Conservation News

Conservation Leadership Programme celebrates 40th anniversary

This year, the Conservation Leadership Programme (CLP) celebrates 40 years of equipping early-career conservationists with essential leadership skills, support and resources needed to conserve biodiversity and promote sustainable development locally, while contributing globally. Over the last 4 decades, the CLP partnership of Fauna & Flora, BirdLife International and the Wildlife Conservation Society has supported c. 4,400 early-career conservationists leading 955 projects in 109 countries around the world, all focused on protecting globally threatened biodiversity through locally-led endeavours.

The flagship annual small-grants scheme, the CLP Team Awards, has supported 746 teams of emerging leaders working to address priority conservation issues in low- and middle-income biodiverse countries, through project funding, specialized training and continuous mentorship. Many of these projects have been instrumental in rescuing species from the brink of extinction. For example, several globally threatened species, including the grey-breasted parakeet *Pyrrhura griseipectus*, Fiji ground frog *Cornufer vitianus* and the greater adjutant stork *Leptoptilos dubius*, have been recategorized to a lower threat status on the IUCN Red List as a result of CLP-supported conservation efforts, and 75 new protected areas and 130 NGOs have been established through CLP support. Through targeted research and outreach, CLP projects have uncovered vital new information to guide conservation efforts—including the discovery or rediscovery of 130 species—and rallied local communities, and even whole societies, to preserve biodiversity.

The Programme has provided hundreds of early-career leaders with professional development opportunities. For example, the CLP Career Placements scheme (formerly referred to as internships) has placed 164 emerging conservationists (CLP mentees) in regional offices of CLP partner organizations, where they have contributed to ongoing projects and gained on-the-ground work experience. Subsequently, most mentees have secured permanent positions within their host organizations and led successful conservation careers. The CLP Alumni Grants scheme has awarded 487 grants totalling USD 546,446 to CLP alumni, enabling them to attend international conferences and training courses. The Programme has also overseen c. 70 international and regional training courses, which has equipped hundreds of early-career leaders with essential skills in topics not usually covered in formal education, such as Project Planning & Fundraising, Conservation Leadership, Communications, Behaviour Change, and Writing for Conservation (co-organized with the *Oryx* editorial team).

Over 40 years, CLP has played a key role in the career progression of thousands of conservationists. A 5-year survey of 700 CLP alumni revealed that 98% of respondents considered CLP support as important for their subsequent career, and 91% reported they were still working in conservation 10 years after receiving their first CLP award. By giving these early-career conservation leaders the full suite of support, they have mobilized actions, shaped policies and fostered sustainable development, and many CLP alumni are now world-renowned for their ground-breaking accomplishments.

To view a full list of the projects supported by CLP since it was established, visit conservationleadershipprogramme.org/our-projects.

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The Whitley Awards 2025

On 30 April, the Whitley Fund for Nature announced the six conservation leaders receiving the Whitley Awards 2025. The Whitley Awards ceremony—the flagship event of the UK-based charity—was held at the Royal Geographical Society and was also broadcast online.

The awards are worth GBP 50,000 each in project funding over 1 year. The 2025 Whitley Award Winners are Yara Barros, Brazil (Big cat coexistence: Conserving jaguars in Iguaçu National Park); Reshu Bashyal, Nepal (Healing Forests: Safeguarding medicinal plants in Nepal); Andrés Link, Colombia (Canopy corridors: Reconnecting brown spider monkeys in Colombia); Rahayu Oktaviani, Indonesia (Calling for community: Saving the song of the Javan gibbon); Nurzhafarina Othman, Malaysia (Connecting landscapes for Bornean elephants in Sabah); and Federico Pablo Kacoliris, Argentina (The Guardians of Somuncurá Plateau's Biodiversity).

In addition, a Whitley Award alumnus is chosen to receive the Whitley Gold Award in recognition of their outstanding contribution to conservation. Worth GBP 100,000, this top prize was presented to 2018 Whitley Award winner Olivier Nsengimana and his team at the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association. They have led work to rebuild the grey crowned crane population and protect its wetland habitat in Rwanda. This award will support Olivier and his team to expand their community-led efforts and secure protection for this iconic species across East Africa. In just 1 decade, the Association has

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