

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

· FALL 2026 ·

**PROTECTING SHARKS
WITH... BEES?**

**INTRODUCING WCN'S
WILDLIFE VETERINARY
PROGRAM**

**ZEBRAS, GIRAFFES,
AND A LION COMEBACK**



WCN

Wildlife Conservation Network

Protecting sharks with... bees?

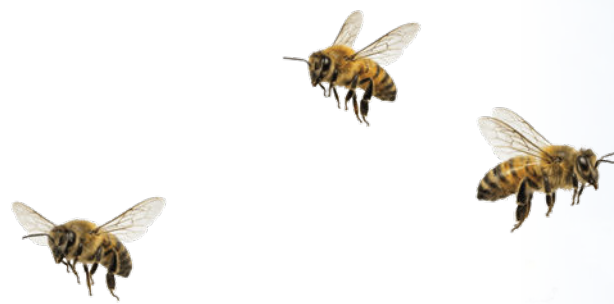
Andrés Fraiz found that if he stood in just the right spot, he could hear both sounds at once—the gentle surge of the tide as it pushed in through the roots of the mangrove forest, and the deep thrum of thousands of bees. Andrés works for WCN Conservation Partner MarAlliance, as their National Coordinator for Panama. He heard this odd combination of sounds on a field visit to the fishing village of Puerto Remedios. There, the MarAlliance team was collaborating with local fishermen to help them take up a second trade: beekeeping.

Now, at first glance you might wonder why an organization like MarAlliance, which works to conserve marine wildlife, would be involved in a beekeeping project. What could a honeybee possibly have to do with a critically endangered scalloped hammerhead shark, or a threatened whiptail stingray? But the answer was right there, in the tangled mangrove forest beyond the beehive.

Sitting at the intersection of land and sea, mangroves are among the most productive coastal ecosystems on Earth. They buffer the shore against storms and provide sheltering nurseries for sharks, rays, and a host of other fish species. But in Central America, many mangrove forests have been degraded by agricultural conversion, logging, and development. Their health and recovery depend, at least in part, on increased pollination. And pollination depends on bees.

A SOLUTION FOR MANGROVES, AND FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Andrés and the MarAlliance team knew that they could not protect those mangroves, and the wildlife that depend on them, without the participation of the local community. So they designed a pilot program that put the community needs front and center. The mangroves



needed more pollination to increase seed production, and the people of Puerto Remedios needed a source of supplemental food and income. Beehives could help satisfy both.

As a result of MarAlliance's successful pilot earlier this year, a cooperative of 23 fishermen in Puerto Remedios is now managing hives that pollinate nearly 100 acres of mangrove forest and will produce about 5 gallons of honey per hive, per year. Some of that honey will be sold, with the rest going directly into household pantries.

A FIRST STEP TOWARD SOMETHING BIGGER

While the bees at Puerto Remedios are already helping improve the health of mangrove forests, for MarAlliance the project is also about building relationships. Partnering with coastal communities to protect marine ecosystems is

Bees are at work throughout the year, but it's during the dry season—when other resources are hardest to come by—that the hives matter most.

a long-term project—one which requires trust. The sort of trust that's earned through benefits a community can feel right away, rather than through appeals to distant ecological outcomes. And based on the success of this pilot, MarAlliance is now bringing it to a

river system in the Darién Gap, working with an Indigenous women's group who stand to gain the same combination of income, food security, and a stronger stake in forest health.

It may be an ecological cliché to say “everything is connected.” But few examples make that clearer than a bee pollinating a mangrove flower, and in doing so, helping sustain both local communities and coastal ecosystems. ■



INTRODUCING WCN'S Wildlife Veterinary Program

Wildlife conservation needs skilled veterinarians. This is particularly true for the complex work carried out by WCN's Conservation Partners and Wildlife Funds—everything from rehabilitating injured pangolins in Southeast Asia, to translocating black rhinos in Southern Africa, to running vaccination campaigns for Ethiopian wolves in the Bale Mountains. But despite their importance, the need for skilled vets far outstrips the supply. Some regions have little or no veterinary coverage at all, forcing organizations to fly in specialists only after an emergency has already occurred. Meanwhile, many trained vets who are ready to serve often find themselves professionally isolated, without access to the equipment, labs, or networks they need to do their best work.

Gaps like these threaten to undermine investment in wildlife conservation, and WCN has long recognized the need to close them. Since 2019, we have supported 41 wildlife veterinarians and veterinary students with scholarships and career development through our Rising Wildlife Leaders program. Now, we are building on that foundation to launch a dedicated Wildlife Veterinary Program.

The program will provide wildlife vets with specialized training opportunities, mentorship, and scholarships. It will also help pay for the diagnostic equipment that is so often absent from the field. Perhaps most importantly, it will build a network of wildlife veterinarians through site exchanges and regional training hubs, allowing them to share knowledge and reduce the isolation



that can push talented vets out of the field. And while this is a new program, it is also exactly the kind of work that WCN does best—effectively deploying resources to the field, connecting conservationists with one another, and equipping them with the skills and equipment they need to be successful.

The result will be a boon not just for the vets themselves and the conservation projects that they support, but also for the wildlife that we all care so much about. Healthier herds, prides, and litters. ■



ABOVE: WCN'S PANGOLIN CRISIS FUND GRANTEE, LILONGWE WILDLIFE TRUST, TREATS A PANGOLIN THAT THEY RESCUED FROM THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE.

OPPOSITE PAGE: WCN PARTNER, RWANDA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, RELEASES REHABILITATED GREY CROWNED CRANES BACK INTO THE WILD.

Zebras, Giraffes, and a Lion Comeback

At first light, a helicopter lifts off over sand and scrub in northeastern Namibia, easing a herd of zebras toward a wide funnel that narrows into a boma (livestock enclosure). They're later ushered into waiting trucks to travel hundreds of kilometers on gravel roads to a new home. Lise Hanssen, director of Kwando Carnivores Trust (KCT)—a grantee of WCN's Lion Recovery Fund (LRF)—has watched this unfold many times. "It's very calm, which always surprises me," she says, sharing that herds travel together to keep families intact. "The trucks are kept dark to minimize the stress." It's a scene that plays out often in landscapes where LRF and its partners invest in rebuilding a depleted prey base in protected areas—because without zebras, springbok, and impala to hunt, lions can't survive.

The zebras are part of a larger operation that recently moved about 595 animals from Etosha National Park into Khaudum National

Park, Nyae Nyae community conservancy, and the Damaraland region. Years of drought stripped grazing bare in Damaraland, while in Khaudum and Nyae Nyae, decades-old veterinary fences—built to keep cattle and wildlife separate, but ultimately blocking migration and access to water—and poaching nearly wiped out zebra and impala populations. The animals were translocated by Namibia's Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism with support from the LRF, the Conservation Travel Foundation, and KCT. LRF director Peter Lindsey says the translocations provide more than just nourishment for lions. "When lions have enough wild prey to hunt, they're less likely to turn to livestock, easing the human-wildlife conflict that often ends in retaliatory killings," he says. "With prey species back on the ground and communities invested in what happens next, we're hopeful for the future of wildlife in Damaraland and Nyae Nyae."

The lion population across the Khaudum–Nyae Nyae system had stalled at fewer than a dozen animals for over a decade. That began to change four years ago, when KCT and its partners started reintroducing zebra and impala to landscapes where both species had disappeared; those animals have since gone



"It's especially meaningful because these animals go into landscapes managed by the people who live alongside them—Namibia's community-led conservation is recognized worldwide."

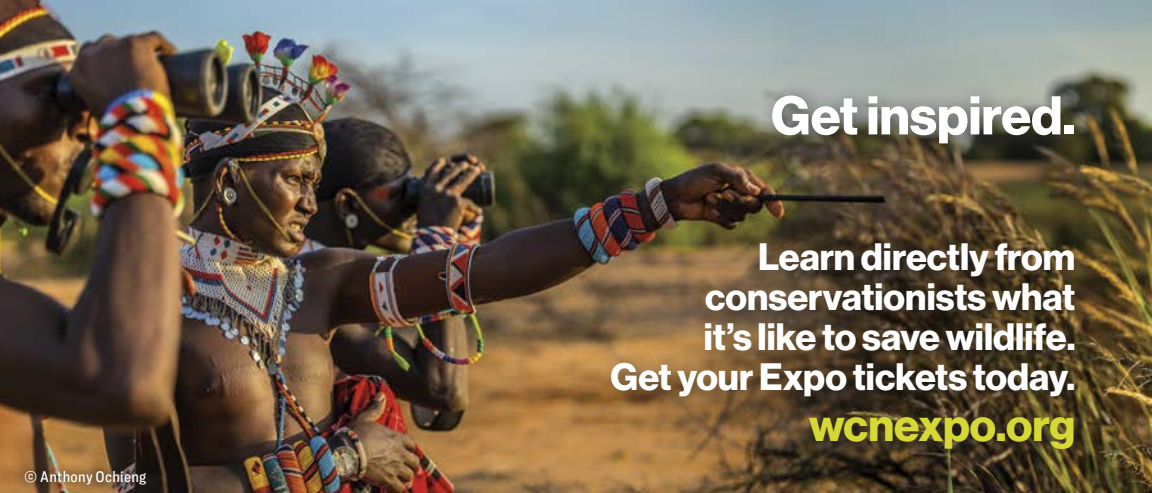
— Peter Lindsey



through three breeding seasons. Lise, who tracks lion numbers as a living scorecard for the landscape's health, added six cubs to the tally this season. "They're doing great," she says. "Before, when we'd see cubs, they'd disappear—there wasn't enough food. Now they're surviving, growing, and eventually having their own cubs." The system's lion population has surpassed 55. "It's a complete turnaround," she says.

Adds Peter, "It's especially meaningful because these animals go into landscapes managed by the people who live alongside them—Namibia's community-led conservation is recognized worldwide."

For LRF, it's evidence, Peter says, that a struggling landscape, and the lions in it, can recover. It's no small feat—relocating hundreds of animals is a massive undertaking. But there are also lighter moments, says Lise, who recalls one translocation in particular. When a giraffe descended from the truck into his new landscape one morning, he lowered his enormous head and looked her in the eye. She swiftly retreated; "It was the size of a skyscraper!" Looking back, she's sure it was more curiosity than threat—in fact, these operations always remind her why she works in conservation. "It's such a rewarding thing, putting wild animals back into the wild to make that area better." ■



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