Herdhanu Jayanto waved away another mosquito as he waded through the knee-high grass of Indonesia’s freshwater wetlands. Since dawn, he had searched for signs of one of the world’s rarest reptiles, the Critically Endangered Siamese crocodile. Herdhanu is one of the latest recipients of the WCN Scholarship Program, which empowers young conservationists in their home countries to become tomorrow’s leaders in the field.

The Siamese crocodile and the false gharial are just two of the crocodilians threatened by commercial hunting and habitat loss from large-scale farming that Herdhanu hopes to save from extinction. And he’s not alone.

Today’s Students, Tomorrow’s Leaders

Across the world, other WCN Scholars are leading the way for local conservation efforts on behalf of threatened species.

WCN Scholars pursue degrees and conduct field research that will establish them as local conservation leaders who can effectively protect wildlife. WCN proudly supports the education of these bright scholars not only because it is an investment in the survival of wildlife, but because local conservationists have historically been excluded from leadership roles and sidelined by foreign organizations and individuals. By funding the development of these conservation and veterinary students, the Scholarship Program is supporting the local people who will be in charge of shaping the future of conservation in their countries. This year’s batch of WCN Scholars is our largest yet, with a total of $354,000 in scholarships awarded to 26 conservationists around the globe. Some scholars also hail from countries supported by the program for the first time, such as Belize, the Central African Republic, Kazakhstan, and Myanmar.

One of these scholars, Jamal Galves of Belize, is focusing his work on establishing the endangered Antillean manatee as a flagship species to protect critical coastal habitats from unsustainable development. He plans to create a coalition of local marine groups to steer marine conservation efforts in Belize. Similarly, Tania Romero Bautista is using her scholarship to build sustainable strategies and make conservation more accessible to Peru’s Amazonian communities. By advocating for the rights of Amazonian communities in the formation of conservation policies, Tania is helping local people have more influence in freshwater management and direct involvement in the defense of vital species like the Amazon river dolphin.

On the other side of the world, Naing Lin is uniting local communities in Myanmar to conserve landscapes and the rich biodiversity found within. This includes charismatic species, like elephants and tigers, as well as elusive animals, like the fishing cat. Protecting Myanmar’s wild spaces will benefit both these iconic species and the people who live alongside them. In India, Hasita Bhammar is undertaking an ambitious project to estimate the costs of human-wildlife conflict on local communities. Hasita’s studies will identify activities that ensure the benefits of conserving wildlife will always outweigh the potential costs. This will incentivize community support for coexistence with species like elephants and big cats, thus reducing conflict and furthering Hasita’s goal of establishing co-management of protected areas between local people and government.

By supporting the initiatives of these inspiring students, WCN is able to safeguard more diverse wildlife and encourage the growth of a new generation of local conservationists. From Indonesia to Nepal to Madagascar and beyond, the 26 WCN Scholars are reimagining how conservation can benefit wildlife and people. By investing in those who live in the same spaces as these amazing animals, we are building a future where conservation leaders reflect the landscapes in which they work. We can’t wait to see what tomorrow brings for these scholars and the wildlife they protect.

Jamal Galves is using his WCN scholarship to protect the endangered Antillean manatee in Belize.

Herdhanu Jayanto uses many methods, such as aerial drones, to search for rare crocodilians in Indonesia.
2021 Scholarship Recipients

JUAN SEBASTIAN AYALA Giraldo
Colombia
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP
Sea turtles
MSc - ICESI

HERDHAH JAYANTO
Indonesia
PATO. J. MILLER SCHOLARSHIP
Siamese crocodile
MSc - New Mexico Highlands University

HASITA BHAMMAR
India
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP
Elephant, big cats
PHD - University of Oxford

JAMAL GALVES
Belize
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Antillean manatee
MSc - UC Santa Cruz

JEAN FERNANDO RANDRIAMAJAVONJIASON
Madagascar
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Teatfish sea cucumber
Applied training - (school TBD)

KINLEY
Bhutan
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Rufous-necked hornbill
MSc - University of Greifswald

MICHAEL AKRASI
Ghana
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP
White-bellied pangolin
MSc - Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

JEAN FERNANDO RANDRIAMAJAVONJIASON
Madagascar
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Teatfish sea cucumber
Applied training - (school TBD)

ALBERT SALEMGAREYEV
Kazakhstan
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Saiga antelope
MSc - Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

RAMA MISHRA
Nepal
PATO. J. MILLER SCHOLARSHIP
Fishing cats
PHD - University of Antwerp

FLORENCIA CHIAPERO
Argentina
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP
Andean cat
PHD - University TBD

MARIAM WESTON FLORES
Mexico
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP
Jaguarundi, margay, ocelot, jaguar
MSc - University of Cambridge

NAING LIN
Myanmar
WCN-WCS JOINT SCHOLARSHIP
Tiger, elephant, ungulates, birds, Irrawaddy dolphin
MSc - University of Kent

PAT J. MILLER SCHOLARSHIP
Siamese crocodile
MSc - New Mexico Highlands University

JAMAL GALVES
Belize
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Antillean manatee
MSc - UC Santa Cruz

FLORENCIA CHIAPERO
Argentina
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP
Andean cat
PHD - University TBD

MARIAM WESTON FLORES
Mexico
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP
Jaguarundi, margay, ocelot, jaguar
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Madagascar
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Teatfish sea cucumber
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Kazakhstan
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Saiga antelope
MSc - Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

HASITA BHAMMAR
India
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP
Elephant, big cats
PHD - University of Oxford

JAMAL GALVES
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HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Antillean manatee
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Madagascar
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Teatfish sea cucumber
Applied training - (school TBD)

ALBERT SALEMGAREYEV
Kazakhstan
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP
Saiga antelope
MSc - Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
How Street Dogs Become Cheetah Protectors

The dogs were already barking when his truck pulled up to the Ghanzi camp. As he left the vehicle, desert dust bloomed from a dozen rushing paws and Max Seele spied tails frantically wagging behind the wooden fence slats. He had arrived at Cheetah Conservation Botswana’s (CCB) demonstration farm, where their livestock guarding dog (LGD) training facility prepares these canines to protect farmers’ livestock and prevent human-cheetah conflict. Max reached over the fence to greet a young Tswana dog, a local variety with a bright future in the program thanks to CCB’s intensive research.

The LGD program creates goodwill with farmers and eliminates the primary threat to cheetahs—retaliatory killings for lost livestock. Half of LGD owners are no longer hostile toward cheetahs and fewer where LGDs are deployed. Since 2013, CCB has placed 146 dogs with farmers across Botswana, who have seen an 85% reduction in livestock losses. As the Ghanzi Camp Coordinator, Max manages the demonstration farm where LGDs are trained, and historically, imported Anatolian shepherds have been the preferred breed in similar programs from CCB’s peers. But CCB’s findings from a decade-long study indicate that local landrace dogs—dogs that haven’t received any formal breeding but have adapted to living in human environments—known as Tswana dogs are better suited for the job.

Although CCB’s Farming for Conservation team has always championed Tswana dogs, some farmers in Botswana did not share their confidence. Unlike the imposing Anatolian shepherds, Tswana dogs are smaller in size, so farmers doubted their ability to scare away large carnivores. Anatolian shepherds also carried an air of quality, being expensive pure-breeds, and farmers didn’t trust that the local dogs roaming their streets would be up to the task. Some even declined CCB’s LGD program because they didn’t use Anatolians and the farmers didn’t want a Tswana dog. So CCB set out to prove the worth of Tswana dogs and discovered that these landrace pups were far cheaper, much better behaved, and easier to train than the Anatolians. Being natives, the Tswana dogs also handled the extreme heat and rough terrain of Botswana’s Kalahari region far better than imported Anatolians, which often sought shade on the hottest days. Their smaller size also didn’t hinder their ability to successfully guard livestock from cheetahs, jackals, and even leopards.

Informed by this impressive data, CCB has been validated for making Tswana dogs the stars of their LGD program. Max and his team source unwanted puppies from local villages to train with adult LGDs at their facility, which helps the young dogs learn quicker. CCB’s research shows that each LGD can save up to six cheetahs every year from retaliatory killings and save farmers an annual average of $1,300 in livestock losses, and Tswana dogs will only bolster these numbers as the program continues. These dogs are effective, accessible, and happy protecting their herds, which they treat as family. Their devotion and aptitude for the work will ensure that more cheetahs are saved, farmers’ attitude toward cheetahs improves, and that Tswana dogs get the credit they deserve.

Max Seele (left) administers vaccinations to Tswana dogs at their training facility, ensuring that each dog is healthy before and after placement with a farmer.
Freeing Cotton-Tops from Captivity

Paula stared at the small fingers wrapped around the bars of the cage and the shiny eyes peering out from behind them. The cotton-top tamarin looked past her toward the forest far beyond the window of her family’s living room. This rare monkey, who her grandparents named Amenir, had been their pet for almost five years, a gift from relatives who live near his natural habitat in northern Colombia. With their snow-white head of fur and tiny size, many people find cotton-top tamarins cute and appealing as pets, but these endangered primates do not belong in captivity.

Paula Andrea started researching cotton-tops online, and after learning how detrimental it is to keep them as pets, she began looking for someone to help convince her family to free Amenir.

PT regularly uses social media to explain how keeping cotton-tops as pets reduces their populations and threatens the survival of the species. Paula responded to one such post and shared her desire to free Amenir. Delighted by her compassion, PT provided Paula with educational materials about the impact of the illegal cotton-top trade to sway her family into releasing their pet. It took time, but it worked.

After agreeing that this would be best for Amenir, PT connected Paula’s family with CARDIQUE, the regional environmental authority. They received Amenir and placed him with one of their “friend of wildlife” participants—kind-hearted citizens who house rescued cotton-tops in semi-captivity on private land. While it is unlikely that Amenir can fully return to the wild after years of captivity, his new home allows him to experience life in conditions more closely related to his natural habitat. He may also get to socialize with other rescued tamarins.

Proyecto Tití plans to recruit more caring Colombians to convince others not to keep cotton-tops as pets. To date, thanks to PT’s positive reputation and successful community outreach, 68 people have contacted them in the hopes of turning over captive cotton-tops. A growing number of online supporters are alerting them about other pet cotton-tops, and PT hopes to one day found a rehabilitation center specifically for recovered tamarins. With help from people like Paula Andrea and her family, PT will continue changing attitudes about cotton-tops in Colombia and teaching admirers of this rare species to keep them in their hearts, not their homes.
WCN protects endangered wildlife by supporting conservationists who ensure wildlife and people coexist and thrive.

Invest In Wildlife Conservation

We greatly appreciate your dedication to protecting wildlife. Your kind support is vital to our Partners’ heroic and enduring work in conservation.

WAYS TO GIVE

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