

# Conservation news

## Making the world a smaller place—sharing tools and building global networks

It is now widely accepted that sustainable conservation in biodiversity-rich countries requires strong local and national organizations. Yet these organizations are often resource poor and working in isolated conditions, severely restricting their effectiveness. Recognizing this, a unique collaboration has been formed to link local and national organizations together through a global Capacity for Conservation network, focusing on strengthening institutional capacity through organizational development.

The concept of organizational development dates back to the 1940s and is often attributed to the research of psychologist Kurt Lewin. In 1947 he proposed that a group or organization was more than the sum of the individuals, and that a group has specific structural properties: 'relations between parts rather than by the parts or elements themselves' (K. Lewin, 1947, *Human Relations*, 1, 5–41). By 1974 organizational development was considered a proactive process that could help organizations respond positively to increases in education, income and social mobility (F. Friedlander & L.D. Brown, 1974, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 25, 313–341) and flourish during times of change. Organizational development is intended to be driven from within. Rather than an external expert attempting to diagnose and cure a problem, the onus is on those within the organization to identify systemic, structural or cultural issues that are hindering performance, and develop their own solutions with some guidance from an external facilitator.

Organizational development is now an established concept in the conservation sector. The mission statements of Fauna & Flora International and many other organizations describe a commitment to invest in local capabilities to bring about sustainable change. The need for this is clear: local and national partner organizations frequently ask for cost-effective, simple, appropriate solutions to tackle common organizational needs in order to become more resilient and able to deliver enduring actions to protect habitat and species.

Successful initiatives such as the MPhil in Conservation Leadership at the University of Cambridge and the Conservation Leadership Programme are already targeted to those who work in areas of high biodiversity and who are well positioned to identify development needs in their organizations and wider communities. The first international conference on Capacity for Conservation took place in Colombia in 2013, bringing together practitioners from all over the world, and a second conference is planned, in Africa, in 2015. These intensive, face-to-face opportunities are essential, yet resource limitations mean a relatively small

number of people are able to attend. We also need approaches that make learning, information and support accessible to all those seeking to develop their conservation organization.

The Capacity for Conservation collaboration is a partnership between BirdLife International, Fauna & Flora International, the Tropical Biology Association and the Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, supported by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative. Responding to calls for assistance from the 250+ local and national conservation organizations with which these organizations work, the collaboration is committed to supporting the self-led organizational development of conservation organizations, with recommended tools, resources and networks.

The first product of the collaboration, [capacityforconservation.org](http://capacityforconservation.org), launched in September 2014. It is a new online resource for those working in the conservation sector and has already attracted 167 users logging on from 82 countries, from Antigua to Zimbabwe. The website offers an organizational assessment tool that guides the user through a review of their organization in 12 areas, including project planning, leadership, external communications, fund-raising, and monitoring and evaluation. The results of the assessment suggest what needs to change; the toolkit then assists with this. The toolkit already contains 140 resources in 18 languages, as well as case studies to illustrate how others have approached the same issue. This bank of resources will grow as users upload their own tools and case studies, sharing learning and knowledge between local initiatives, globally.

In addition to guiding individuals committed to organizational development, the website also has a research purpose. As each organization completes their self-assessment, they contribute data that, cumulatively, will point to the most pressing development needs within the conservation sector as identified by the organizations themselves. This information has great potential to inform the investment strategies of donors and partners, to ensure support enables local conservation organizations to develop and deliver the strongest possible conservation outcomes.

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## A new Caucasus Programme

Recently described as one of the world's forgotten landscapes, Eurasia's importance for global biodiversity is now being rediscovered. Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has been working in Eurasia for over 15 years and, with projects

ranging from Portugal in the west, through to Romania in Eastern Europe and Georgia in the Caucasus, all the way east to the Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the Eurasia programme represents an extremely diverse and sweeping body of work. Not surprisingly, as it seeks to strengthen the conservation of the regions biodiversity, it interacts with an equally diverse array of partners, government agencies and local stakeholders.

The Caucasus ecoregion hosts a rich biological and cultural diversity and contains unusually high levels of species endemism. It incorporates, in their entirety, the territories of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and, in-part, those of Turkey and Iran as well as the southern reaches of the Russian Federation. It has been recognized as one of the world's 34 most biologically rich and threatened terrestrial ecosystems, is one of the Global 200 Ecoregions and one of three Endemic Bird Areas in Europe. It is also considered to be a world centre for agro-biodiversity and the origin of many of today's domestic plants and animals (and the purported birthplace of wine). FFI recently made the decision to formalize more than a decade's worth of projects and actions in the region with a specific and dedicated programme of work focusing on the Southern Caucasus.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s many parts of the region have experienced relatively rapid modernization in industrial, economic and legislative fields. However, the significant social and economic changes that resulted have led to widespread unemployment and an increase in dependence on natural resources in rural areas. Furthermore, poorly regulated and unsustainable hunting, an unstable legislative framework, and a growing but unregulated farming industry combine to increase the pressure on the region's natural landscape.

The decision to set up a regional office in Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, will allow the small in-country team to expand its programme of work both geographically and thematically. In keeping with FFI's partnership approach, the office will continue to favour working in close partnership with local groups across the region whilst, where required and requested, supporting and building their capacity to deliver conservation in the long term. This process has already begun, with the expansion of human–carnivore conflict work, pioneered in Georgia, into Armenia, and an exploratory study of the extent and potential impact of wild-life trade in the region.

Based on the work that has been implemented to date, the programme has identified five initial priority areas with which to engage over the coming years: human–carnivore conflict, wildlife trade, protected area development, marine and coastal issues and threatened tree species (the latter with the Global Trees Campaign). One of the first actions of the Caucasus programme will be to carry out further scoping studies that will encompass Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this way the team will develop a more

detailed picture of biodiversity conservation in each country while emphasizing these five priorities. Ultimately, we hope that the presence of FFI in this emerging frontier of biodiversity conservation will act as a catalyst for enhanced global recognition of the region's value and increased international support for its conservation.

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### Collaborative conservation for horseshoe crabs

The archaic horseshoe crabs originated 475 million years ago. Of the four extant species, two (the Chinese horseshoe crab *Tachypleus tridentatus* and mangrove horseshoe crab *Carcinoscorpius rotundicauda*) exist in southern China. Although categorized as Data Deficient on the IUCN Red List, populations of horseshoe crabs in Asia are declining as a result of loss of spawning/nursery areas from coastal reclamation, habitat destruction and pollution, bycatch from trawling, and overexploitation for biomedical uses. A slow growth rate and long maturity make horseshoe crabs vulnerable to disturbance. In China and other Asian countries an additional threat to the Chinese horseshoe crab is over-harvesting of adults for food. Horseshoe crabs are not, however, legally protected at the national level in China (although in some provinces the Chinese horseshoe crab is listed as a provincial protected animal) and many other Asian countries.

During 7–8 June 2014 the Guangxi Mangrove Research Centre, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) China Programme, Biodiversity Research Centre Academia Sinica (Taiwan) and Mangrove Ecological Research Group of the China Ecological Society organized a workshop (Nearshore Resources and Environment of Beibu Gulf—Conservation and Wise Use of Horseshoe Crabs) in Beihai, Guangxi Province, China, with financial support from the Guangxi Mangrove Research Centre, National Geographic Air and Water Conservation Fund, and the China Exploration & Research Society. Over 40 scientists, conservationists and stakeholders from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong gathered to share research findings and formulate collaborative action for the conservation of horseshoe crabs in southern China.

The workshop reviewed the current status of horseshoe crabs in China. In Taiwan and Hong Kong the number of adult horseshoe crabs is particularly low. The most abundant population of Chinese horseshoe crabs in Beibu Gulf, Guangxi Province, has decreased by > 90% and c. 10% of the adults are harvested annually. The local biomedical industry has estimated that > 80% of the harvested Chinese horseshoe crabs are consumed as food and 20% are bled to produce limulus amebocyte lysate, which is used to detect bacterial contamination in medical devices