

PEARLS OF WISDOM FOR BUDDING CONSERVATIONISTS

Advice from a few
generations of Whitley
Awards winners

This toolkit was developed as a
collaboration between:



CONSERVATION
OPTIMISM

FOREWORD

If ever there was a time when optimism is needed it is now. For those of us who care about the environment, the challenges can sometimes seem overwhelming. It is too easy to feel powerless in the face of biodiversity loss, pollution and ongoing climate change – and the glacial progress of world leaders towards agreement on policies to address these global threats.

However, reasons for optimism are all around us, in the inspiring work of conservationists and local communities across the globe who are taking effective action to protect wildlife and the environment. It is the mission of the Whitley Fund for Nature to support the work of these conservation heroes and ensure they gain the recognition they deserve. The experience of each Whitley Award winner is unique. Together their achievements demonstrate that – wherever you are and however great the challenges seem to be – conservation work can make a difference. This booklet draws on their experiences to show how it can be done.

The skills needed for successful conservation action are not those we learned at school. And “learning by doing” can seem hard and lonely for a young conservationist in a remote location striving to address complex and often urgent problems. In this booklet, practitioners who have become leaders in their different fields share their life lessons, providing advice, inspiration, and encouragement to those who are starting out on the same journey.

In this sense, as a distillation of the collective wisdom of Whitley Award winners from around the world, the booklet will serve as a mentor for early career professionals. The insights to be found on every page are not “recipes for success”, since no such thing exists in conservation work. Rather they may be used as aids for decision making, and as inputs for the development by readers of their own strategies for success, adapted the contexts where they work.

I recommend this booklet to conservationists everywhere, young and old, as an invaluable resource for sharing and learning – and as a source of optimism for our future.



Paula Kahumbu (WildlifeDirect CEO & 2021 Whitley Gold Award winner)





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Overview 3

The secrets of good collaboration 5

The power of communication 8

How to nail project management 11

Leading with compassion 14

When things get tough 17

The art of fundraising 20

Tips to get started 23

Meet the contributors 25

INTRODUCTION

We believe that a planet on which both people and nature flourish is possible. But for this vision to come true, we need as many people as possible to feel empowered to act as conservationists.

This toolkit aims to give budding conservationists the tips and encouragement they need to make a difference for nature. To do so we tapped into the knowledge and experience of Whitley Award winners supported by the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN).

A UK charity, WFN identifies and supports local environmental heroes from across the Global South, who are acting on the latest science and leading grassroots projects with passion. All are bringing tangible benefits to wildlife, landscapes and people. Their success is a wonderful source of inspiration for early career conservationists.

To bring the toolkit to life we interviewed 13 Whitley Award winners and asked them to tell us about six key areas: collaboration, communication, project management, leadership, wellbeing and resilience, and fundraising. They dived deep into what they have experienced throughout their careers, not shying away from difficult topics, and shared true gems with us.

Conservation Optimism is built on the belief that securing our planet's future hinges on as many people around the world as possible all stepping up to take action for nature.

Providing people with tips on how to get started in conservation is an important part of achieving this belief and is something that resonates with the Whitley Fund for Nature. We hope that you find this toolkit useful and that you enjoy this collaboration.

It has been a wonderful experience for both our teams to work together and we have been blown away by the depth of the answers we received from the Whitley Award winners.

Optimistically yours,

Julia Migné (Director of Conservation Optimism) &
Danni Parks (Director of Whitley Fund for Nature)



OVERVIEW

Don't have time to read the entire toolkit? Fear not, we have distilled the key advice from our panel of Whitley Award winners for you below!

THE SECRETS OF GOOD COLLABORATION

1. Identify potential partners, in and outside of the sector
2. Put yourself in their shoes
3. Be flexible and adaptable
4. Establish mutual respect and understanding
5. Build trust through long-term relationships

THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION

1. Keep your message simple
2. Remind people of the beauty of nature
3. Find an angle to connect with people
4. Tailor your message to your target audience
5. Be passionate and optimistic

HOW TO NAIL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

1. Identify what you bring to the table
2. Set realistic goals
3. Learn from failure
4. Embed yourself in the local context
5. Build a strong team

LEADING WITH COMPASSION

1. Listen to people around you
2. Be kind and passionate
3. Read the crowd and adjust to their needs
4. Support women leaders
5. Be humble and let others shine

WHEN THINGS GET TOUGH

1. Build a support network
2. Take time off regularly
3. Tap into optimism
4. Spend time in nature
5. Look ahead at the goals you want to reach

THE ART OF FUNDRAISING

1. Be engaging
2. Identify the best angle to sell your project
3. Understand what your funders want
4. Build relationships with your funders
5. Adapt quickly

TIPS TO GET STARTED

1. Make changes in your own life
2. Learn through trial and error
3. Create your niche
4. Start in your backyard
5. Learn from other disciplines



THE SECRETS OF GOOD COLLABORATION

Collaborating with different stakeholders is essential for conservation. But what does it take exactly to build successful partnerships? And who should you collaborate with? Our panel of Whitley Award winners had a lot of thoughts about this topic. Read on for their recommendations!



"Build a network and don't work by yourself. There are a lot of things to be learned from other people, especially from people not in your immediate sphere. And also of course work with people who are not conservation professionals themselves. One of the great joys of working in this field is converting new people!"

- Rodrigo Medellín

One way to do that according to Rodrigo, a bat conservationist working in Mexico, is to come down from your ivory tower and to "never stop making your comfort zone grow". But it is important to identify who you should be working with before you make a start on building that network.

Hotlin Ompusunggu, a Doctor of Dental Surgery who moved to Sumatra in 2019 and started the NGO Healthy Planet Indonesia (HePI) with the help of WFN Continuation Funding, tells us that the best collaboration she has had in her career as a conservationist is with the local communities who live by the rainforests. "My best experiences are the collaborations when we listen to each other and respect each other and treat each other with dignity and value trust, honesty, and transparency". Marleny Rosales-Meda, who works on sustainable forest use in Guatemala, agrees on the importance of working with local communities and adds that "it's essential for people involved in your project to feel valued and to know that their contribution is appreciated".

For Dino J. Martins, a Kenyan entomologist, it was crucial to engage with farmers as part of his goal to improve pollinator awareness and conservation. He explains: "Something I learned early on from my mum was that you catch a lot more flies with honey than with vinegar. So a philosophy that I've adopted in life is that it's easier to work with people when you're listening to them, when you're respectful towards them, when you're understanding."

Dino strongly believes in the power of awe and often shows farmers insects such as aphids ("the devil incarnate for a farmer") through a microscope and he said that "they're just blown away and their jaw drops" at the sights of those tiny creatures up close. That's something that Pablo Borboroglu, a penguin conservationist working in Argentina, can relate to: "Conservation has a lot of different aspects. It's not just a normal job so it's really important to establish an emotional connection with the people in your team and with communities."



Dino J. Martins sharing the joy of insects with farmers in Kenya

However, remember that building relationships with people, no matter who they are, takes time and effort. Laury Cullen does a lot of work with communities in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest and explains: "A lot of what we do involves communities and it has to do with pride and trust. When you get the same team working with the same local people in the same business for a long time then you get the trust, you foster relationships. So I would suggest that long-term presence is important if you want to build trust and pride with the local communities."





Shivani Bhalla, who promotes human-carnivore coexistence in Kenya, agrees with the fact that collaborations take time to implement but she also adds that it is essential to know when to pull the plug on an unsuccessful collaboration. “A key thing for collaboration is that it takes time to figure them out. Don’t rush into it. And some collaborations will not work out so don’t be scared to say: I’m sorry, this is not working and we need to move on.”



Laury Cullen at a community tree nursery in Brazil

A last ingredient for a successful collaboration? Caleb Ofori-Boateng, the first formally trained herpetologist in Ghana, reminds us that it is crucial to remember that not everyone thinks like us, “people are motivated differently and people have different reasons to get involved or not”. So putting ourselves in other people’s shoes can help us gain a better understanding of the places we’re working in. To do that, we need to be flexible and adaptable. “You have to work with others and you have to always be open to new ideas or ways of doing things”, says Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, a conservationist protecting gorillas in Uganda. “I think it’s one of the fields where you have to be very flexible. You can’t be really rigid otherwise you won’t achieve your goals”.

“Conservation is all about people so we have to unite them. When you are consistent and persistent people tend to listen to you.”
- Purnima Barman



THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION

Identifying your stakeholders is an important step but how do you then communicate your goals to those audiences? Whitley Award winners have had to become experts in communication, to leverage their success and scale-up their projects. They reflect on what has worked for them and share some tips with us.

“I actually wish I communicated a lot more so communication, communication, communication! Don’t obsess about the details, they just don’t matter if it is public communication. But it’s absolutely vital that you get going with confidence!”
- Amanda Vincent



Marleny Rosales-Meda highlights the importance of communication by adding that as conservationists “we need to learn a new way of communicating in order to be effective communicators”. She believes that this will allow us to get a clear message out to our audiences and to mobilise people to act for nature.



Maya-Q’eqchi’ youth enjoying learning about permaculture and reforestation during an applied training workshop

Amanda Vincent, a marine biologist who works in the Philippines, has her three rules for communication: know your message, know your audience, and keep it simple. The knowing your audience part particularly resonates with Elena Bykova, a mammologist from Uzbekistan, as she believes that it is important to communicate with people at all levels of society. She explains that “you need to have a common language with everyone you’re working with, including local people living in the areas that you want to protect”.





Sometimes it is important to remember as well that showing people how beautiful nature is can be a powerful way to engage them in conservation. We have a lot of serious messages we want to share about the work we are doing but Dino J. Martins reminds us that connecting people with the innate beauty of the creatures we work on is a great way to build bridges. “The hardest thing working with insects is that a lot of people are frightened of them.

The way I work on connecting people with insects is just by showing them their shapes and colors”, he says. “Getting them to sit quietly and watch and listen and observe. And I find that’s an incredibly powerful way for people to realise that here’s this small creature that looks so alien and yet it’s so much like us!”



This is something that Amanda can relate to as she explains that her biggest challenge is that fish are often not regarded as wildlife by people. “It’s still a massive challenge to convey to people that fish are wild and that they deserve respect and support and conservation”, she adds. She found that her focus species, the seahorse, has helped her break down lots of barriers. She says: “I think one of the wisest moves we made was working on seahorses. You talk about seahorses and do feel a connection and a certain reverence from people. They’re fantastic on their own but they also really did open doors for a plethora of other marine fish”. Being strategic about the way you frame your work can make a massive difference in the way your communication might be received!

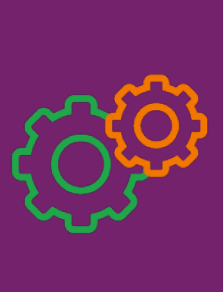
Framing our messages differently in order to reach the audience we wish to reach is another crucial part of the equation. As part of her work protecting saiga antelope Elena Bykova engages with various local communities and explains that “by coming back regularly and linking the saiga to their historical and spiritual frameworks they started becoming interested”. She says: “The next step was showing them that the future of saiga doesn’t depend on external researchers but that they can have a direct impact in protecting the species. So we encourage them to look at their own behaviour and think about the impact that poaching the species is having.”

Different stakeholders have different preferred ways of communicating so it is important to keep that in mind. “If we were working, let’s say with the government, they don’t want to read long research reports, “ explains Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka. “They’ll never read them, they just want something very brief. So if you’ve done some research and there’s something from the research that you’d like the government to follow up on, you have to give them a summary of the research.” Rodrigo Medellín also highlights the power of widening our perspectives to “reach the decision makers, the land owners, the children, and any other groups of people who are connected to the issues that you’re working on”.

We know that we need to engage different audiences in conservation but how do we empower people to actually act and make a difference for the planet? Caleb Ofori-Boateng believes that a lot of it has to do with optimism. He says: “Share the optimistic side of things. Be idealistic. Recognise that people choose good over evil so sell them a vision of the future and co-create the solutions or next steps to help realise that future.”

“You don’t need to talk science, you need to talk passion. It’s all about how it makes people feel!”
- Pablo Borboroglu





HOW TO NAIL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Working in conservation often involves a certain amount of project management. But what makes a successful project? And can we scale them up to increase our impact? That's something that all Whitley Award winners have had to finesse over their careers so they have plenty of suggestions for us!



"It's important to know yourself and what you can invest into conservation. We all have different skills, physical abilities, life experiences, and professional experiences so think about what you can bring to the field and what is the best way for you to contribute."

- Elena Bykova

One of the very first things we have to do when managing projects is fixing our goals. It is tempting to fix ambitious targets that will bring us closer to the impact we are hoping to have. However, Caleb Ofori-Boateng suggests that "it's better to set realistic goals to make an impact and let that impact carry you to your milestone".

Pablo Borboroglu also strongly believes in the importance of being realistic and adds: "It is very important to have a good diagnosis of the problem from the very beginning. Then you can come up with useful solutions." He emphasises that skipping this step can lead to investing a lot of time, money, and energy in a solution that will just never be adapted to the context.

"Just keep in mind your goal," says Pablo. "There will be lots of storms, there will be lots of moments in which you say: 'Oh, I'm not good enough for this or I wasn't the right person for that'. But storms happen and it is good for conservationists to become storm pilots."

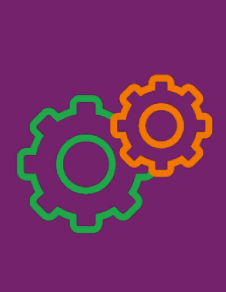


Conservation is indeed often about playing the long game and weathering the storms. Elena Bykova explains that: "Conservation is not just taking action for one day or one month. It's something very continual so you should be prepared for this and need to understand your responsibility from the very beginning."

But while we need to keep our eyes on the horizon, it is vital to also take the time to embed ourselves in the local context and to understand the cultural and spiritual background. Marleny Rosales-Meda explains that this "can be incredibly helpful and will in turn allow you to co-create resources with local communities, which can be much more powerful".

Another essential ingredient to successful project management that most Whitley Award winners agreed on is building a strong team. While Elena highlights the importance of bringing together diverse but complementary team members, Caleb remembers that he used to think he could do everything on his own when he was younger but then realised: "To really be able to make an impact and replicate whatever I'm doing, I need to focus on capacity building".

Pablo adds: "If you are going to manage a big project, it is important to be aware of your limitations and hire people. Hire lawyers, hire bookkeepers, hire psychologists, whoever you need in your team." Having a lean structure that expands and contracts based on the needs of the projects gives him and his team the flexibility they need to adapt quickly.



Having volunteers helping us achieve our goals is also a great way to increase impact while providing people with a way to make a difference for nature. However, Turkish conservation professor Çağan Şekercioğlu, highlights that while “having good volunteers will increase your impact, you have to choose your volunteers like you choose employees” and have a proper selection process.

Adapting quickly is often crucial in conservation and so learning from failure is extremely important to be able to bounce back when things go wrong. Amanda Vincent explains: “If you’re going to stick your neck out and push for some action, you’re going to get it wrong from time to time.” One key tip she learned from facing failure is that “you can’t run if there are an awful lot of obstacles in your path, you’ve actually got to pick your way carefully”. She adds that trusting your team is also an important component of managing projects.

Being a lion conservationist, Shivani Bhalla had to be adaptable and flexible throughout her career. She says: “Conservation changes a lot and the threats change a lot. If I look at the threats 15 years ago to lions and I look at the threats to them now, some of the old threats are not really threats anymore but there are new emerging threats and you can’t be stuck in your old ways. You’ve got to adapt, be flexible and just take into account new threats and try and address them if you have the capacity to.”

It can sometimes be hard to know in which direction to expand when projects are growing but it is essential to not let that paralyse us. “I think that a lot of conservationists, particularly those in academia, are hesitant to get going because they’d like to be more confident,” explains Amanda. “But the reality is that we always have enough information to make some sort of step in the right direction.” So we have to keep going and as Purnima Barman, a conservationist protecting greater adjutant storks in India, says: “We have to bring in the energy and the passion. We have to be restless!”.

“In conservation you really have to think outside of the box because conservation is not only about animals or forests, it’s about people.”
- Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka



LEADING WITH COMPASSION

The Whitley Award winners featured in this toolkit are all recognised as leaders in their field. But what does it take to lead a team thoughtfully? They share their advice for future conservation leaders.

.....
: *“When you put passion into what you do, when you love*
: *your work, when you really love your species or your area or*
: *whatever you work on, people see that and your team sees*
: *that. And then it’s contagious. They get that energy and they*
: *want to belong.” - Pablo Borboroglu*
.....



Leading is all about listening to people and doesn’t necessarily have to be a hierarchical process. Hotlin Ompusunggu explains that she gives everyone an opportunity to lead when working with local communities. She adds: “When we have meetings with the communities we spin a wheel to decide who will lead the meeting. So that person could be a cook or a driver or have any other job and still get an opportunity to lead the meeting.”





Through this practice she is building a certain work culture and making sure that everyone feels listened to. “It shows that we respect them and we listen to them. And every time we have a meeting we make a circle, so that no one is the chair of the meeting. Everyone has the same interaction with us and no one is behind someone else. We really try to get that social structure to get everyone to be valued the same and for everyone to have the same opportunity to engage with others.”

Amanda Vincent agrees with Hotlin’s points and believes that we can only make progress when we’re cognisant of people’s needs. It is crucial to listen to our teams and assess what they might need from us. For Amanda, the ingredients needed to lead are passion, determination, and “a pretty heavy dollop of kindness”.



Shivani Bhalla with local women in Kenya

Reading the crowd and adjusting how we lead is another thing that many Whitley Award winners pointed out. Çağan Şekercioğlu explains that listening to people is the most important thing for him to do as a leader. He adds: “Some people may be afraid to talk to a boss so it can be useful to pull them aside and ask them regularly how they are doing”. Marleny Rosales-Meda had to learn to be a leader as a young woman working primarily with men. She explains that where she works in Guatemala “men tend to make decisions and women can be seen as weak” so it took a lot for people to believe in her. But she strongly believes that women have something unique to bring to leadership positions. She says: “As women we have a vision that is unique, long-term and much more comprehensive. We tend to be more empathetic and we have the capacity to resolve conflicts and work in groups”.

Shivani Bhalla is also calling for more women leaders and has an important message, especially for those working in Africa. “If you’re a man in a position of power, be compassionate to women! There are conservation leaders in Africa who are never given opportunities to become leaders or to rise in the rankings. Less than 5% of conservation leaders in Africa are women and that absolutely has to change. Women need to really start pushing through these crazy barriers that we keep facing, but the men need to be very supportive of that.” She adds that diversity is incredibly important in teams and is something that leaders really need to look into. “We have got to start focusing and prioritising leaders that actually are from Africa and not someone coming in from the outside and telling us what to do.”

Rodrigo Medellín adds that another important aspect of being a leader is keeping our options as open as possible and not discarding anybody. We never know who might be a future ally or who might bring skills that we had not realised we had within our teams.

But how do we enthuse colleagues? Elena Bykova believes that love is a key building block. She says: “Love is so important! You need to love what you’re doing and love your species or the area where you’re working to inspire other people”. Amanda adds that instilling a sense of hope in our team is essential.

The last piece of the puzzle according to Shivani is also to be humble and give team members the opportunity to shine whenever possible. “This is not about our egos, this is about our teams. And I think we fail so much in conservation where you have this one face model. You’ve got this one hero, leading a team and that is not sustainable.” So we need to make sure that our teams get the credit they deserve and the possibilities to be the face of the projects they are in charge of.

“You should really manifest a sense of joy, enthusiasm, excitement, and optimism as much as you possibly can. And then make certain that the team feels the progress and achievements.” - Amanda Vincent





WHEN THINGS GET TOUGH

As conservationists we are exposed to traumatic events such as habitats being destroyed, or species going extinct. It can be tough to keep going. So what are some techniques that Whitley Award winners use when conservation work becomes difficult?



“Conservationists are doing the world a service. One species at a time, one tree at a time, we are making the world a better place for all humanity. People have to recognise the role conservationists are playing for our future and to support us in any way. In my local dialect, we have a useful proverb. It means, ‘if you are not supporting me, at least don’t make things difficult for me.’”

- Caleb Ofori-Boateng

Something that everyone agrees on is the need to prioritise our own mental and physical health. Hotlin Ompusunggu explains that she makes an effort to be in regular contact with her friends and family members. She says: “It’s good to always communicate with your family and friends but you shouldn’t only share your successes and should be able to share your problems too!”. She adds that she also takes care of her overall health by paying attention to what she eats, exercising regularly and getting enough sleep.

Shivani Bhalla has also learned throughout her career how important it is for her to take her wellbeing into account. She adds: “When you live and work in the same place, it’s so important to take a step back and keep prioritising your health. If you don’t, you suddenly get hit by health issues. So make wellbeing a part of your everyday life!”. She has now gotten into the cycle of taking time off every six weeks.

She explains: “That’s been transformational for me! I absolutely stop everything and I make it a part of my commitments. I schedule that time in my calendar months in advance and say to my team that nothing’s happening for me for the next 10 days. And that has really helped my wellbeing”. Making sure she goes to the doctors when she is feeling unwell and seeing a therapist regularly are other things that Shivani finds useful.

Others find solace in being optimistic about the future. Rodrigo Medellín is convinced that we cannot run the risk of becoming pessimistic. He explains: “The world is already a very dire place and I’ve realised that if I become a doomsayer, a pessimist, I will destroy my legacy. So I’m trying to inspire as much hope as I can in the younger generations and I am empowering as many young people as I can. I want them to become their own leaders wherever they are”. Amanda Vincent also believes that remaining optimistic is essential for her to keep going.



Caleb Ofori-Boateng finding joy in the field in Ghana

She says: “There’s just always a way forward. You sometimes have to work hard to find it but if you’re willing to bend your brain and explore different ideas then there will be something you can do that’s useful and helpful.” Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka also likes to celebrate the wins and gains whenever they happen and explains that it motivates her to move further.

Dino J. Martins also emphasises the importance of being hopeful about the future. He encourages us to be hopeful even when there seems to be no hope and highlights the importance of spending time in connection with nature. He adds that doing so “will be a source of nourishment in those very difficult times”.



Spending time in nature is what got a lot of us to become conservationists. It's something that we are passionate about and enjoy doing. Caleb Ofori-Boateng reminds us to focus on what our passions really are. He says: "Working in conservation has lots of challenges and requires lots of sacrifices. And from my experience, the reason that I've been able to go on is because I'm motivated from within. I'm so passionate about what I'm doing".

Looking ahead at the goals we want to achieve is another strategy to keep going when things get tough. Laury Cullen and his team have what they call the Dream Map. He explains: "That map is like our boss! We have a dream and we know where we want to get. We look at that map and we see the happiness at the end! And we see that our supporters are really keen to help us with that long-term mission." Never underestimate the power of having people supporting us and cheering us on as well!



"We see the impact of our determination, passion, and love for what we do on a daily basis. That's really good fuel and energy."
- Laury Cullen



THE ART OF FUNDRAISING

So we now know more about what makes a compassionate leader, how to communicate and collaborate with others, and how to take care of our own mental health. But we're still missing quite an important aspect of working in conservation: fundraising. Nowadays, being able to raise funds for projects is a crucial part of being a conservationist. Fear not though, our panel of Whitley Award winners have plenty of tips for us!

"You need to talk from the heart and donors love to hear real stories from the ground. So I learned that you should let them become your friends, not just your donors. Involve them in the journey until the accomplishment. It's hard to do when your donor base is really big but it's always worth keeping in mind."
- Hotlin Ompusunggu



Fundraising is an important aspect of any conservation project but it can seem like a mysterious world if you haven't had to raise funds before. Rodrigo Medellín has been doing it for a while now and emphasises the need to believe in ourselves. He says: "You have to be engaging, and you have to be fully convinced that this is exactly what you want to do".

Framing your work well also helps according to Laury Cullen. Being a conservationist in the Atlantic Forest means being embedded in one of the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. But he can also frame it as a compelling case for conservation, home to charismatic species like black lion tamarins and jaguars.

He believes that thinking about the landscape you work in and how you want to sell it to funders is really important. What's the best angle to sell your work? Is there a species there that would help you gain specific funding and ultimately help you protect the whole ecosystem? All those points need to be clear in your head before you go and talk to potential funders.





Understanding funders' wants and needs is a crucial part of the process and something that Caleb Ofori-Boateng knows well. He explains: "I probably spend the same amount of time, if not more, trying to understand the potential funder than writing the funding proposal. I read their websites, look at their eligibility criteria, and then look up the people that they've funded recently. And all of these together put me in a position where I can think like the funder."

It's also useful to think about the kind of fundraising we want to tap into. Are we hoping to go through international and national foundations? Or are we looking for private donations? Elena Bykova recommends checking organisations that can put you in touch with potential donors. She explains: "Having a direct relationship with them is great because we can really explain why we need the money and how it would make a difference on the ground. It also means that we get to build longer term relationships with some of our donors and they become our friends."



Purnima Barman raising awareness of the greater adjutant stork in India

This point resonated with many of the Whitley Award winners featured in this toolkit. It's one thing to get a funder but another all together to build on that relationship and turn it into a long-term funding source. Laury adds: "I invite most of our donors to come and see the project. Of course we send the reports and the pictures but nothing is the same as coming here and spending a few days with the local people". Purnima Barman also believes that being honest is essential to keep the relationship going. She says: "They should know what is going on so don't be shy and share some of your challenges with them".



It is important as well to remember that funders are not faceless entities. Amanda Vincent reminds us that we want to appeal to them as people. She explains: "You want to make those people proud and you want to make those people feel that you're fully engaged. So get your reports in on time and really make some effort to try to connect with the donor through other forms of communication".

Lastly, conservation projects often require us to be adaptable and flexible with the way we run them so Shivani Bhalla recommends diversifying sources of funding as much as possible rather than putting all our eggs in one basket. She also reminds us that fundraising doesn't have to fall all on one person: "Reach out to your team! I think that's an important tip for anyone who feels that all the pressure is on them to fundraise. It's important to look around your team and ask if anyone else is interested in fundraising. And then you can help and train that person."

"It's cliché but persistence is key and you just need to keep applying." - Çağan Şekercioğlu





TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

Are you keen on getting started after reading all this advice? Here are five tips that the Whitley Award winners told us they wished they had known about when they started their career!



"The only thing that is not acceptable is to continue living without making any changes in your own life." - Rodrigo Medellín

"Start saving the biodiversity in your own backyard and then create a spark. You have to start the environmental education journey in your own home." - Purnima Barman



"You can create your niche where you fit perfectly well, and then you can adapt. You can contribute to the world in whatever shape you want." - Pablo Borboroglu



"Learn about sociology, pedagogy, psychology, and even linguistics because it's really important to have some knowledge about different languages. Having a range of skills and knowledge is quite useful to work as a conservationist." - Elena Bykova

"Learning comes from the field experience! It comes with working with people and with testing and trying things." - Laury Cullen





THE CONTRIBUTORS

1

Mexico
Rodrigo Medellín

2

Guatemala
Marleny Rosales-Meda

3

Brazil
Laury Cullen

4

Argentina
Pablo Borboroglu

5

Turkey
Çağan Şekercioğlu

6

Ghana
Caleb Ofori-Boateng

7

Kenya
Dino J. Martins
Shivani Bhalla

8

Uganda
Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka

9

Indonesia
Hotlin Ompusunggu

10

Philippines
Amanda Vincent

11

India
Purnima Barman

12

Uzbekistan
Elena Bykova



Purnima Barman, of NGO Aaranyak, is combining conservation of bone-swallowing storks with social reform in Assam – giving economic opportunities to over 10,000 women by weaving hargila stork motifs into traditional textiles. She won a Whitley Award in 2017 and Continuation Funding in 2019.



Shivani Bhalla and her NGO, Ewaso Lions, work with Samburu warriors to diffuse conflict between herders and carnivores in Kenya. Shivani won a 2014 Whitley Award and scaled up her work with 2016 and 2019 Continuation Funding.



Pablo Borboroglu won WFN's top prize in 2018 – the Whitley Gold Award. Founder of the Global Penguin Society, Pablo combines science, management and education to conserve penguins across the Southern Hemisphere, using them as a flagship species for wider conservation of the marine environment.



Elena Bykova, with the support of a 2011 Whitley Award and 2013 Continuation Funding, has saved the Critically Endangered saiga antelope from likely extinction on Uzbekistan's Ustyurt plateau. Now, with 2020 Continuation Funding, she and her team at the Saiga Conservation Alliance are taking a holistic approach to recovering the social-ecological system in the Aral Sea Basin.



Çağan Hakkı Şekercioğlu is a leading force for conservation in Turkey. Having won the 2013 Whitley Gold Award and several rounds of Continuation Funding, he and NGO, KuzeyDoğa, are currently working to protect wetland ecosystems whilst bringing real benefits to local people.



Laury Cullen, having won a 2002 Whitley Award and five subsequent rounds of Continuation Funding, has become a world leader in nature-based solutions to climate change. With NGO, IPÊ, he has restored Brazil's largest forest corridor with 1.4 million trees grown in community nurseries. As well as sequestering carbon and supporting rural families, this work is reconnecting isolated wildlife populations including black lion tamarins, jaguars, and tapirs.



Dino J. Martins has researched insect-plant interactions, collaborated with farmers on sustainable agriculture, and contributed to the Kenyan government's legislation against pesticides. His lifelong dedication to pollinators and people is improving food security, boosting livelihoods and conserving biodiversity across East Africa. Winning the 2015 Whitley Gold Award, he is the first alumnus to join WFN's Board of Trustees.



Rodrigo Medellín – the Bat Man of Mexico – has been supported by WFN for 17 years, over which time he has expanded his work to 16 countries across 4 continents. With NGO, BIOCONCIENCIA, he has made a measurable impact on how people perceive bats, promoting their importance for pollination, pest control and seed dispersal.



Caleb Ofori-Boateng won a 2019 Whitley Award. Ghana's first formally trained herpetologist, Caleb rediscovered and now protects the Togo slippery frog with his NGO, Herp Conservation Ghana.



Hotlin Ompusunggu received a 2011 Whitley award, the 2016 Whitley Gold Award and is still scaling up with 2019 Continuation Funding. Poverty and poor health are drivers of deforestation in Indonesia so Hotlin and her NGO, Healthy Planet Indonesia, offer free healthcare in exchange for planting trees across critical orangutan habitat.



Marleny Rosales-Meda is making sure that indigenous knowledge of sustainable hunting informs conservation practice and national law in Guatemala. Having won a 2008 Whitley Award and three further rounds of Continuation Funding to support the creation of the country's first scientifically-based & community-validated hunting region, she is working with her NGO, ORCONDECO, to build conservation capacity through youth leadership opportunities.



Amanda Vincent won the first ever Whitley Award! For over 30 years she has put a spotlight on trade in seahorses in the Philippines, tackled destructive fishing practices such as bottom-trawling and influenced progressive marine management and policies with her NGO, Project Seahorse.



Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka protects the health of mountain gorillas and the people with whom they share space, resources and 98% of their DNA. She was Uganda's first wildlife vet before founding Conservation Through Public Health and, since winning her 2009 Whitley Gold Award and additional Continuation Funding, has become an internationally recognised conservationist.

Credits:

CONCEPT AND CONTENT

Concept and overall design by Julia Migné.

The Whitley Award winners were interviewed by Giada Giacomini, Iona Cunningham-Eurich, Julia Migné, Sarah Wheedleton, Sofia Castelló y Tickell, Susana Veloso Soares, Trisha Gupta, and Will Sharkey.

Illustrations sourced by Maria Carbin.

Proofreading by Amy Forshaw, Danni Parks, Marie Conroy, Sofia Castelló y Tickell, Susana Veloso Soares, Trisha Gupta, and Will Sharkey.

Photos: Carla Rhodes (photo of Purnima Barman p.25), HJ Koldewey (photo of Amanda Vincent p.26)), Les Films au Clair de Lune (photo of Caleb Ofori-Boateng p.26), Nina Fascione (photo of Shivani Bhalla p.25), Stacey Iverson (photo of Elena Bykova p.25).

FUNDER

Whitley Fund for Nature

PUBLISHED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE UNITED KINGDOM IN 2022 BY CONSERVATION OPTIMISM

This toolkit is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

We actively encourage reproduction in all forms, by all means electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FOR BUDDING CONSERVATIONISTS

