

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Sixty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 27 November -1 December 2017

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

This information document has been submitted by Canada on behalf of Youth for Wildlife Conservation (Y4WC) in relation to agenda item 23 on *Follow-up of the Youth Forum for People and Wildlife and South Africa's Youth Conservation Programme: Report of the Secretariat*.*

1. At its 17th meeting (Johannesburg 2016) the Conference of the Parties adopted Resolution 17.5 on *Youth Engagement*. We commend this significant step for Youth Engagement.
2. The Youth Delegates who participated in the Youth Forum for People and Wildlife have since founded the Non-Governmental Organization **Youth For Wildlife Conservation (Y4WC)**, which facilitates a global network of early-career conservationists and currently has members in 40 countries. One of the objectives of Y4WC is to be a global platform for youth engagement and empowerment in wildlife conservation and trade matters. By bridging the gap between existing and future policy-makers as well as grassroots conservationists, we believe that this capable and knowledgeable generation can contribute to effective policy and management of wildlife that translates to practical, grassroots conservation efforts on the ground.
3. We commend the Secretariat for the facilitation of World Wildlife Day 2017, for which the theme was *'Listen to the Young Voices'*. Y4WC were official partners in the celebrations and participated in the Youth Panel organized in New York on March 3rd 2017, taking this opportunity to express messages from young conservation leaders from around the world.
4. Y4WC look forward to continuing its partnership with the CITES Secretariat and its Parties, contributing to advancing Youth Engagement within CITES and wildlife conservation.
5. Y4WC is particular keen to contribute to the organization of a side event focused on Youth Engagement and Empowerment at the CoP18 to be held in Sri Lanka. In addition to that, and to assist in the implementation of the recommendations of Conf 17.5, Y4WC aims to hold a three-day pre-CoP Youth Forum, organizing capacity-building workshops and professional development training to selected youth in-person, and a wider network through online engagement. It is anticipated that youth delegates from Party delegations as well as selected youth working on applied wildlife conservation projects on-the-ground will participate and have the opportunity to network across disciplines with experts and peers alike.

* *The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.*

6. Y4WC invites the Standing Committee to take note of the information presented further in this information document regarding the 'Motivations, Challenges and Opportunities of Youth Globally'. We present here an abbreviated version of the longer project report written by Youth for Wildlife Conservation that captures our findings regarding youth engagement in wildlife conservation. The purpose of both the summary and the full report is to provide organizations, governmental institutions and all those involved in engaging youth in conservation worldwide with a basis for constructive discussions around youth engagement in order to ensure that young people are able to participate fully and effectively in all aspects of the conservation field.



“Run by Youth, For Youth, Promoting Youth”

Millennial Engagement in Wildlife Conservation: Motivations, Challenges and Opportunities of Youth Globally

Summary Report

What do we mean by “millennials”?

The term “millennial” is a cultural grouping of humans by age that refers to a specific generation. It is commonly used for those born after the 1980s. Since the term does not have a universally recognized age range, for the sake of the project on which this report is based, we define “millennials” as youth who are between the ages of 18 and 30 years old (born between 1987 and 1999).

Why look into the motivations, challenges and opportunities for millennials in the field of wildlife conservation?

We often hear that youth are less and less engaged in environmental issues nowadays, as our connection with nature diminishes from generation to generation. Yet we face an unprecedented wave of environmental awareness and education in today’s permanently connected world, and youth play a central role in this movement.

Towards the end of 2016, as Youth for Wildlife Conservation (Y4WC) started to take concrete steps towards facilitating a youth network of early-career conservationists, we were unable to find any existing research into the current engagement of millennials in the field of wildlife conservation. Yet, as a newly-formed global youth network we had many questions on our minds, including:

- What are the challenges that our generation faces when seeking professional work in the field of wildlife conservation?
- How easy is it for early-career conservationists to find information on opportunities within the wildlife conservation field?
- What are the regional differences in our motivations into pursuing a career in wildlife conservation and engagement?
- What are the most important gaps in wildlife conservation career development that need to be addressed to increase our engagement?

To address these questions and alongside our partners at IFAW and Impact by Design, Youth for Wildlife Conservation (Y4WC) undertook this project to better understand and address the opportunities and barriers that youth experience, and identify the main gaps that need to be addressed to improve our career development in the field of wildlife conservation. As current leaders of today, and the future leaders of tomorrow, empowering youth is the only way that will ensure today’s wildlife will thrive tomorrow.

Methodology and respondents of project

We used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to better understand the views and needs of millennials for both conservation professionals and those not currently professionally involved in the field, but interested in it. A quantitative survey of 23 questions was fully completed by 332 respondents living across 57 countries. Additionally, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 28 youth living across 20 countries.

All respondents were guaranteed anonymity. During the statistical analysis, we looked into differences between regions and country income levels (classifications determined by the world bank). The detailed information regarding the social survey design, the interview design, the statistical analysis and interpretation can be found in the full report.

KEY PROJECT FINDINGS

The millennial generation will shape the future, yet the field of wildlife conservation is often perceived particularly challenging for youth to establish impactful projects or to find permanent professional positions in. With decreases in global biodiversity and a heavier human impact on the Earth, the millennial generation must be engaged and empowered to take on these challenges, for a more sustainable and harmonious planet for people and wildlife.

Inspiring Millennials

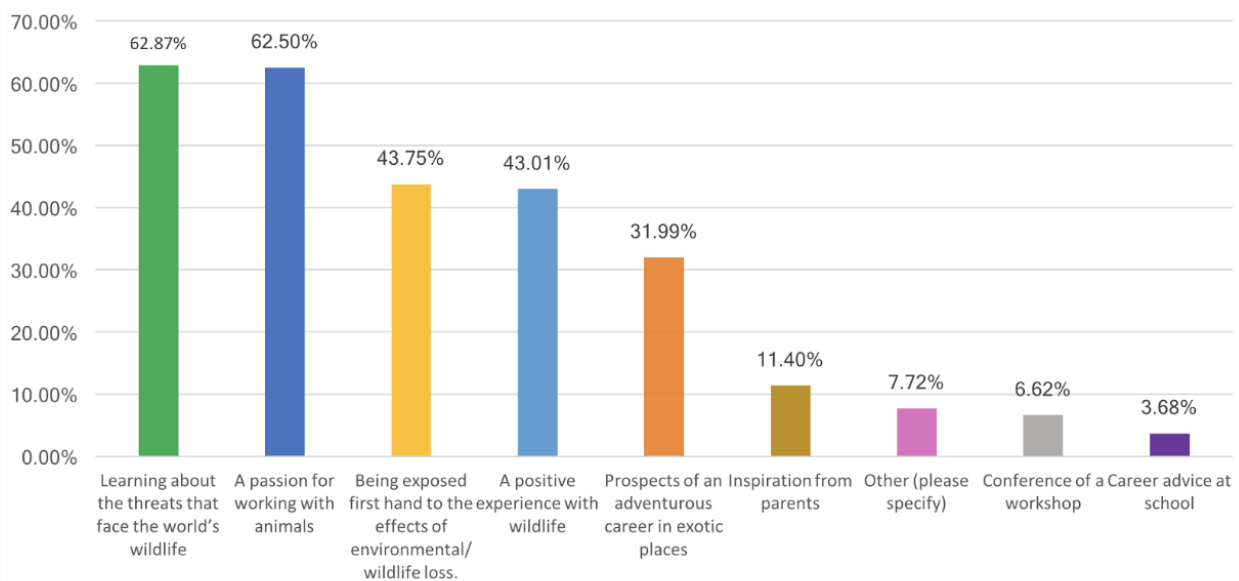


Figure 1. What inspires millennials to get involved with conserving wildlife?

Every day, people are inspired to act for what they find compelling and meaningful. For millennials, the inspiration to conserve wildlife comes from (1) **learning about the threats** that the world's wildlife faces, is instilled by their (2) **passion for working with animals**, by (3) **being exposed first hand** to the effects of environmental damage or wildlife loss, and (4) experiencing a **positive and optimistic experience** with wildlife (Figure 1). The prospect of an **adventurous career** in exotic places also plays a role.

Often, we found that it's a combination of these that cement youth interest, slowly carving their path towards the field of wildlife conservation. Initial inspiration from parents, workshop or conferences, and career advice from an academic setting were all minimal according to our survey, even for those who are currently studying wildlife conservation or a related subject.

Inside Millennials Head's

Not all millennials think and act the same way. In fact, youth's diversity in experiences, skills and opinions is what builds a strong network, capable of taking on the challenges faced by the world's wildlife. Yet, we find some interesting similarities amongst youth from across the world: the issues we care about the most, the challenges we face, the sources and people we trust for information, and the importance of networking.

The issues we are passionate about

Although the field can be divided into many issues and disciplines, the top interest of millennials is **habitat destruction** (i.e. logging, development), with no significant difference across region or national income. It is logical that millennials show interest in these issues since the repercussions of habitat destruction as a driver of biodiversity loss and its negative implications for wildlife and communities globally has been a major finding in many scientific studies. An interest in **human-wildlife interactions** followed closely, with millennials from Latin America and North America significantly more likely to be interested in these issues. The most popular discipline of interest is **Wildlife science and research**, along with education and training.

Our respondents were also aware of the fact that issues/disciplines are ultimately all connected and therefore an understanding of multiple disciplines is required. On average, respondents indicated an interest in 6.23 out of 9 conservation issues/ disciplines listed.

"[Besides my interest in protected areas and youth empowerment, I'm interested in] climate change, poaching wildlife, trafficking also. But you know all the issues about conservation link, you can't talk about climate change without protected areas, poaching without protected areas, wildlife trafficking without protected areas. When I take a commitment with a protected area I need to develop my knowledge on Climate change, wildlife trafficking."

- Conservation Professional from Benin

In scientific research, we trust!

The online world has drastically changed the speed, quantity and quality of information that travels from one corner of the globe to another, keeping us constantly updated on events, news and ongoing research. However, millennials find themselves surrounded by information of various degrees of quality and accuracy. For the overwhelming majority of our respondents, **scientific journals** (78.9% of respondents) and the **websites of non-profit organizations** (66.6%) were the most trusted sources when seeking information on the wildlife issues they are the most interested in. Note that millennials in North America were significantly more likely to trust non-profit organizations than youth from the Middle east and Northern Africa, East Asia and Sub Saharan Africa.

"Scientific articles, peer review journals, anything just scientific."

- Non-Conservation Professional from the United States

This trust towards scientific journals is attributed to the attitudes of millennials towards researchers and scientists, believed to be better at **avoiding any bias** in the way they conduct research, share knowledge and the peer-review system prior to publication. Perceived by our respondents to be free of any political or monetary agenda (or at least to a minimal degree), youth trust them because they are believed to be the experts working in a particular field.

Some interviewees also mentioned that they trust those that have become experts in their own right, not necessarily those in the world of academia or research. This includes members of their **local community** (i.e forest inhabitants, palm oil production workers, or local park rangers) who are extremely knowledgeable in specific localized issues. These people are extremely valuable to youth in areas when not a lot of conventional scientific research has been conducted. This is especially true for youth who do not have reliable access to academic resources or in matters where information relevance is short-lived (e.g. information related to on-the-ground trade and trafficking cannot always wait for scientific research to be published).

It's all about our network

Throughout our project, the importance of one's network was continually emphasized. Networks are formed by those youth trust for reliable information on research updates, wildlife news, best practices, event opportunities, job openings and much more.

“People, your contacts, your networks. That’s very important. [...] When you want to know about something having someone, or someone who knows someone who works in that field is very important resource, better than any data mining or going online. [...] Networking I would say is key.”

- Student from Malaysia

When millennials look for information, their trusted professional network includes **scientists/ staff scientists** (61.5% of respondents), the **staff of conservation organizations** of different scales (local, national and international ~57%), as well as our **teachers/ professors** (56.7%). **Close friends/ social media friends** are also trusted sources of information for more than one third of the respondents (33.6% and 33.9% respectively). A strong and reliable network, therefore, can act as a powerful catalyst and its importance cannot be underestimated.

Millennials' Engagement

From thought to action

Even with the appropriate knowledge, resources and network, transferring an interest of wildlife conservation issues into actions to address them can still be a challenge for millennials and is perceived as such. Although our study finds that youth are involved in and are taking specific actions to work in issue they find compelling, an astounding **90.3%** said they found engaging in wildlife conservation challenging. Yet, millennials do acknowledge the clear benefits to engaging in wildlife conservation issues, **80%** agreed with the statement *'There are benefits to engaging in wildlife conservation issues in my area or school'*, and an overwhelming majority of respondents (**95%**) agreed that *'It is important to do my part to help wildlife'*.

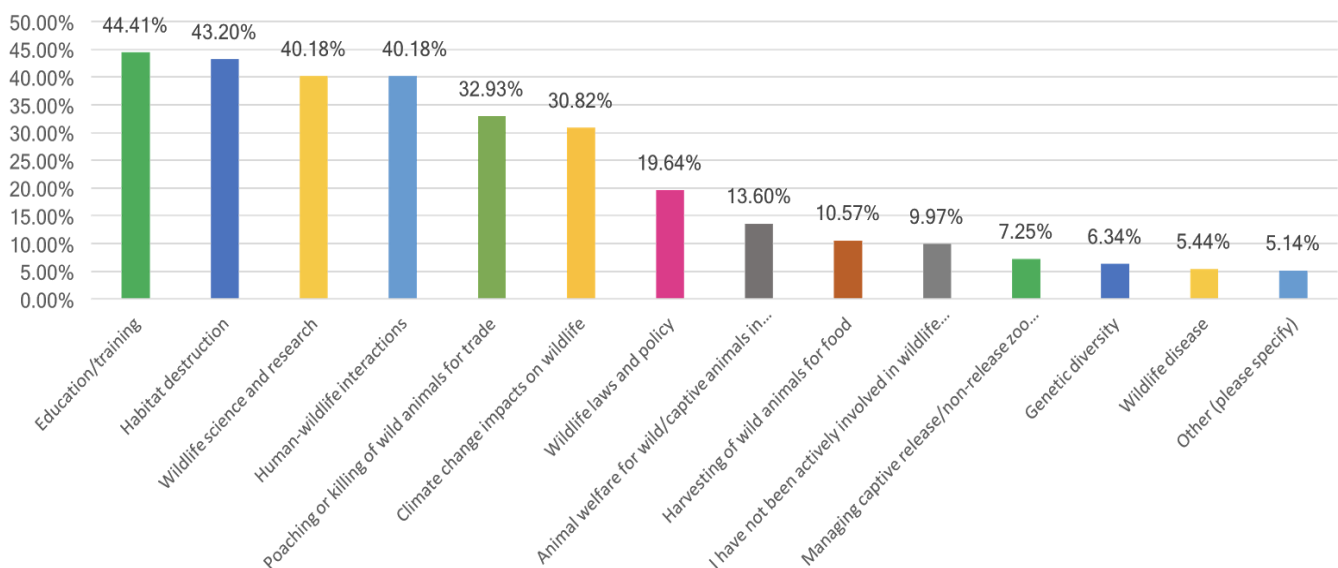


Figure 2. The issues that millennials have been actively engaged in, in the past year.

We found that youth are actively engaged in a multitude of issues relevant to the conservation field (Figure 2). Of course, the level of engagement needs to be taken into account (addressed further below in the section

'Challenges and Barriers' and Figure 3), as there is an obvious difference between signing a petition and running a full-time wildlife conservation project.

Crucially, **9.97%** of respondents stated they have not been actively involved in wildlife conservation issues in any capacity within the past year. Considering our earlier findings that all respondents were interested in at least one issue or discipline of wildlife conservation, there is a real danger of having this generation not fulfilling their potential. This means that the wildlife conservation sector is losing passionate and dedicated youth to other fields because of the lack of support and/or the unique challenges they face when entering this field.

A sense of making a difference, alongside like-minded people!

Like many conservationists who have gone before them, millennials working on wildlife conservation issues want to feel as if their actions are making a positive impact on their environment. If, as established above, an initial inspiration to conserve wildlife comes from learning about the threats that the world's wildlife faces then it can be argued that to continue in this career path, youth would need to witness and experience, not only on an individual level but globally, a measurable positive impact and change to the environment.

According to our respondents 32.31% strongly agree and 49.5% agree that **their actions can make a difference**. Furthermore 'It feels good to do something for animals', 'meeting like-minded individuals', 'contributing to something morally important', 'I feel like I am making a difference', all scored highly on a Likert scale of rewards our respondents describe as the benefits of working in the field of wildlife conservation.

"Meeting like-minded individuals that get excited about conservation, was when I changed my mind, my focus, and have since got a lot of opportunities for which I am grateful for."

- Conservation professional from Belize

Challenges and Barriers

The **financial burden** caused by a continuous and ever-growing need to invest in unpaid voluntary and internship positions, a genuine feeling of **not knowing where to look for opportunities** to get involved, and finally the **uncertainty of having the adequate knowledge and skills** all pose as significant barriers and challenges for youth to establish impactful projects or to launch permanent, professional wildlife conservation careers in.

"On a broader perspective, I think that national support and funding are big barriers to these kind of ambitions and I think everybody needs to get on board and to invest more time and energy into these projects. If we want to help the natural world at all."

- Non-Conservation Professional from U.S.A

For the most part, millennials feel the need to complement their academic studies with practical experiences in order to be competitive in the job market. Such experiences are crucial for developing valuable skills and expanding one's network, and many are more than happy to volunteer and intern in conservation projects. But for youth, and especially for those who do not have a financial safety net, this is a very unsustainable position to be in. With **little job security** and many positions being of a **voluntary and unpaid** nature, the financial burden can be a very important barrier. This can limit youth from lower economic backgrounds from entering the wildlife conservation profession.

According to our respondents, when asked if they are willing to participate in wildlife conservation opportunities in their area, an astounding **86.2%** of them either agreed or strongly agreed, however only **23.71%** believe that there were enough opportunities available to take part in, leaving the majority of respondents unsatisfied with the local opportunities available to them. **80%** of our respondents would like **more legitimate opportunities** for them to participate in wildlife conservation. This may be down to a lack of wildlife conservation opportunities in general or the communications regarding these opportunities are not reaching this target audience. Figure 3

shows the differences between the opportunities our respondents were aware of and the opportunities they were actually involved in in the past year.

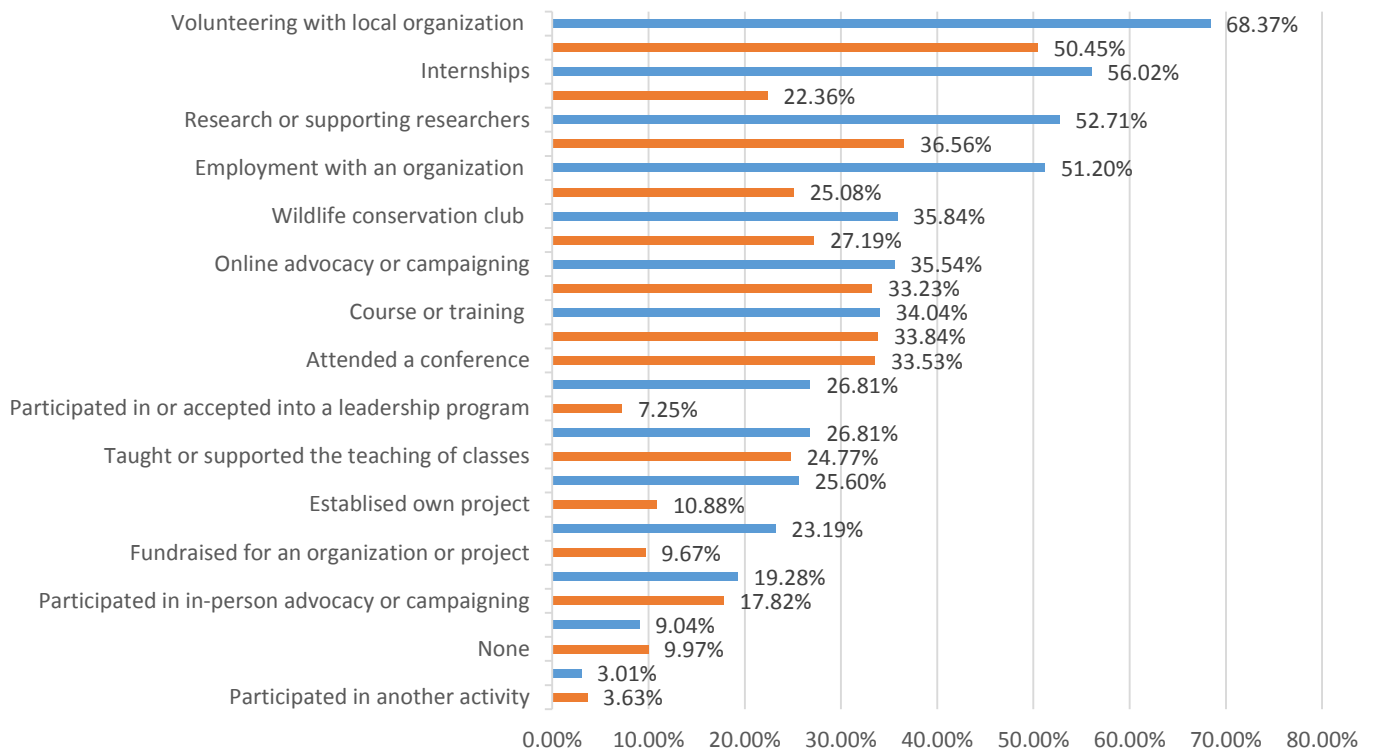


Figure 3. The opportunities millennials are aware of for engaging in wildlife conservation (blue) and what opportunities they have been actively involved in (orange), in the past year.

Although, academic institutions provide a unique setting through which millennials gain knowledge, network, and define their professional aspirations, **conventional academic programs have limitations**. Millennials feel their work would benefit from additional knowledge, such as learning ‘how to engage a community’, ‘how to develop strong partnerships’, and ‘how to manage projects’. Software skills such as using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and statistical analysis software (SPSS, R+) also appeared to be desirable skills that can enhance one’s work.

DEVELOPING MILLENNIALS

In 2012 the world population passed the 7 billion milestone, with **those under the age of 30 accounting for more than half**. These generations are now forming a larger percent of the workforce, with innovative ways of working and new perspectives on global issues, yet they face unique challenges in regards to employment. The field of wildlife conservation is often perceived **particularly challenging** for youth to establish impactful projects or to find permanent professional positions in. While the importance and urgency of conserving our existing wildlife cannot be understated, it’s often noted that there are surprisingly **few opportunities for millennials** (which we define as those between 18-30 years old) to engage in, develop their skills and ultimately successfully establish a lasting career in.

Yet, youth from all corners of the globe play, and will continue to play, a determining role in the future of wildlife conservation. In fact, their career aspirations, attitudes, and knowledge of new technologies can help shape new and innovative solutions to tackle wildlife issues. This needs to be encouraged, such that millennials are not only engaged in said issues, but are effectively empowered to act and achieve the maximum positive impact for wildlife and communities across the world. We identified the following strategies that collectively serves this purpose.

1. Support their passion

A passion for wildlife and conservation efforts can be encouraged in many ways and by many players, but being exposed to both the effects of wildlife loss and positive wildlife experiences are extremely important in fostering an initial interest. Our findings suggest that the best way to inspire the next generation of conservationists is by providing **opportunities for them to learn about the various threats to wildlife**, whether formally through academic training, or informally. Support the building of **peer-to-peer networks** to encourage discussions on complex wildlife conservation issues, best practices and how to overcome challenges.

As established experts, participating in such networks also contributes to knowledge-sharing and creates mentoring opportunities. As family members, fully supporting those who have an interest in exploring the different careers and pathways into conservation is key.

2. Expand professional development resources, beyond traditional academia

Incorporating a **practical and hands-on** component as a crucial part of wildlife conservation programs, one that will equip youth with the soft and hard skills needed, is invaluable. Programs should also reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the field of conservation by providing **inter- and cross-disciplinary training** in sciences, policy-making, management and the social aspects too.

In terms of both variety and content, there is room for improvement for professional development materials tailored specifically to young conservations. We suggest that there be a more coordinated effort between the different entities that produce online courses, in-person trainings, resources etc. and that it is formulated **in consultation with millennials**.

3. Provide more Funding for professional development and youth-led projects

“Right now the most obvious [challenge] is funding, since we are doing a lot of activities. But for big activities or big plans like mass camera trapping work, or like attending workshops in another country, all this requires quite a lot of money which we cannot afford.”

- Student from Borneo

Financial barriers and the lack of funding came up time and time again throughout our findings. Whilst we understand that wildlife conservation lacks funding overall, we argue that **there is an added value in investing in millennials** and their youth-led conservation projects. As young adults instilled with a desire to conserve wildlife for the next generations seeking to establish a fulfilling career in this field, the financial security to undertake relevant studies and gain adequate practical experience is primordial.

We implore all to continually **explore new avenues of funding** and we encourage the public sector and governments to invest in conservation universally. Additionally, we urge organizations to **abandon the unpaid volunteer/ internship schemes** for highly educated applicants, especially those that do not lead to full time positions, and urge employees to provide **more entry-level positions** aimed at early-career skilled people.

4. Connect with technology

Millennials are powered by technology, we suggest institutions improve their communications strategies and utilize **social media and online tools** to connect with early-career conservationists over the world and provide them with legitimate opportunities, accurate research and useful resources for engagement into wildlife conservation.

Also, for youth with limited technological skills and reduced access to the internet, support **computer training programs** in these areas so these youths can take advantage of the global online community and access further professional development opportunities.

With these suggestions, we hope to build capable and knowledgeable millennials, who envisage a long and successful career, scaling up their projects and maximising the positive outcomes for the future of people and wildlife.





Y4WC Mission:

To support early-career wildlife conservationists by empowering them to become catalysts for change and the future conservation leaders the world needs.

Y4WC Vision:

To advance youth in their conservation careers by facilitating an international network, peer to peer support, leadership and professional skills development, and good practice sharing. Building a supportive network of strong, capable, conservationists and future leaders enabling them to envisage a long and successful career in conservation, working for wildlife and communities around the world.

The project on which this summary report is based was conducted by Youth for Wildlife Conservation and published with the support of the International Fund for Animal Welfare and Impact by Design. We would like to express our deepest gratitude towards the individuals who responded to our survey and our interviewees, as well as all the individuals who helped us throughout the process.

For bibliographic and reference purposes this project report should be referred to as:

Tang,C., Crouch, J.S. (2017) *Millennial Engagement in Wildlife Conservation: Motivations, Challenges and Opportunities of Youth Globally. Summary Report.* Youth for Wildlife Conservation.

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