to reach out to early-career conservationists so developed a session on how to communicate the climate and biodiversity crises for the IUCN Youth Summit, which took place in April and was attended by thousands of young people. Finally, our Pakistan Hub then ran a session as well for the students of GC University Lahore.

“This internship has been the most incredible experience. I have learnt so much and met some wonderful people! I have thoroughly enjoyed the creative aspect of this project and definitely want to continue with what I’ve learnt and carry on making infographics!”



# CONSERVATION OUTREACH

Outreach is an important part of what we do at Conservation Optimism. In 2021, we expanded our international reach by taking part in various virtual events, while still managing to run some in-person events.

## OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

From our annual film festival to school workshops, we were lucky enough to be able to conduct some in-person outreach activities this year through our UK Hub. The film festival night saw over 100 of attendees join the screening, which took place at the Oxford Museum of Natural History. One of our judges, wildlife photographer and filmmaker Luke Massey, attended the event and announced the winners. Excitingly, we had a few filmmakers present in the room who came to the stage to receive their winning certificates.

2021 saw us run our very first school workshops in two local Oxford schools: Cheney and Cherwell. In Cheney, the team shared stories of conservation optimism with a group of teenagers and asked them to present a photo of nature that they had taken in their backyard. In Cherwell, the team focused more specifically on science communication as a potential career path. Overall, both classes were engaged, and we received some positive feedback from both the children and the teachers.

We also collaborated with the Oxford Museum of Natural History again this year by running Conservation Optimism tours of the museum as part of their annual Super Science Saturday programme. Finally, we screened the winning films of the festival to around 300 children as part of the Museum Christmas STEM activities, which they ran for several local schools.

**“IT WAS A FANTASTIC SESSION! THE STUDENTS BECAME VERY ENGAGED BECAUSE THEY HAD BEEN ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE SOMETHING, WHICH DOESN'T NORMALLY HAPPEN IN LESSONS.”**  
– DAVID GIMSON, CHENEY SCHOOL



## CONFERENCES AND TALKS

We have been busy taking part in various conferences and giving virtual talks in 2021! Here is a timeline:



Credit: Alicia Hayden

February: The India Hub took part in a panel session titled “Words Matter: Nature” co-organized by Coalition Wild, Earth Advocacy Youth and Global Youth Biodiversity Network.

April: We were at the IUCN Youth Summit delivering a workshop, which later sparked the creation of the Pakistan Hub. We also had a booth at the Wildlife Conservation Network Expo.

May: Our Founder, E.J. Milner-Gulland, gave a lecture for the Future for Nature Academy, which resulted in the creation of the Sweden Hub.

July: We delivered a workshop titled ‘Creative Communication: Make your research stand out’ as part of Interdisciplinary Conservation Network, a three-day event in Oxford.

August: We gave a talk about how to engage different audiences for the Alumni Week of the Whitley Fund for Nature.

September: Our Director, Julia, headed to Marseille, France, and delivered a workshop on storytelling tips at the IUCN World Congress’ #NatureForAll Youth Oasis Pavilion. She was also at the virtual edition of Communicate, taking part in a Commentary Box with CEO of the Natural History Consortium, Savita Willmott.

November: We did a [Twitter thread](#) on the Positive Communication Toolkit as part of the British Ecological Society TropiCon conference and took part in the closing panel and discussed how to tailor communication material to different audiences. Julia gave the final keynote at the first Chester Zoo Youth Symposium and the India Hub ran two workshops there on how to build online movements. Finally, we were on a panel titled ‘The Future of Storytelling’ with Lizzie Daly, Sam Sutaria, Elizabeth Swanson Andi, Jonnie Hughes, and Emilie Ehrhardt.

December: We ended the year by running a virtual lunchtime workshop on the Positive Communication Toolkit as part of the 2021 International Congress for Conservation Biology.





**CONSERVATIONOPTIMISM.ORG**



**ADMIN@CONSERVATIONOPTIMISM.ORG**



**@CONSERVOPTIMISM**



**@CONSERVATIONOPTIMISM**



**@CONSERVATION OPTIMISM**