



WILDCRU
Wildlife Conservation Research Unit



**Post-Graduate Diploma in Wildlife
Conservation (Recanati-Kaplan)**

IMPACT REPORT

2024 & 2025

The Diploma

Established in 2008 with transformative support from the Recanati-Kaplan Foundation, the Post-Graduate Diploma in Wildlife Conservation is an integral part of WildCRU's mission to transform wildlife conservation through world-class research, training and implementation. The course is delivered by WildCRU as a collaboration between the Department of Biology and Oxford Lifelong Learning (historically known as the Department for Continuing Education) and primarily funded by Panthera. Lady Margaret Hall, where many of WildCRU graduate students are registered, has provided college affiliation to the Diploma all these years.

Modules in wildlife ecology and behaviour, species and biodiversity monitoring, population management, habitat assessment, human populations and conservation are complemented by an array of practical skills from first aid to fundraising to scientific writing. These set modules are followed by a two-part customised research project where students use their own data to explore specific topics and conservation challenges.

The course's intensive 7-month curriculum, suits candidates in employment and those with young families. Being a small course, with typically 7-10 students per cohort, participants receive a high level of personalised teaching and one-on-one project supervision.



Prof Claudio Sillero

Course Director

"For almost two decades, Tubney House has been much more than the Diploma's home - it has been a place where conservationists from across the world have lived, learned and formed lasting friendships. As we close this remarkable chapter and move to Pembroke College and the Life and Mind Building, we carry that spirit of community with us. The LaMB places the Diploma at the heart of Oxford's scientific life and opens exciting opportunities for future cohorts."

Training
conservation
scientists and
practitioners from
around the world.



Training people from
biodiversity-rich
countries counters
parachute conservation



Over 90 Diploma
alumni have started
or completed further
graduate studies

Diploma participants are aspiring young conservationists from biodiversity-rich countries, with WildCRU focusing on the most talented and least privileged applicants who would not normally have the opportunity to attend a world-class university.

To date 137 students from 55 countries have completed the course – including 52 from Africa, 48 from Asia, 25 from South America, 6 from Europe, 4 from North America, and 2 from Oceania.

Overall, we have trained 84 men and 53 women, and in the last 5 years we have achieved our target to attain gender balance, with 20 men and 20 women trained.

Numerous publications result from Diploma research projects and alumni develop lasting collaborations with WildCRU, generating diverse jobs and opportunities across the globe. Diploma alumni have been authors on over 1,000 scientific papers, technical reports and public outreach items to date. Notably, there have been 13 articles published in Science.

Former students have contributed to IUCN Red List assessments of at least 15 carnivore species, including 11 cat species, and EU status assessments for grey wolves, bears, lynx, and wolverine. Several alumni have gained prestigious positions and awards, and others have obtained positions in local, national and regional conservation focused organisations.



Ruth Kwabe from Zambia became Fund and Project Manager for the Painted Wolf Foundation



2017 alumni Raffael Hickisch established an NGO in the Central African Republic and has built several tools to help manage protected areas across the country

RECENT ALUMNI AWARDS:



Leticia Benavalli won the 2024 Marsh Award for Early Career Conservation



Badru Mugerwa won the 2025 Indianapolis Emerging Conservationist Award



Eva Ayaro won the 2025 Marsh Award for Early Career Conservation



Moreangels Mbizah received a 2026 Whitley Award for Conservation



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Class of 2024

Seven conservationists made up the class of 2024 – from Africa, the Americas and China. Each brought unique experiences from working in their home countries in a diverse range of subjects, including human-wildlife coexistence, community-based environmental education and biodiversity conservation. At Oxford they were taught, mentored and supported by various WildCRU staff, researchers and graduate students.

Lorraine Jowa ZIMBABWE



Growing up on a small farm in rural Zimbabwe, Lorraine's family were in constant conflict with baboons and monkeys that raided their crops - threatening their food security and livelihood. While studying biology at university she took modules related to wildlife management and human-wildlife conflict which fed her interest in conservation and supporting coexistence with wildlife. She also became passionate about environmental education in communities and schools.

Prior to joining the Diploma, Lorraine lived and worked in Nyaminyami District, one of the least developed areas of west Zimbabwe, where she was instrumental in developing and implementing education activities emphasizing the importance of conservation and environmental protection. Her team successfully introduced environmental concepts into the school curriculum, ensuring that the next generation is equipped with the knowledge and passion to protect the planet.

PROJECT.....

Human wildlife conflict in agricultural communities; A case study of crop raids and livestock.



Darya Assil USA



Darya grew up in an area with little to no wildlife, so she had travel long distances to observe animals in their natural habitats. Her excitement during these experiences made her passionate about conservation and fed her aim to protect wildlife globally. Learning about habitat destruction, biodiversity loss and the decline of wildlife populations pushed her to pursue conservation as a career.

Prior to joining the Diploma, Darya's experience included wildlife rehabilitation, human-wildlife conflict mitigation, marine and terrestrial surveying, and animal tracking - specifically of mammals and megafauna. These roles in different regions of the world particularly inspired her through demonstrating the potential for nature recovery and restoration.

PROJECT.....

Assessing interactions between brown hyenas and sympatric apex predators in Gonarezhou National Park, Zimbabwe.

Hua Zhong CHINA



Hua's appreciation of nature and wildlife began with a fascination for wild cats.

Prior to joining the Diploma he carried out field studies of wild carnivores and biodiversity surveys across western China. These projects mainly used camera trapping, satellite monitoring and genetic analysis of scat samples.

This work inspired him to learn more about the ecology of carnivores, and especially their interactions with people and human-dominated landscapes. His ultimate aim is to work towards mitigating human-wildlife conflicts in western China.

PROJECT

Coexistence patterns of snow leopard, wolf, bharal and livestock in the Qinghai-Tibet plateau.

Ruth Kwabe ZAMBIA



Ruth sees working in conservation as contributing to the greater good of humanity in present and future generations. She hopes to inspire and influence young Africans like herself to dare to dream and pursue careers in conservation.

Before joining the Diploma she gained three years of professional experience in conservation, specialising in field ecology with a focus on carnivore monitoring and tracking. She also had the opportunity to work with protected area law enforcement and data management.

PROJECT

African wild dog habitat selection in the greater Kafue ecosystem.



Dr Egil Dröge

Diploma Coordinator
& Lead Tutor

"As lead tutor for the course, one of the greatest privileges is seeing students grow in confidence and capability during their time with us. It is particularly fulfilling to follow their progress after completing the Diploma, and to see so many build on this to succeed in their professional careers and ensuing conservation impact."



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**Mynor Sandoval-
Lemus**
GUATEMALA



Since childhood, Mynor knew his life would be around animals and nature. During schooling he became captivated by biology and then conservation. This fed into a life goal of working towards a balance of people with nature and attaining wellness. To pursue this aim, he started working with people and organisations with an interest in protected areas and indigenous communities in Guatemala.

Previous to the Diploma, his work focused on mammal and bird conservation - the highlight being working on tapir conservation in the Mayan Biosphere Reserve. This role also involved some collaborative work with jaguar conservation. He gained additional experience contributing to the management of a marine protected area in Guatemala's Pacific, doing camera trap studies and avian monitoring, as well as mangrove monitoring and restoration with local communities - which led to an involvement with indigenous land management.

PROJECT

Assessing multispecies spatial-temporal changes in the Maya Forest.

Dr Jorgelina Marino
Diploma Welfare Tutor



“One of the greatest strengths of the Diploma is that it brings together people working in very different conservation contexts from around the world. It is especially encouraging that half of our students last year were women, contributing to a more inclusive conservation community.”

Melisa Lera
ARGENTINA



Melisa always felt strongly connected to nature. Growing up, she learned how humans impact nature, and the complicated relationships our species has with others. Her decision to work in conservation is rooted in a desire to build better interactions between humans and nature, and to protect the planet from damaging human actions.

Prior to joining the Diploma, Melisa was involved in several conservation projects in Antarctica, Patagonia and Costa Rica, studying and doing field work - mainly with charismatic marine species.

PROJECT

Insights on the novel predation by pumas on Magellanic penguins in Monte León National Park, Argentina.



Visual abstract for a study led by Melisa exploring predation of Magellanic penguins by recovering puma populations in Patagonia - published in the Journal for Nature Conservation

Taisiia Marchenkova RUSSIA



Taisiia grew up in the Republic of Tatarstan, far from the realms of biology - until a fleeting meeting with a roe deer sparked her interest in wildlife. This journey took her 8,000km from her hometown, to the significant and biodiversity-rich landscape of Primorsky Province where she found her calling. She explored her interest in wildlife conservation during her studies at the Far Eastern Federal University in Vladivostok.

Before joining the Diploma, she was involved in the Wildlife Conservation Society Russia's Amur Tiger Project where she learnt snow-tracking and route counting of ungulates and small predators. After that, she joined the Amur Leopard Project in the Land of the Leopard National Park, and became an assistant research scientist, developing fieldwork skills including camera-trapping. This work focused on leopard population dynamics, the consequences of inbreeding and population restoration processes.

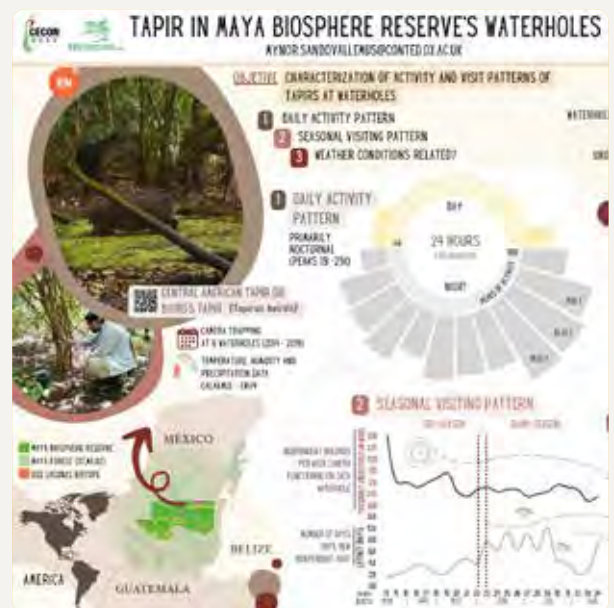
PROJECT

Intraspecific interactions in Far Eastern leopards.

Dr Paul Johnson Diploma Tutor



"It is a great pleasure and a privilege to be a member of the Diploma teaching team. The course has now hosted well over a hundred students from all over the world. It is particularly gratifying to hear how their Oxford experience has helped to propel many of them to influential positions in the protection of biodiversity in their home countries."



Detail from Mynor's poster at the Cambridge Student Conservation Science conference



Taisiia presenting her poster at the Cambridge Student Conservation Science conference

Class of 2025

Nine conservationists made up the class of 2025 – from Africa, Latin America and Europe. Their diverse work experiences prior to joining the Diploma include conducting biodiversity surveys, carnivore monitoring, data analysis, habitat assessment, community-based conservation and fostering human-wildlife co-existence.

This cohort benefited greatly from the diverse interests and skills its members brought to Oxford. They bonded early as a group and developed into a highly integrated, collaborative community, fulfilling some of the Diploma's most ambitious aspirations.



Emmanuel Kutote SOUTH SUDAN



Emmanuel started appreciating nature during school field trips, when he realised the value and beauty of natural spaces. This sparked his aim to become a conservationist within his own country, helping to protect South Sudan's remarkable wilderness.

He managed to join an Environmental Science and Management course in Uganda, which led on to work with the NGO Fauna & Flora. During the past six years with the organisation, he has learnt about project management and helped encourage local communities to protect natural resources. He has also been involved in biodiversity surveys using camera traps, eDNA, aerial monitoring and ground patrols across protected areas - providing crucial information for the organisation and government.

PROJECT

Assessing post-conflict wildlife assemblages in Southern National Park, South Sudan.

Mariana Almaraz- Alandia BOLIVIA



Mariana wanted to work with animals from a young age, and high school helped focus her interest in wildlife and habitats. She proceeded to study Biology at Universidad Mayor de San Simon, exploring different fields within the biological sciences, and becoming set on a career in conservation.

Her experience to date includes bird and lepidoptera research for a multi-disciplinary urban corridor project in Cochabamba city. She also participated in the 6th expedition to study and protect the Bolivian dolphin, conducted by the NGO Faunagua.

She is currently part of the Andean Carnivore Project, following on from her bachelor thesis exploring habitat use of the Geoffroy cat in the Inter-Andean dry forests of Bolivia.

PROJECT

Temporal and spatial co-existence of a carnivore guild in the Inter-Andean dry forests of Bolivia.

Trevor Balone

BOTSWANA



Trevor's journey into conservation started with a Bachelor's degree in Range Science from the Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, where he got to dive into everything from conservation ecology to GIS mapping.

After graduating he worked with Cheetah Conservation Botswana, focusing on camera trapping, cheetah monitoring, and human-wildlife conflict mitigation. He is currently a Research Officer at Leopard Ecology and Conservation, conducting carnivore monitoring, collecting and analysing behavioural data.

He has a particular interest in blending traditional tracking skills with modern conservation technology to improve wildlife monitoring. Prior to joining the Diploma, he co-authored a publication in *Frontiers in Conservation Science* exploring integrative approaches to studying carnivores in low-density ecosystems.

PROJECT

Foraging behavioural shifts of lions at the interface of reserve and cattle-post landscapes.



Esme Stewart

UNITED KINGDOM



Growing up in the English countryside, Esme developed a passion for nature and wildlife from a young age. After completing a BSc in Zoology at Leeds University, she interned for a rhino ecotourism company in Zambia, working to integrate tourism and conservation in North Luangwa National Park. This experience reinforced her interest in balancing wildlife protection with sustainable tourism.

After graduating, she joined a great ape ecotourism company in Uganda and Rwanda, as the Community and Conservation Project Manager. This involved work to address human-wildlife conflict, mitigate zoonotic disease transmission, and implement responsible tourism protocols. She also helped develop a partnership with the Jane Goodall Institute, local leaders and the private sector introducing the Roots & Shoots programme in western Uganda, encouraging environmental engagement amongst students.

PROJECT

Drivers of Ethiopian wolves' den site selection in human dominated landscapes.



Romaric Tegang CAMEROON



Romaric has a strong passion for wildlife protection, particularly large carnivores, the African golden cat, pangolins, elephants and giraffes.

His work to date has focused on the ecology and conservation of threatened species in Central Africa, gaining fieldwork experience in data collection, capacity building, and awareness-raising in protected areas across Cameroon.

For the past four years, he has worked as the Bénoué Complex Lion Project Coordinator. This role includes studying human-wildlife coexistence, coordinating threatened species monitoring in the Benoué landscape, data management and analysis, and documenting the distribution and threats to African golden cats in Boumba-Bek National Park using camera traps.

PROJECT

Multi-occupancy patterns of large carnivores in the Bénoué Complex, Northern Cameroon.

Stephen Ngoma ZAMBIA



Growing up in Zambia's Shibuyunji District, Stephen's passion for wildlife and conservation began at a young age. It led him to pursue a degree in Wildlife Management at Copperbelt University, where his thesis focused on the effects of farming on waterfowl population density.

His commitment to wildlife conservation deepened further when he began working for Panthera. He saw firsthand the vulnerability of carnivores to habitat degradation and human-induced threats like poaching with wire snares in Kafue National Park. His work in monitoring and habitat protection reinforced his aims to support direct action and strategic conservation efforts.

PROJECT

Spatial ecology and habitat use of African wild dogs, cheetahs, and lions in Kafue National Park.

Dr Darragh Hare Diploma Tutor



"Teaching on the Diploma is a highlight of my year. Every cohort is full of students who bring a wealth of experience in wildlife management, spanning continents, species, and real-world conservation challenges. I learn at least as much from the students as they learn from me."



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Eva Ayaro TANZANIA



Eva's passion for nature led her to study Wildlife Sciences and Conservation at the University of Dar es Salaam.

Since graduating, her professional experience has focused particularly on the protection of endemic chameleon and frog species in Tanzania. This has included biodiversity research, species monitoring, habitat assessments and community-based conservation. She has also been involved in wild dog conservation, avian monitoring, and species distribution studies in several of Tanzania's protected areas. In a previous role as Field Officer with the Environmental Conservation for Wildlife and Community Enterprise (ECOWICE), she led conservation education programs, human-wildlife conflict mitigation initiatives and sustainable livelihood projects.

Eva is currently a Tasso Leventis African Biodiversity Fellow at the University of Oxford's ICCS, an EDGE Fellow with the Zoological Society of London, and a Research Intern at the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI), where she contributes to species monitoring, ecological assessments, and conservation planning. She is also involved with the Women in Conservation Organization, supporting environmental education and conservation leadership for young women in Tanzania.

PROJECT

Pygmy chameleons: ecological insights and conservation challenges in the Nguru Mountains.



TSZ ©



Maitland Ely AUSTRALIA



Growing up in the south west of Western Australia Maitland was surrounded by a diverse range of flora and fauna. He also witnessed the considerable negative impacts of mining on many wildlife and plant communities. While he learnt the important role this industry plays in Western Australia, he came to understand the importance of educating others on the need to protect and restore native flora and fauna.

His work experience includes, assisting in a Marine Turtle monitoring program on the Class A Reserve Barrow Island with a focus on Flatback Turtles. He was also part of an environmental research team in the Jarrah Forest, conducting conservation rehabilitation work including botanical monitoring.

He currently works as an Ecologist in Western Australia, a role which has involved conducting a wide range of different fauna and flora surveys across Western Australia, including Black Cockatoo Habitat Assessments.

PROJECT

Protected area types influence on spatial usage of small carnivores in Tanzania.

“The WildCRU Diploma was a transformative experience that strengthened my technical skills and my conservation-critical thinking. The mentorship, community and real-world focus made it an invaluable step in my career.”

Matilde Sant’Ana



© Charlotte Searle

Matilde Sant’Ana PORTUGAL



Matilde’s journey into conservation began with a BSc in Biological Sciences from University of London’s Royal Veterinary College. Since graduating, she has worked on several conservation projects across Africa, including in Madagascar, South Africa and Malawi - gaining experience in species monitoring, ecological research and conservation management.

She is currently the Field Research Coordinator in Liwonde National Park, overseeing wildlife monitoring programs and research operations. Focal species include African wild dogs, lions, and cheetahs, which have been gradually reintroduced to the park since 2017, as well as rare antelopes, vultures, and Temminck’s pangolins.

PROJECT

Post-release analysis of reintroduced African wild dogs in Liwonde National Park, Malawi.

➤ Capacity building

Many Diploma alumni continue academic studies – by the end of 2025, 60 alumni had embarked on PhD and 30 on MSc programmes (including 2 MBAs). Four alumni are now assistant professors in the USA and one is an associate professor in Russia.



NOTABLE ALUMNI ACADEMIC MILESTONES 2024-5:



Ardiantiono from Indonesia started a postdoc at University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA



Tsyon Asfaw from Ethiopia started a postdoc at Leeds University, UK



Mehnaz Jahid from Bangladesh completed her PhD in Canada

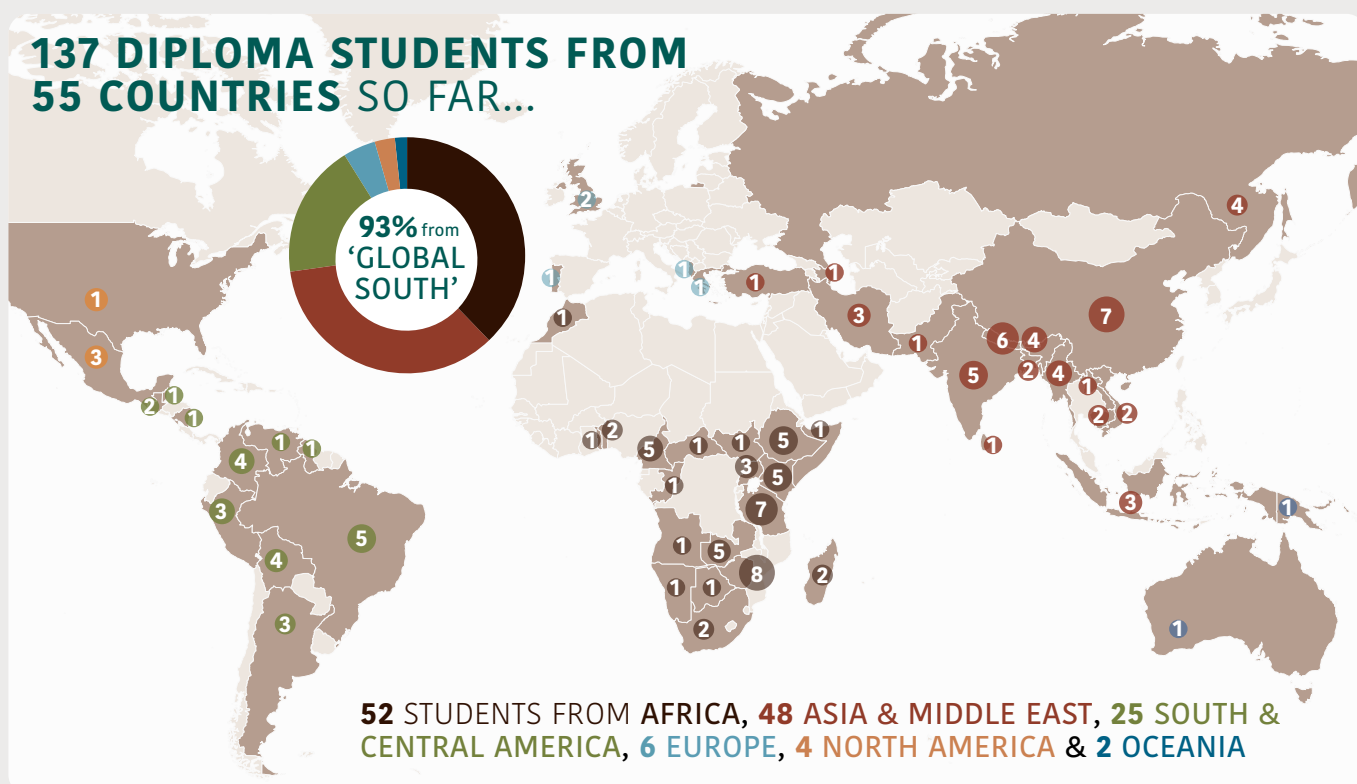


Irene Pinondang from Indonesia completed her PhD at Kent University, UK



Bilal Mustafa from Pakistan started his PhD in Texas Tarleton University, USA

137 DIPLOMA STUDENTS FROM 55 COUNTRIES SO FAR...



Follow-up funding

With support from the Robertson Foundation each year WildCRU awards scholarships to a few outstanding students to assist in their career development. Four scholarships were presented in 2024;

MELISA LERA: ARGENTINA: Impact of pumas on Magellanic penguins in Argentina

DARYA ASSIL: USA: Interspecific interactions between large carnivores in Gonarezhou National Park, Zimbabwe

HUA ZHONG: CHINA: Coexistence of predators, prey and livestock in the Central Himalayas

MYNOR SANDOVAL: GUATEMALA: Biodiversity conservation in the Maya Forest, and implementing capacity building workshops (pictured)



Supported by Joanna and Martyn Hitchcock, the WildCRU Panthers Fund at Lady Margaret Hall helps Diploma graduates extend their impact. In 2024, it supported Taiisia Marchenkova's research on Amur leopards, and provided essential resources to the course including laptops and project management training.

WildCRU also runs an 'Inclusivity Accelerator' fund. The key purpose of the Accelerator is to acknowledge and promote people of colour and women, local expertise and indigenous knowledge from our research locations around the world. Eleven bursaries were awarded in 2024 and five in 2025.

2024

ABADI WERETA: ETHIOPIA: Equipment award

ANDREA SIBANDA: ZIMBABWE: Equipment award (pictured)

BRAWIN KUMAR: INDIA: Support for Madras Hedgehog project training workshops

ELMON DHLOMO: ZIMBABWE: Equipment award (pictured)

HANNAH SACKY: GHANA: Analytical training

KEDISELATSE SELUME: BOTSWANA: Conference award (pictured)

MEENA VENKATAMARAN: INDIA: Conference attendance

MONICA NGASIKE: KENYA: Training visit to Lion Landscapes in Tanzania

MUSTAFA DULE: ETHIOPIA: Equipment award

NIMA BADELU: IRAN: Equipment award

STEPHANO ASECHEKA: TANZANIA: English language training



2025

EVA AYARO: TANZANIA: Equipment to build inclusive capacity for amphibian acoustic monitoring

EMMANUEL KUTIOTE: SOUTH SUDAN: Support for study and protection of elephants in Bire Kpatuo Game Reserve

ESME STEWART: UK: Attending the Wild Dog United conference

TREVOR BALONE: BOTSWANA: Resources to publish a multi-lingual comic that captures elders' lion stories

STEPHEN NGOMA: ZAMBIA: Support for a large carnivore spatial ecology study in Kafue National Park

KICK-START INITIATIVE

As part of a collaboration between the Zoo Berlin, Berlin Zoo Wild and WildCRU we launched the **Kick-Start Initiative**. The first three grants, each worth €11,600, were awarded in late 2025 to enable recent Diploma graduates to return home and develop their own field-based conservation project. The beneficiaries were:

EVA AYARO

Data to Impact: Advancing chameleon conservation and building Tanzania's herpetofauna research capacity

EMMANUEL KUTIOTE

Understanding forest elephant movement patterns in Bire Kpatuo Game Reserve, South Sudan

ROMARIC TEGANG (pictured below)

Ecology and conservation of leopards in Boumba-Bek National Park, Cameroon



With the move to the new Life and Mind Building (the LaMB) in Oxford, and the housing of students in Pembroke College, the Diploma student experience will likely be very different from September 2026. Being taught in a brand new, state-of-the-art building in the heart of Oxford will be very inspiring, and the ease with which they can visit talks and lectures outside their formal curriculum plus engage with other colleagues will be greatly improved.

In the next 3-5 years, we plan to increase the visibility of the Diploma and increase its matriculation to enable more conservationists to benefit. We aim to deliver sustainable growth, increase teaching resources and identify new funders. Central to this vision is retaining the defining nature of the Diploma - its sense of community, personalised teaching and scholarships for most of the students. This will be possible thanks to recent funding from the Arabian Leopard Fund and the Notsew Orm Sands Foundation which has enabled us to initiate our targeted growth, and ensure we can maintain our focus on students from the Global South. We also hope to introduce, in partnership with Zoo Berlin, a scholarship for female conservationists. Watch this space!





Professor Amy Dickman

WildCRU Director

"The WildCRU Diploma has truly transformative impacts on its graduates. They return to their field sites equipped with new skills, energised with new ideas, and most importantly of all, with a network of peers who support them as they go back to tackle key challenges in conservation science."

