

# notes from the field

SUMMER 2018



New  
Dawn for  
Ethiopian  
Wolves

Scholarship  
Winners

Searching  
the Forest for  
Penguins

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**WCN**

Wildlife Conservation Network

# A New Dawn for Africa's Rarest Wolf

The November evening chill cuts through Edris Ebu's clothing, making him shiver. Around him, the wind rushes through the vast open valley with ferocity. Edris steels himself and focuses on the Ethiopian wolf lying still before him, its upper body is covered with a blanket to keep it calm. He moves quickly, injecting the wolf with a rabies vaccine. Once he's done, Edris—a program manager for the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Program (EWCP)—motions for his team to take off the blanket. The wolf wastes no time, sprinting into the thick grassland covering the Web Valley. This part of the Bale mountains holds around a 100 wolves, the highest density of Ethiopian wolves found in the country, and EWCP aims to protect as many of them as they can from this latest outbreak of rabies.

Edris and his colleagues exchange smiles, exhausted but happy after six days of responding to the rabies outbreak. With only 500 Ethiopian wolves remaining in the wild, a widespread disease outbreak can be devastating. But their quick response, 28 wolves inoculated in just a week, has curbed what could have turned into a rampant spread of the disease throughout the valley. Unfortunately, the team is very familiar with such outbreaks; since EWCP was founded in 1995, they have endured eight other rabies or canine distemper epidemics. Each of those outbreaks spread to wolves through domestic dogs and ultimately wiped out 50-75% of the wolf population in the region. With this recent epidemic, however, they are witnessing a massive shift; they've lost less than 10% of the wolves.

Dr. Jorgelina Marino, EWCP's science director, credits this astonishing shift to a combination of finding the right percentage of wolves to vaccinate (40% across different packs in the infected areas), the team's rapid response to the outbreak, and their previous vaccination efforts which made some wolves already immune to the disease. While this is concrete proof their conservation efforts are working, Jorgelina is confident most future outbreaks can be eliminated through oral vaccines. Oral vaccines, distributed to wolves with-



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in a "meat bait"—meat (typically rats) loaded with rabies vaccine—are less stressful for wolves and easier for EWCP to dispense year-round as a pre-emptive method. The Ethiopian government agrees and recently signed an agreement allowing EWCP to conduct their first full-scale oral vaccine campaign this summer.

Since the EWCP team's vaccination efforts in November, they have continued to monitor the wolves vigilantly. The wolves are not only healthy, but the population is growing; a huge influx of pups have been born in and around the valley, signifying a welcome reprieve for this rare and highly endangered canid. ■

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# Supporting a New Generation of Wildlife Champions

An Nguyen has never seen a tiger, a leopard, or a rhino. Though much of the forests in his home country of Vietnam once teemed with such iconic animals, they are now largely empty of wildlife due to hunting, snaring, and habitat loss. This is why An protects what wildlife is left in Vietnam's Annamite mountains—like the Owston's civet, the Annamite striped rabbit, and the large-antlered muntjac.

In another part of the continent, in the breathtaking mountains of Nepal, Monsoon Khatiwada is trying to save an endangered animal few have heard of, the dhole—gorgeous fox-like canids with fiery orange coats. Dholes have a reputation among local people as livestock killers, and are the focus of much human-wildlife conflict. Monsoon aims to change those perceptions through education and community outreach activities.

Both An and Monsoon share a fierce dedication to protecting wildlife in their home countries. They are also two of the most recent 14 WCN Scholarship recipients. Founded over a decade ago, the WCN Scholarship Program seeks out and nurtures the next generation of emerging conservationists, providing them with opportunities to learn new skills, collaborate with their peers, and build life-long relationships as they pursue graduate degrees.

To date, WCN has proudly supported 102 graduate level scholars across 36 countries, from Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. These scholars work on a diverse range of species, some very well-known—like snow leopards, cheetahs, and giraffes—and others, such as the dhole and the Owston's civet, that are more obscure. With the aid of these capable and devoted scholars, endangered wildlife in nearly every corner of the globe has a stronger chance to thrive. ■



**MONSOON POKHAREL KHATIWADA**  
Nepal  
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP  
**Dhole**  
PhD - University of Oviedo



**GAO YUFANG**  
China  
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP  
**Snow leopard**  
PhD - Yale University



**TIASA ADHYA**  
India  
WCN SCHOLARSHIP  
**Fishing cat**  
MSc - St. Xavier's College, University of Bombay



**MARINA RIVERO HERNANDEZ**  
Mexico  
WCN SCHOLARSHIP  
**Baird's tapir**  
MSc - El Colegio de la Frontera Sur



**FRANCY FORERO**  
Colombia  
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP  
**Cotton-top tamarin**  
MSc - Institute of Ecological Research (IPE)



**TASHI DHENDUP**  
Bhutan  
PAT J. MILLER SCHOLARSHIP  
**Clouded leopard, tiger, marbled cat, Asiatic golden cat, and Pallas' cat**  
MSc - University of Montana



**LUCERO MARIA DEL CARMEN VACA LEÓN**  
Mexico  
WCN SCHOLARSHIP  
**Jaguar, Baird's tapir, white lipped peccary, and ocelot**  
DPhil - University of Oxford



**ARTHUR BIENVENU MUNEZA**  
Rwanda  
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP  
**Giraffe**  
PhD - Michigan State University



**SALONI BHATIA**  
India  
WCN-WCS SCHOLARSHIP  
**Snow leopard**  
MSc - Nature Conservation Foundation and Manipal University



**HENRY MWAPE**  
Zambia  
WCN SCHOLARSHIP  
**Leopard, lion, African wild dog, and spotted hyena**  
MSc - University of Arizona



**AN NGUYEN**  
Vietnam  
SIDNEY BYERS SCHOLARSHIP  
**Large-antlered muntjac, Owston's civet, Annamite striped rabbit, and felids**  
PhD - Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, and Freie Universität Berlin, Germany



**PHALE MAX SEELE**  
Botswana  
HANDSEL SCHOLARSHIP  
**Cheetah**  
MSc - University of Botswana



**GIRIDHAR MALLA**  
India  
PAT J. MILLER SCHOLARSHIP  
**Fishing cat**  
PhD - Wildlife Institute of India



**AGOSTINHO AQUELINO JORGE**  
Mozambique  
WCN SCHOLARSHIP  
**African lion and other large carnivores**  
PhD - University of KwaZulu-Natal

# Searching the Forest for Penguins

GPS IS KEEN TO INVESTIGATE HOW THESE PENGUINS USE THE OCEANS AND HOW THAT INTERSECTS WITH CURRENT OR FUTURE HUMAN ACTIVITIES.



Pablo Borboroglu takes his final strokes before reaching the coastline, his paddle plunges into the water like a warm knife sinking through butter. Milford Sound's infamous torrential rains had cleared, allowing Pablo and other Global Penguin Society (GPS) conservationists, Thomas Mattern and Ursula Ellenberg, to easily glide their kayaks through the narrow valley of water. They are struck silent by the beauty of the landscape—a rainforest peppered with waterfalls lines the shores and snow-capped mountains find their twins mirrored in the still water—as they head towards land to find one of the rarest penguin species in the world.

The GPS team is searching for the fiordland crested penguin or “tawaki,” a sacred species for the Maori community, and one of six other penguin species found in New Zealand. With a population of only 3,000 pairs (Antarctica's iconic emperor penguins boast over a quarter million pairs) this species is highly vulnerable; any disease or calamitous event could send their numbers plummeting. Though easily identifiable by its crests—bright yellow strips of feathers adorning its head like a pair of opulent eyebrows—finding one in the labyrinth of the rainforest is difficult. This is why in addition to being rare, the fiordland crested penguin is also one of the least studied penguin species. Conservationists at GPS are trying to change this, particularly because learning about these penguins helps them better understand the health of the oceans.

Once on land, the GPS team navigates through unending foliage and steep slippery hills until they find the penguins. Fiordland crested penguins are hard to spot because they nest in the forest under rocks and fallen trees and in thick vegetation, but the conservationists still managed to tag 30 of them. GPS is keen to investigate how penguins use the oceans and how that intersects with current or future human activities, including fisheries, deep-sea mining activities and other developments on land that could affect ocean quality. The data they collect will help inform their work with New Zealand's government to create a network of marine protected areas (MPA).

GPS is highly successful at establishing marine protected areas. They helped create Argentina's “Blue Patagonia”, a massive MPA protecting thousands of birds, fish, mammals, and plants in an area the size of Belgium. This year, Pablo won the prestigious Whitley Gold Award and a National Geographic/Bufett Award for Leadership in Conservation for such powerful contributions to conservation. Currently, he is working to develop two more MPAs in Chile and Argentina, which will protect huge swaths of ocean in key areas of biodiversity that are vulnerable to overfishing and pollution. This is why penguin conservation is so critical; researching and protecting penguins is a gateway to preserving the health of the oceans, which all life depends on. This makes every minute of the difficult search for fiordland crested penguins worth the effort. ■



**WCN protects endangered species and preserves their natural habitats by supporting entrepreneurial conservationists who pursue innovative strategies for people and wildlife to co-exist 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.

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We are honored to have a number one rating amongst wildlife conservation organizations from Charity Navigator, with four stars and a perfect score.



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