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#12

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PROTECT *OUR PLANET* *AND* CREATE A SUSTAINABLE WORLD

Twenty years ago, I set up the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation because I was determined to help protect our planet – its health, climate and biodiversity – whatever the challenges. Now, as I look through this anniversary issue 20 years on, that determination is stronger than ever.

Because, despite the serious concerns that sadly weigh heavily on all environmentalists, these 20 years of action have demonstrated a fundamental truth: science-based, collective effort produces tangible results. Dozens of species protected, hundreds of communities supported in addressing environmental challenges, thousands of our peers taking action in their daily lives, and millions of euros invested in a sustainable economy – this is what can be achieved when committed individuals come together to chart a bold course.

The following pages describe this bold course, focusing on the three priorities that have guided our work for the past 20 years: protecting the most vulnerable ecosystems, as they are often critical to the stability of Earth's key functions; bringing changemakers together, as none of us can take action alone; and innovating, because we need to develop new models to create a sustainable world.

These are the driving ambitions for us, as well as for our partners and donors, to whom I would like to express my sincere thanks – for these past 20 years of action and for those to come.

HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco

IMPACT

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Young lion (*Panthera leo*)
in the Lualenyi reserve in Kenya.

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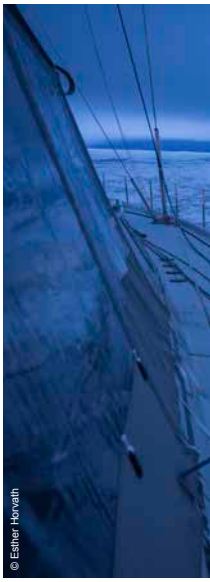
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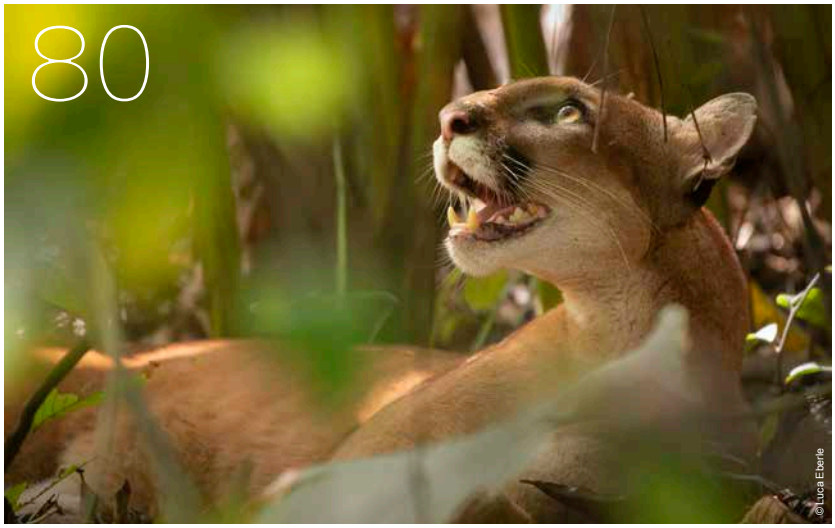
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YEARS OF ACTION *AND* ENGAGEMENT

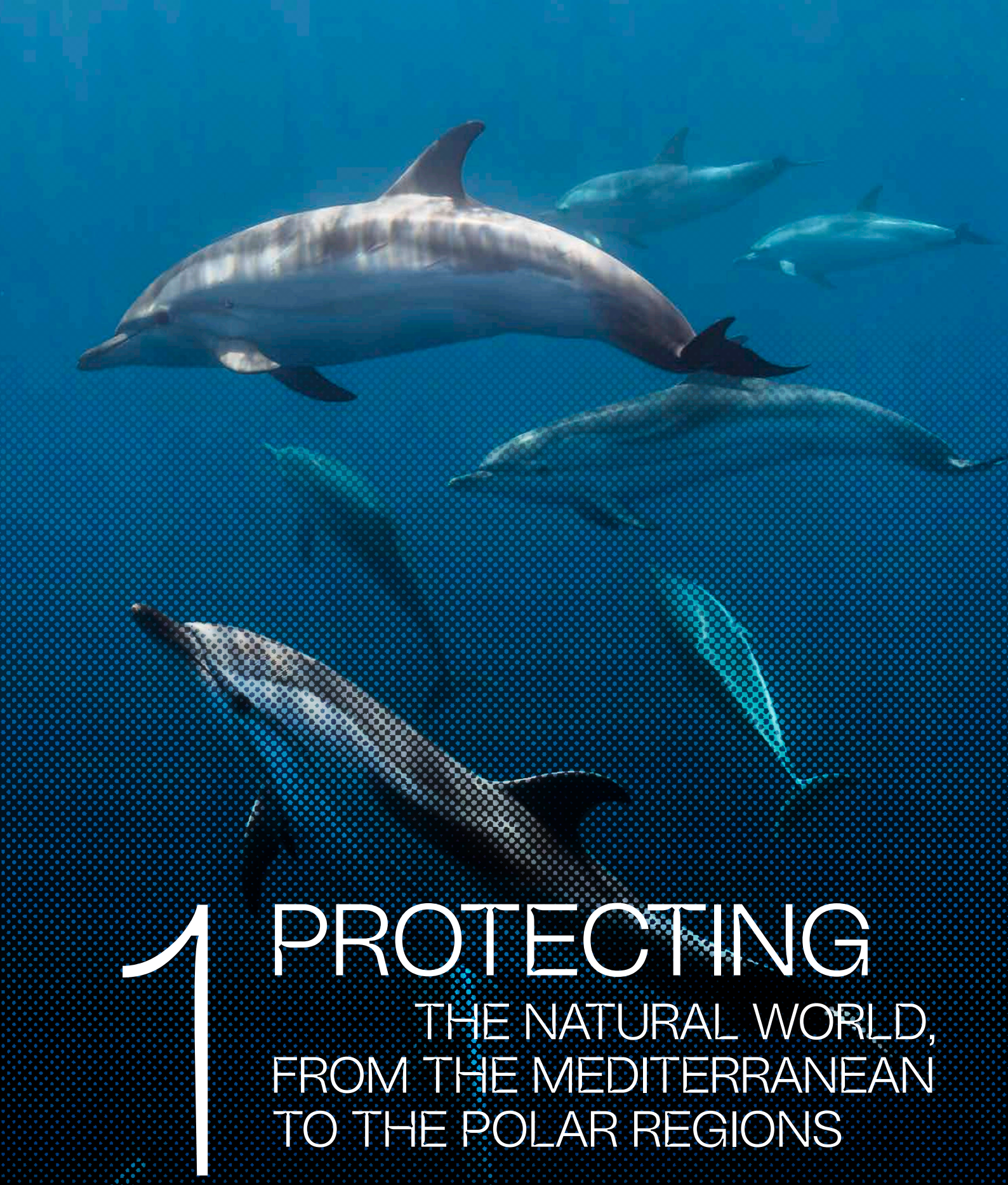
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In April 2006, a man stepped onto the sea ice at the North Pole. He was following in the footsteps of his great-great-grandfather, who had sailed the seas and explored the ice a century earlier. As HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco looked out over the vast Arctic landscape, thousands of miles from his Principality, he could see the ice was thinning and breaking up, signalling alarming changes. As a man of strong convictions with a keen awareness of environmental issues, the Prince decided to take action himself to help counter the damage being done to the Earth. Two months after that voyage, the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation was launched.

Twenty years on, the organisation has expanded significantly and firmly established a long-term vision. Across all continents, it has now supported more than 850 projects on the ground, formed partnerships, funded scientific research and advocated for the natural world and human communities in the highest international forums. From its own vicinity in the Mediterranean to the frozen poles, and from forests to wetlands, its impact is evidenced by the species that have been saved, the seas revitalised and the communities empowered. It has led the way in raising awareness of ocean and climate issues as planetary emergencies, and it continues to break new ground, create unprecedented momentum and promote solutions.

The Foundation owes this influence to the people who sustain it: scientists and managers, explorers and guardians of the most vulnerable environments, donors and innovators. This special report brings together their different perspectives, examining the role of philanthropy in a world in crisis and its ability to pioneer new approaches as the need arises.



1 PROTECTING

THE NATURAL WORLD, FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE POLAR REGIONS

© Frédéric Larrey

How can we protect more than just scattered fragments of Earth's riches? How can we mitigate the threats that are destabilising ecosystems? Over its two decades of sustained action to preserve the natural world, the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation has mapped out a path. The organisation has a branching structure that operates in around one hundred countries, using a non-hierarchical model that involves local communities and takes a long-term approach.
The Foundation's key priorities are to tackle the impacts of climate change, protect biodiversity and ensure the sustainable management of water resources. It achieves these objectives through practical projects, some of which extend across entire regions. Their conservation efforts, which have resulted in a raft of successes, focus on continuity, in terms of both time and space. Because only measures with long-term support can guarantee the health of ecosystems and the survival of species and their habitats. The planetary boundaries are being redefined in light of the world's different ecosystems – tropical forests, mangroves, lagoons and marshes, savannahs, coastlines and every kind of marine environment – all of which are central to the Foundation's work.

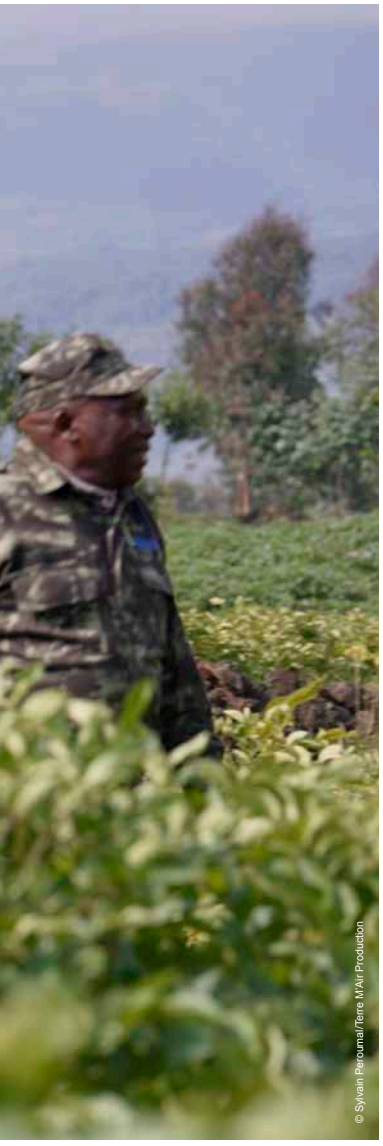
HSH Prince Albert II meeting local communities involved in gorilla conservation in the forests of Rwanda, 2025.



[1] Ocean Acidification and other ocean Changes – Impacts and Solutions.

THE MEDITERRANEAN AS A LABORATORY

As the Foundation is located on the shores of the Mediterranean, many of its flagship initiatives are concentrated there, with the region serving as a laboratory for its systemic, integrated approach. Fifteen countries around the Mediterranean have signed up to the Beyond Plastic Med (BeMed) initiative to curb plastic pollution, which is affecting this iconic sea more than any other. Meanwhile, The MedFund, which was set up to support the region's marine protected areas, has secured the long-term future of nearly 10,000 square kilometres of Mediterranean MPAs over the past 10 years, including 800 square kilometres under strong protection. The Pelagos Initiative, launched in 2021, is enhancing conservation measures in the Mediterranean's first cross-border area dedicated to the protection of marine mammals. The Foundation has made it a long-term priority to safeguard species, as demonstrated by its efforts to protect the bluefin tuna – one of the greatest conservation success stories in the Mediterranean – and to ensure the return of the monk seal to its shores. However, not all the attention is on marine ecosystems. The Foundation is also working to protect other habitats in the region that are vulnerable to climate change and to human pressure. The Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE), instigated by the Foundation, is supporting numerous wetlands, including the Vjosa Delta in Albania, the Salina wetlands in Malta and stagnant pools in the karst mountains of Croatia. This Mediterranean-wide programme is indicative of the Foundation's systemic approach, where measures are long-lasting and implemented over a wide area.


© Sylvain Peroumal/Terre M'Air Production

LOOKING AFTER THE PLANET'S VITAL ORGANS

Over the past 20 years, the Foundation has significantly broadened its influence, focusing on the most vulnerable habitats as well as the most widespread threats. One of the key problems it is addressing is ocean acidification, an invisible change to the chemical composition of seawater due to the ocean absorbing a quarter of all human-caused CO2 emissions. The Monaco Declaration brought political attention to the phenomenon back in 2009, and the OACIS initiative subsequently made a long-term commitment to addressing it.[1] By protecting the ecosystems that provide us with a breathable atmosphere, productive soil, abundant biodiversity, a stable climate, a continuous supply of freshwater and more besides, the initiative is taking care of our planet's vital organs. It is maintaining the functioning of essential ecosystems that safeguard both planetary and human health. With the economies of some communities and even whole countries relying on a stable cycle of ice, springs and groundwater, the Foundation is striving to protect and restore freshwater resources, particularly in areas threatened by water scarcity.

REGENERATION, FROM THE TROPICS TO THE POLES

Disruption to forest and coastal ecosystems, soil degradation and destabilisation of the cryosphere are resulting in ever greater threats. Nevertheless, every piece of positive action – whether in restoring mangroves, wetlands or tropical forests – helps to reverse this trend, limiting the impacts and promoting regeneration instead. The polar regions also need help, and in both the Arctic and the Southern Ocean the Foundation is supporting marine protected areas and blue corridors – safe routes used by large cetaceans to return to their breeding and feeding grounds. These efforts are all working towards one goal: to protect 30% of the global ocean by 2030.
The Foundation works with a non-hierarchical approach to improve the health of the natural world, pooling financial and human resources and partnering with the communities that deliver the projects. It facilitates support, consolidation and scaling up. Its organic approach ensures that projects are embedded in their local area and sustainable in the long term, and also fosters solidarity among the stakeholders. The initiatives and the funds raised all serve the same vision: that of a thriving, less polluted planet, dotted with pockets of regeneration, where ecosystems can continue to ensure planetary habitability, which is an overlooked yet essential function of Earth's natural processes. Protecting these ecosystems keeps the world habitable – a principle that the Foundation repeatedly translates into action.

MEASURABLE CONSERVATION RESULTS

+850

projects supported in more than 100 countries since 2006

+400%

increase in biomass of bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean Sea, one of the Foundation's great conservation successes (supported since 2008)

1.55m km²

of the Ross Sea in Antarctica represents the world's largest marine protected area, which the Foundation helped to establish

1m ha

of primary Amazon rainforest under Indigenous territorial protection (Amazon Frontlines project with six Indigenous nations)

9,785 km²

of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean supported by The MedFund, including 800 km² under strong protection (19 MPAs, 8 countries)



© Greg Lecoeur

PROTECTING VULNERABLE ECOSYSTEMS, ON LAND AND AT SEA


© DR

Forests, coral reefs and coastal wetlands are home to millions of wild species. These vulnerable but highly productive and protective environments are being degraded at a rate not seen since the last mass extinction, with profound consequences for human societies. The Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation has developed a framework to reverse this trend, by leveraging various mechanisms to protect these ecosystems.

Charlotte Karibuhoye Said has dedicated more than three decades to conservation science, regional governance and field conservation. She founded the consultancy Interface for Nature and is a member of the Foundation's Scientific and Technical Committee. Here, she provides us with her insights into these protection mechanisms.

"30×30 might be achievable, provided that, beyond the numbers, we aim to create a network of areas that truly works – for biodiversity, climate and people."



Socio-ecological mangrove restoration project in Benin, supported by the Foundation.

You spent many years coordinating support for the regional network of marine protected areas in West Africa, RAMPAO, which links around 40 sites from Mauritania to Benin. What lessons do you draw from that experience?

Coordinating the multi-stakeholder process that established RAMPAO was one of the most formative experiences of my career. The first lesson: in conservation, don't wait for a perfect dataset before acting. When we started, the data on ecological connectivity and key areas for marine biodiversity was incomplete – and it still is. We combined existing scientific information with local knowledge, applied the precautionary principle and moved forward. It was the right call, as subsequent research on sea turtle populations, fish stocks and migratory birds has continued to confirm.

Second lesson: an MPA network isn't just an ecological concept; it's a social one, where active facilitation and good governance play a key role. Connectivity has to operate at multiple levels: site managers, scientists, local communities, decision-makers – each must find their place in it. A regional framework that feels imposed from above will never be fully owned at ground level.

Are protected areas still our best tool against biodiversity loss, and is the 30×30 target achievable?

If soundly designed, well managed and equitably governed, protected areas remain our most robust tool against biodiversity loss. Healthy ecosystems do so much for both nature and people: in coastal and marine areas, for instance, they provide nursery and feeding grounds for countless species, underpin fisheries and livelihoods, and rank among the most effective carbon sinks. But their design and management must adapt to global change and be integrated into development strategies.

30×30 might be achievable, provided that, beyond the numbers, we aim to create a network of areas that truly works – for biodiversity, climate and people. The main obstacles aren't technical (we know how to conserve nature). They concern governance, political commitment and long-term investment. Guinea-Bissau, a small country with very limited resources, has already protected 26% of its territory.



Environmental trust funds capitalise resources to enable long-term financing. One such example is The MedFund, founded by France, Monaco and Tunisia, with the support of the Foundation, to benefit marine protected areas. What does this model change for protected area managers?

With project-based funding, you're constantly in survival mode: proposals, uncertainty, staff turnover. An endowment-based mechanism gives managers a predictable financial base, enabling them to plan ahead, keep their teams together and focus on conservation, which becomes more resilient as a result. In contexts of political or economic instability, that baseline is essential. Ecosystems don't recover on project timelines; our funding mechanisms need to reflect that. Other countries in the region are now drawing on these models, which is the best proof of their effectiveness.

What explains the shift toward cross-border, network-based approaches? And how do you keep those networks genuinely functional?

Migratory species operate across multiple jurisdictions. Protection limited to a single exclusive economic zone is largely symbolic – all the more so as climate change pushes species to shift ranges, making static boundaries increasingly inadequate. Isolated populations are also weakened unless connected through corridors or stepping-stone sites.

For these networks to be genuinely effective, connectivity must translate into concrete partnerships with coordinated action: coherent management, harmonised monitoring, shared science and policy alignment across sectors and borders. My experience through RAMPAO and similar regional initiatives has taught me this is difficult but possible. What makes the difference is an inclusive marine spatial planning process that recognises diverse stakeholders' interests, including the rights of local communities. This must be combined with stronger regional monitoring, capacity development and financial incentives tied to sustainable practices. Each type of action brings what the others cannot. The connections between actors are as important to look after as the ecosystems we're trying to protect. What gives me hope is that we're getting better at this.

The DEDURAM project in Guinea-Bissau trained 1,150 women salt producers in solar techniques – reducing emissions from salt production by 99% – and supported the development of 2,500 hectares of mangrove rice fields. Why is the involvement of local communities, and women in particular, a condition for the success of protected areas?

Local communities aren't just stakeholders; in many cases, they are the reason these ecosystems are still intact. Conservation designed without communities rarely lasts beyond the project cycle.

Women deserve to be highlighted: in Guinea-Bissau, salt production is exclusively a female activity, representing on average more than half of their annual income. DEDURAM is a good illustration of genuine partnership: the results went far beyond a change in technique. Women developed skills in financial management and cooperative organisation, and became active advocates for their ecosystem. When you invest in women in conservation, you get long-term change.



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FRESHWATER ECOSYSTEMS: A CORE CHALLENGE


© FPA2

Freshwater ecosystems are recognised as being the most fertile on the planet, and they are essential to the lives of the communities that depend on them, but they receive less attention than the ocean or forests. Severe impacts from deforestation, soil erosion and increasing urbanisation mean that wetlands are now under threat. In 2021, the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, in partnership with the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation and MAVA Foundation, launched the Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE) with the aim of regenerating Mediterranean wetlands, half of which had disappeared in the space of 50 years. The Foundation also supports other projects around the world to safeguard freshwater ecosystems and improve living conditions for the communities that depend on them.

Milagros Couchoud is Honorary President of the Mediterranean Water Institute and a member of the Foundation's Scientific and Technical Committee. She outlines achievements made by freshwater projects supported by the Foundation around the world.

"Without water, there is no life, no social stability and no human development."

What is special about DIMFE?

This initiative, which draws on scientific expertise from the Mediterranean Water Institute, facilitates experience sharing between institutions and professionals specialising in Mediterranean wetlands. A combination of changes in these environments over the past 50 years are having extremely severe impacts. Populations are becoming more densely concentrated along the coast here than anywhere else on the planet: in some places, the population has increased a hundredfold. DIMFE is drawing attention to these unique ecosystems that are critical to life on Earth. It's highlighting the need to restore them and to create new habitats if needed for the ecological balance of the coastal zone. Using a collaborative model involving donors, scientists and practitioners on the ground, the initiative has helped to implement practical solutions to serious problems that have led to the loss of important wetlands. What makes the approach even more valuable is that it can be replicated.

How should water resources be managed in semi-arid areas, given the current outlook?

In the Messara Basin in Crete, for example, overextraction of groundwater for irrigation has led to saline intrusion and loss of wetlands. The Foundation has funded a project by the IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, which has developed a method for the artificial recharge of aquifers.[2] It's a good illustration of how an isolated aquifer or underwater caves can be used to store rainwater, desalinated water and treated water, in order to maintain stable groundwater levels. Each operation begins with an in-depth assessment of the aquifer (age and composition of the water, contamination risks, etc), before deciding on the appropriate technology. The system can be used in agricultural, urban and environmental contexts to prevent seawater intrusion by raising the piezometric level of the aquifer,[3] and restore coastal wetlands fed by recycled water – at minimal financial and energy cost. There are numerous examples all along the east coast of Spain.

In what way is water security a key societal challenge?

The Foundation is supporting a project in Turkana County in Kenya, in partnership with Caritas Lodwar, that illustrates the direct link between access to water, pastoral stability and human health in an arid environment. It's one of the projects that the Foundation can be most proud of. The assistance given to the rural population in this rift valley has had an extraordinary impact. A mobile technical team is maintaining 53 water installations, benefiting 51,000 people and a million livestock, and a water committee has been set up in every community.

If we can provide a community with access to water and gradually support their agricultural practice by embedding appropriate systems, they can start to envisage a certain level of development. Without water, there is no life, no social stability and no human development.

What about the Olhos d'Água project?

This is another project I find really interesting. In the states of Espírito Santo and Minas Gerais in south-eastern Brazil, a project led by Instituto Terra with support from the Foundation is protecting water sources by reforesting a river basin. They are restoring 52 springs in the Rio Doce basin, working with nature and in partnership with more than 30 local farmers, who have a thorough understanding of their environment and the right approaches to take. Nearly 7,000 trees have been planted to restore vegetation around the springs, and biodigesters have been installed to improve living conditions for the rural communities. The impacts of these measures will be assessed very soon.

[2] Underground layer of porous, water-permeable rock from which groundwater can be extracted, usually by means of a well or reservoir.

[3] Height to which the groundwater in an aquifer would naturally rise if it were allowed. The higher this level, the less seawater can infiltrate inland.

I've always thought it important to find solutions that are appropriate to the countries in question. You can't use the same solution for wastewater treatment in Madrid and in a small village in Minas Gerais, or manage agricultural crops in the same way in Provence and in Espírito Santo. Solutions designed for developed countries can't be imposed on countries that lack the resources to maintain complex infrastructure.

The Olhos d'Água project reforests and protects water sources in the Atlantic Forest in Brazil, with the support of the Foundation.

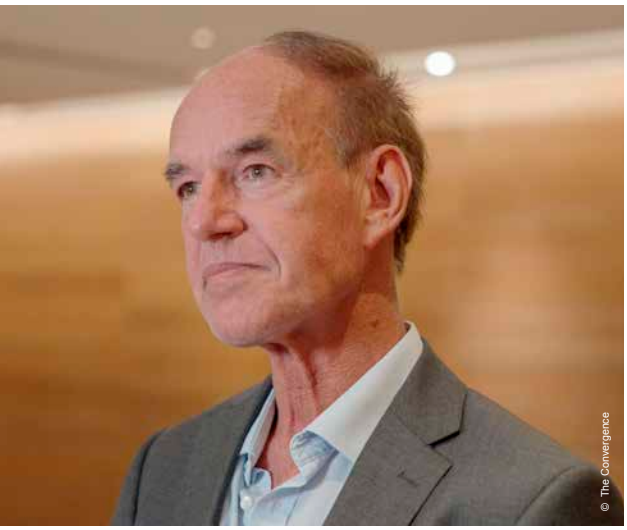
You have devoted much of your career to bringing freshwater issues to the attention of policymakers. Where do we currently stand on water diplomacy?

I've spent my life trying to get these messages across to policymakers in my own country and around the world. I'm optimistic by nature and little by little I can see awareness growing: the United Nations declaration of a human right to water, Sustainable Development Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, the World Water Forum and World Water Congress, and projects such as those supported by the Foundation. People are recognising the importance of water, and starting to take it into account when preparing national budgets. In 2022, DIMFE contributed to a motion by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) being adopted that calls for ecologically sensitive areas to receive stronger protection from unsustainable tourism. It's precisely this sort of seemingly modest progress that builds water diplomacy one step at a time.



© DR

SAFEGUARDING ENDANGERED SPECIES: STRATEGIC CONSERVATION TOOLS


© The Convergence

With species going extinct at an unprecedented rate, protecting biodiversity is a key priority for the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation. For 20 years, it has been supporting recovery programmes focusing on a wide range of species and regions that work closely with local communities and the world's leading experts. It also explores relationships between people and wildlife through its Human–Wildlife Initiative, with the aim of better integrating wildlife coexistence into land management.

From fieldwork to international environmental diplomacy, **Marco Lambertini** has devoted his life to conservation. A former Director General of WWF International, he now convenes the Nature Positive Initiative and sits on the Foundation's Board of Directors.

"Losing nature is a problem not just for wildlife, but for us too. It affects our society, our economy, our well-being."

What makes a species rescue operation succeed where so many others fail?

The common denominators are: wanting to do it – the determination, the passion, a clear science-based vision and plan for the change we want to see – and the competence of the people running the project. In some cases, governments play the most important role; in others, communities or civil society are leading. Increasingly, business is engaging too. Sometimes all those constituents need to be aligned. Many wetlands, forests and species have been conserved or restored. But those efforts are being undertaken in the context of a constant tsunami of destruction generated by the current economic system.

Bluefin tuna and the Mediterranean monk seal illustrate two very different conservation processes. What were the key drivers behind each success?

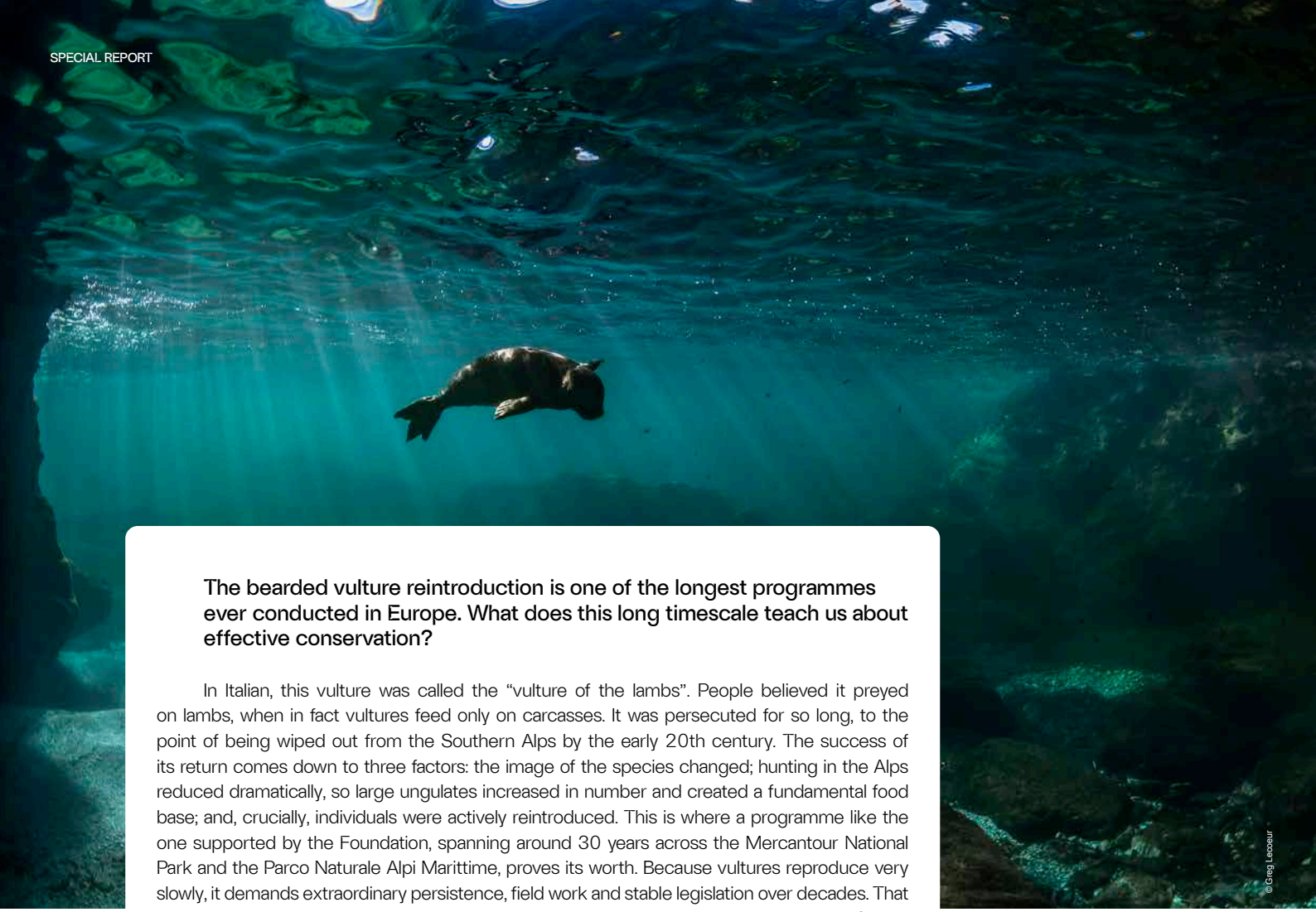
With tuna, we're talking about a very important economic and cultural asset. In the 2000s, Mediterranean stocks were near collapse; entire fisheries that had operated for centuries closed.[4] That attracted the attention of policymakers, the fishing industry and the public. The solution was European legislation, which drastically reduced and sustainably regulated catches, allowing a spectacular recovery. Since 2009, the biomass has grown by more than 400% and the species has been moved from "endangered" to "least concern" – a testament to what international advocacy, supported by HSH Prince Albert II, his government and his foundation, can achieve. It also shows how resilient nature is, provided we act before stocks cross the point of no return.

The monk seal case is completely different. Not an economic asset, and even a source of conflict with small-scale fishers, it owes its recovery to its iconic status as a symbol of the Mediterranean and the broad public support that followed. That led first to marine protected areas – a cause long championed by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation – then to anti-poaching enforcement, and later to engaging fishers to coexist with the species, coordinated through the Monk Seal Alliance, which the Foundation has supported from the outset. We now have 800 individuals, half of which are in Greek waters. Unlike with tuna, it was local NGOs engaging governments and communities that made the difference. And beyond the numbers, it triggered local pride at having saved a species from extinction.

How decisive is political commitment and cooperation between states in the success of a recovery programme?

It can be decisive. Take the tiger recovery in China's Jilin Province, one of the clearest examples. Only decades ago, China had an active programme to eradicate its large predators, as did many countries. That has totally changed since: worldwide, wild tiger numbers now exceed 5,000, a 70% increase from its historic low. The Jilin recovery was the result of political collaboration with Russia, which had already made significant progress with the Amur tiger in the north. In a rare example of transboundary conservation, they created around 300 wildlife passages on the eastern border, allowing Russian tigers to enter and exchange genes with the small and nascent local population. Strong government leadership was essential, supported by a society that has evolved and supports conservation. Protected areas also gave local communities alternative livelihoods, turning hunters into wardens. Tigers have recently been found more than 200 kilometres beyond the national park boundary, which is very promising.

[4] The Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna population declined by 80% between 1970 and 2010.



© Greg Lecoeur

The Mediterranean monk seal, which has been protected by the Foundation since 2011, had its very own initiative launched in 2019 – the Monk Seal Alliance.

The bearded vulture reintroduction is one of the longest programmes ever conducted in Europe. What does this long timescale teach us about effective conservation?

In Italian, this vulture was called the "vulture of the lambs". People believed it preyed on lambs, when in fact vultures feed only on carcasses. It was persecuted for so long, to the point of being wiped out from the Southern Alps by the early 20th century. The success of its return comes down to three factors: the image of the species changed; hunting in the Alps reduced dramatically, so large ungulates increased in number and created a fundamental food base; and, crucially, individuals were actively reintroduced. This is where a programme like the one supported by the Foundation, spanning around 30 years across the Mercantour National Park and the Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime, proves its worth. Because vultures reproduce very slowly, it demands extraordinary persistence, field work and stable legislation over decades. That patience has been rewarded: 45 young were released over the years, and today around 40 pairs are breeding in the wild, with natural breeding having taken over from reintroduction.

Do these successes suggest that a reversal of biodiversity trends is possible at a larger scale?

Halting and reversing biodiversity loss is the goal of the Nature Positive initiative, and the mission of the Global Biodiversity Framework, agreed in 2022, just as the 1.5-degree warming limit is the goal for the climate. Is it possible? Definitely. Not only possible – necessary. We are the most environmentally aware generation in history, and we're beginning to understand that losing nature is a problem not just for wildlife, but for us too. It affects our society, our economy, our well-being.

We're at a fork in the road. The economy that has destroyed so much nature, while improving our lives, is coming to an end. For the first time in our history, nature is being pushed to its limits and failing to provide what we depend on: water, pollination, food security, climate stability. Entire ecosystems risk tipping points with catastrophic consequences and, for all our arrogance, we may be among the most vulnerable. To avoid that, we need to act at scale, fast, and understand that it's in our own interests to do so.

TACKLING DIFFERENT TYPES OF POLLUTION



Sandrine Sommer, Chief Sustainability Officer at Moët Hennessy and member of the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation's Scientific and Technical Committee.

HEALTHIER SOILS FOR THE FUTURE

"More than half of the biodiversity on the planet is concealed beneath our feet, in the soil. It's the least talked about and least understood ecosystem. However, without healthy soils, there's no life on Earth!

I launched the World Living Soils Forum in 2022 to enable sharing of good practice, knowledge and lessons learned – a sort of soil university, a network of soil enthusiasts. We should all be one, as everything depends on the soil, including our food, our technology, our health and the climate.

Yet 40% of land in Europe is degraded, and the figure is even higher globally. We need to act without delay, by introducing regenerative practices – covering the soil instead of leaving it bare, planting hedges and trees, using biological control instead of polluting chemicals, and minimising tilling to avoid compacting the soil. In our vineyards, we assess soil quality using around 20 criteria to calculate a resilience score, which is marked out of 10. This score can be brought back up within four or five years. Once soil health is improved, everything above ground becomes more resilient and diverse, pollinators return, birds and small mammals are supported, and so on. Healthy soils enable the whole chain of living things, from insects to humans, to better withstand climate change.

This is exactly what the Foundation is supporting through many of its soil initiatives. A prime example is Sabrina Krief's project in Sebitoli, Uganda, where a belt of organic food and tea crops is reducing soil pollution and its health impacts on farmers and chimpanzees. It's delivering benefits for both local communities and great apes! With Moët Hennessy, we discussed soil regeneration in Africa at our last Forum and are on the same page as the Foundation, which is implementing the same approach alongside Action against Hunger in Burkina Faso. There, agroforestry is being used to restore land degraded by climate change, with these practices being passed on through farmer field schools. This approach bridges agriculture and forestry, because forests still provide some of the best soils.

The symbiotic relationship between healthy soils and pollinators is a subject that has been close to my heart for a long time. Back when I was at Guerlain, we set up a bee university to pool knowledge about how to protect them. I see this same approach in a project supported by the Foundation in Mercantour National Park, where a survey has identified 419 wild bee species – one third of those in the whole of France! The *Prairies Fleuries* (flowering meadows) competition held in those mountains reminds us that pollination, whether by wild or domestic species, is intrinsically linked to the health of agricultural and pastoral soils.

These projects refuse to separate agriculture from nature – they ensure that the two interact and sustain one another. This return to polyculture will shape the future of our soils. If I had to sum up this approach in a single word, it would be *together*. We can no longer compete with each other over a common good. We will only ensure the regeneration of healthy soils by forming public–private partnerships, pooling expertise, and sharing both our failures and our successes."

Photo: Château Galoupet © FPA2/Portrait photo: © DR



Thierry Vandevelde, marine biologist and engineer, former Director General of the Veolia Foundation, and member of the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation's Board of Directors.

TAKING ACTION FOR THE OCEAN

"I've spent 35 years working in water-related fields, from studying oceanic primary productivity and improving access to water for disadvantaged communities to tackling water pollution. The ocean, and the hydrosphere more broadly, is still too often overlooked by science and by society. We forget that life comes from the ocean, that it produces as much oxygen as all terrestrial vegetation, and that our future is directly dependent on it. The mounting threats it faces are increasingly well-documented and visible. What we're lacking is collective action.

The Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation is committed to bridging that gap. Not by producing yet more alarming reports, but by creating an environment for dialogue that goes beyond mere observation, supporting solutions on the ground and influencing public and international policy.

In the Mediterranean, the most successful illustration of this is Beyond Plastic Med (BeMed), which was formed through a partnership between the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, Tara Ocean Foundation, Surfrider Foundation Europe and MAVA Foundation. How can we control microplastic pollution in the world's most polluted sea? With over 3,000 billion waterborne plastic particles, and concentrations reaching 10.43 kg/km^2 at Cap Corse – four times higher than in the North Pacific gyre – the picture is dire. BeMed has brought together leading European scientists, NGOs, industry representatives and stakeholders from the Mediterranean Basin to come up with some practical solutions, including supporting 126 projects, awareness-raising, recycling, eco-tourism and training for hotels and businesses to make tourism and industrial practices into drivers of change. It's a groundbreaking, structured platform for addressing the plastic problem.

The Foundation is also influencing regulation. As part of the Clean Arctic Alliance – a coalition of 24 environmental organisations – it helped to convince the International Maritime Organization to introduce a ban on the use of heavy fuel oil in the Arctic in 2021. This was a significant achievement, as was securing protection for bluefin tuna and recognition for the ocean in international negotiations. The Alliance is currently campaigning against emissions of black carbon – a highly polluting substance that darkens the ice and accelerates melting – calling for restrictive measures for marine fuels.

A similar approach is seen in the Blue Speeds campaign, which is encouraging governments, shipowners and ports to work collaboratively to bring about effective and lasting change. A 10% reduction in the speed of commercial vessels would be enough to cut underwater noise by 40%, halve the risk of collisions with cetaceans and reduce shipping's greenhouse gas emissions by 13%.

Raising the alarm is one thing. Bringing the right people together, keeping the conversation going and turning awareness into deliverable solutions is another thing entirely. Few organisations are capable of this. And even fewer benefit from the commitment of a Head of State. HSH Prince Albert II champions these causes at the highest political level, including at the United Nations, giving this philanthropic organisation much greater reach than most."

Photo: © Lucile Courtial/Portrait photo: © DR



2 BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER, FROM THE GRASSROOTS TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE

© John Weller.

The Anthropocene highlights the extent of our responsibility for fundamentally altering Earth's systems.[5] It also gives us the opportunity to realign our relationship with the planet: how we inhabit it and how we use it. Yet working out how to navigate this new age cannot be left to isolated actors. It has always been a core role of the Foundation to bring people together: scientists, decision-makers, entrepreneurs, investors, citizens and grassroots actors, Indigenous and local communities, and international organisations. For two decades, this synergy has underpinned all the Foundation's initiatives.

[5] The Anthropocene is a recently proposed concept for a new geological epoch: 'the age of humans', when human activity has become the dominant influence on Earth's climate and ecosystems.

BRINGING DIFFERENT PARTNERS TOGETHER

This ability to bring people together reflects the Foundation's non-hierarchical approach, based on inclusion and equity. It consistently acts as a hub for expertise, financial and human resources, and institutional and political drivers.

In 2019, to boost the recovery of monk seal colonies in the Mediterranean, it set up the Monk Seal Alliance, a coalition of donors supporting organisations in the region that were trying to reduce pressure on the iconic species that had long inhabited sea caves there. Monk seal management plans are now in place, from the Turkish coast to the shores of Albania and Croatia, that inform tourism, fishing and shipping.

Bringing people together means finding common ground from which joint action can flow, sometimes in spite of differing interests. As certain species return to human-occupied regions, the sensitive issue of how to share land and resources surfaces. For example, elephants can damage crops and wolves can disrupt farming practices. To improve coexistence between people and large predators in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region of France, the Foundation set up the Human–Wildlife Initiative in 2020, which has since been rolled out in Switzerland and Spain. It brings all stakeholders to the table (government, the farming community, environmental groups and hunters) to help them adapt to this environmental and societal challenge.

Redefining space for both wildlife and our own purposes requires careful diplomacy – an art that the Foundation values highly, as it is driven by a mission to transcend divisions. Thanks to this balancing act, new methods of managing spaces and species that prevent conflict can emerge.

The Foundation also recognises the power of the imagination through the Green Shift Initiative. Launched in 2023, it draws on art and culture to showcase positive environmental narratives that can inspire new forms of engagement.

BUILDING EXPERTISE

The consortium supported by the Foundation's Pelagos Initiative and launched in June 2025 at the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) is a prime example of this unifying role. It brings together 13 international partners (from the research community, civil society, public institutions and local authorities) around the shared goal of managing the Pelagos Sanctuary more effectively. Collaborative action sometimes involves targeted skills-building: BeMed, for example, is developing expertise in tackling plastic pollution through its Business Club, while other projects are empowering managers of protected areas towards self-reliance and communities to take charge of their own access to drinking water.

Indigenous and local communities are placed centre stage by the Foundation, especially where conservation and access to water are concerned. No projects on the ground are implemented without their participation, from boosting the socio-ecological resilience of mangroves in Benin, to sea turtle conservation by coastal communities in São Tomé, to a cooperative network of marine protected areas in three Cambodian archipelagos. The Forests and Communities Initiative brings together both local and international stakeholders. In Cameroon, for example, management of the globally significant Dja Biosphere Reserve is being strengthened, while livelihoods for forest inhabitants, including the Indigenous Ba'Aka community, are being improved. These communities are true partners, bringing ownership, local grounding and longevity to the projects.



© Michael Alesi/Palais Princier

HSH Prince Albert II addressing the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 24 September 2025.

A HEAD OF STATE AT THE HELM

Another feature of the Monegasque Foundation is that it is the only one led by a current head of state. His unwavering commitment lends extra weight to every project and takes each campaign to the highest level. For example, concerns about the ocean were brought to the international stage at COP21 in 2015 via the Because the Ocean declaration endorsed by HSH Prince Albert II. These issues were subsequently championed by global partnerships (such as with the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, which raises blended finance for ocean ecosystems, which support a quarter of marine life) and regional ones (including The MedFund and its action in the Mediterranean). The inclusion of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water in the international agenda also owes much to the Prince, his government and his foundation.

This long-term political support has also been directed to the high seas as a result of advocacy by the Foundation, including concerning the recent BBNJ Agreement.[6] The Agreement was signed by HSH Prince Albert II on the very first day and ratified by Monaco before any other European state. It came into force in January 2026, opening the door for waters beyond national borders, which represent two thirds of the global ocean, to benefit from the creation of marine protected areas – a key element of the 30×30 target.

Other projects have made significant progress thanks to this long-standing political support. The Prince's personal commitment to the polar regions has raised the global profile of their urgent situation, which is being thrown into the spotlight as the fifth International Polar Year (2032) approaches. In 2026, the third Monaco Polar Symposium brought together nearly 170 scientists and prominent figures specialising in the Arctic and Antarctic regions, who took part in workshops to design flagship initiatives. Bringing together stakeholders and experts in the two poles inevitably stimulates plans for their future from a planet-wide perspective, which is the Foundation's broader intention with all its work.

[6] Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement.

The French branch was the first to be set up by the Foundation, in 2007. Ever since, it has been firmly committed to protecting Mediterranean ecosystems, not least through long-standing support for a project led by Port-Cros National Park to preserve local biodiversity, and a long-term partnership with the BeMed initiative to tackle plastic pollution in the Mediterranean.

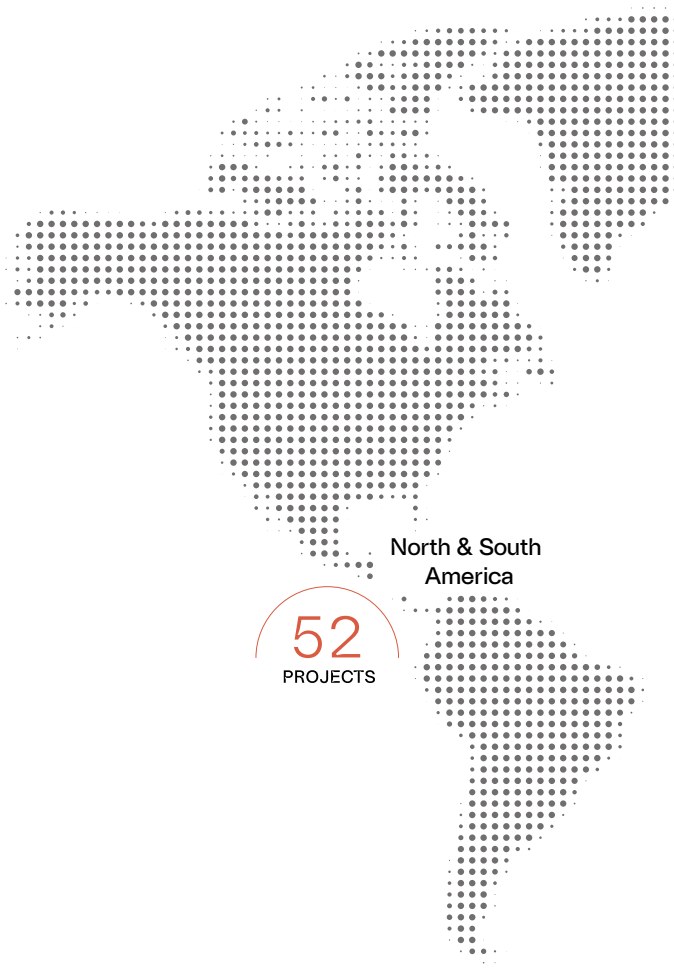
Thomas Grenon
President of the French branch

This branch carries out the Foundation's objectives in Spain by facilitating projects with significant environmental, educational and social impact and by building institutional partnerships. Our work focuses on protecting seagrass meadows around the Balearic Islands, awarding scholarships, supporting the Human–Wildlife Initiative and organising the annual exhibition of the Foundation's Environmental Photography Award.

Carol Portabella Settimó
President of the Spanish branch

Solutions exist. And for them to truly change the world, they must be funded and implemented on a large scale. Through our prestigious flagship event, Ball in Monaco, our objective in Singapore, and more broadly across South-East Asia, is to mobilise funds to accelerate initiatives that protect our planet and support HSH the Sovereign Prince's commitment to building a more sustainable future.

Jackie Deromedi
President of the Asian branch



The Chinese branch's Beijing office has embedded and advanced the Foundation's ecological impact in China for over seven years. Among our flagship initiatives are the Amur tiger conservation programme, the Taihu Lake cyanobacteria remediation project and the high-level environmental science scholarship programme. We also work to empower eco-governance and bilateral environmental cooperation between Monaco and China.

Robert Shi
President of the Chinese branch

The primary aims of the German branch are to raise the Foundation's profile, promote its objectives in Germany and boost fundraising efforts to provide long-term support for its projects. Among the initiatives it has organised to achieve this are a climate symposium in Potsdam in 2019, held in cooperation with the Hasso Plattner Institute and attended by HSH Prince Albert II, and a donor luncheon in Hamburg in 2024.

Prof Dr Alexander Liegl
President of the German branch

As president of the Latin American branch, I am proud to see the Prince Albert II Foundation take root in Brazil. Our alliance with the University of São Paulo, creating three PhD scholarships in environmental research, exemplifies this. The branch's inauguration in November 2025, ahead of the Prince's trip to COP30 in Belém, opened a new era of scientific cooperation and fundraising for the Monaco headquarters' initiatives, notably the Forests and Communities Initiative.

Arnoldo Wald Filho
President of the Latin American branch

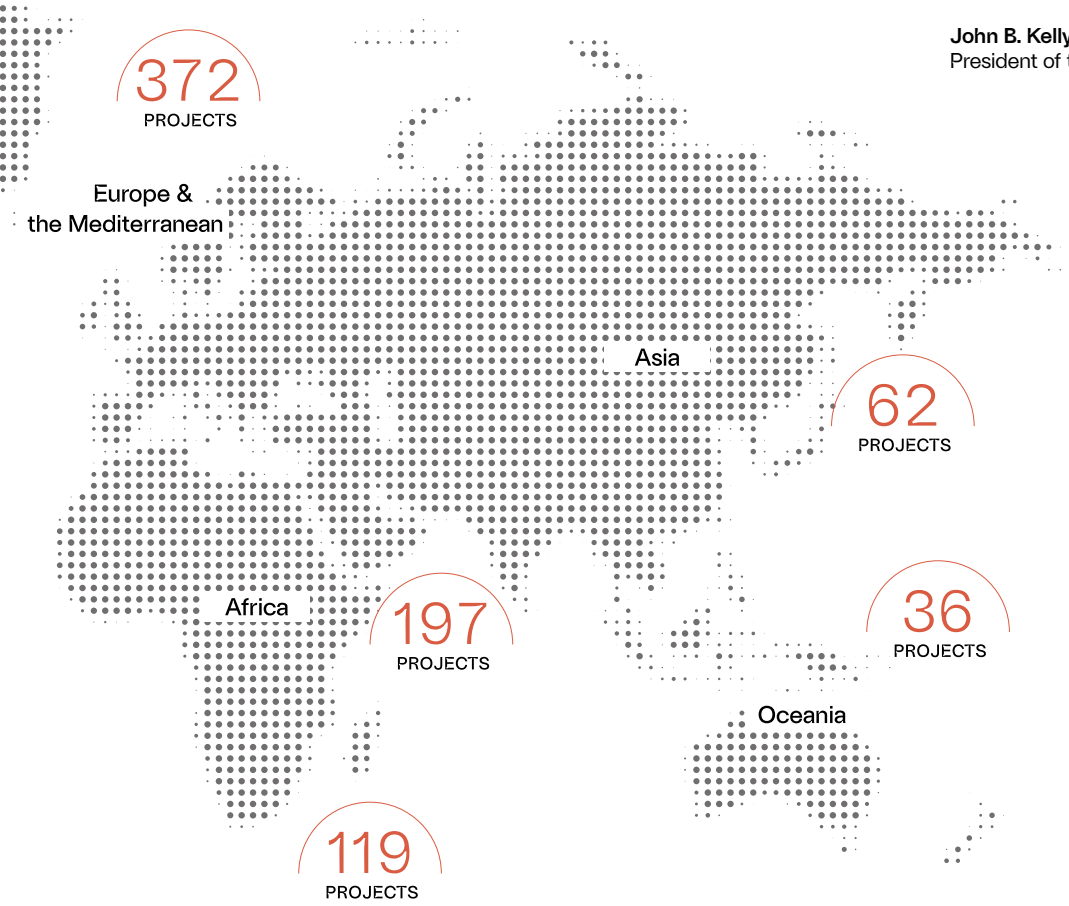
Global distribution of projects as at 31/12/25

The UK branch harnesses the United Kingdom's scientific excellence to promote HSH Prince Albert II's vision; institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Imperial College are among our key partners in the fields of the ocean, the polar regions and biodiversity. In 2025 the Foundation's Planetary Health Awards ceremony was held in London for the first time, highlighting the special bond forged over the past 20 years.

HE Evelyne Genta
President of the UK branch

For nearly two decades, the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation USA has advanced the Foundation's mission by building partnerships that unite science, conservation, innovation and diplomacy. From protecting more than four million hectares of rainforest in Peru to fostering collaborations with MIT, the Smithsonian Institution and the Organization of American States, the US branch has helped strengthen Monaco's leadership in addressing global environmental challenges, while inspiring practical solutions for future generations.

John B. Kelly III
President of the American branch



Guided by science, the Canadian branch has served as a catalyst for conservation initiatives across Canada since 2008, with a particular focus on the North. To date, it has supported more than a dozen projects, including initiatives focused on the intergenerational transmission of knowledge within Inuit communities, research on whale health in the Gulf of St Lawrence, and environmental monitoring across Arctic and subarctic regions.

Bita Razeghi-Cattelan
President of the Canadian branch

As a staunch advocate of sustainable blue finance, the Swiss branch identifies and supports innovations that benefit the ocean, glaciers and biodiversity. It has mobilised several million Swiss francs for the Foundation's projects and facilitated strategic collaborations with the Kofi Annan Foundation, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL), World Bank, Geneva Water Hub, Swiss Re and other impactful partners.

Derek Queisser de Stockalper
President of the Swiss branch

The Italian branch promotes an environment-positive culture through dialogue with universities, research bodies, institutions and civil society. As it travelled around Italy, the touring exhibition Human–Nature: Fragile Balances, *featuring photographs from the Environmental Photography Award, facilitated new local partnerships and took the Foundation's values to centres of learning and culture, boosting its work to support biodiversity and harmony between people and nature.*

Marco Colasanti
President of the Italian branch

A GLOBAL NETWORK

185

partnerships signed with local and international organisations

250

organisations supported on the ground

8

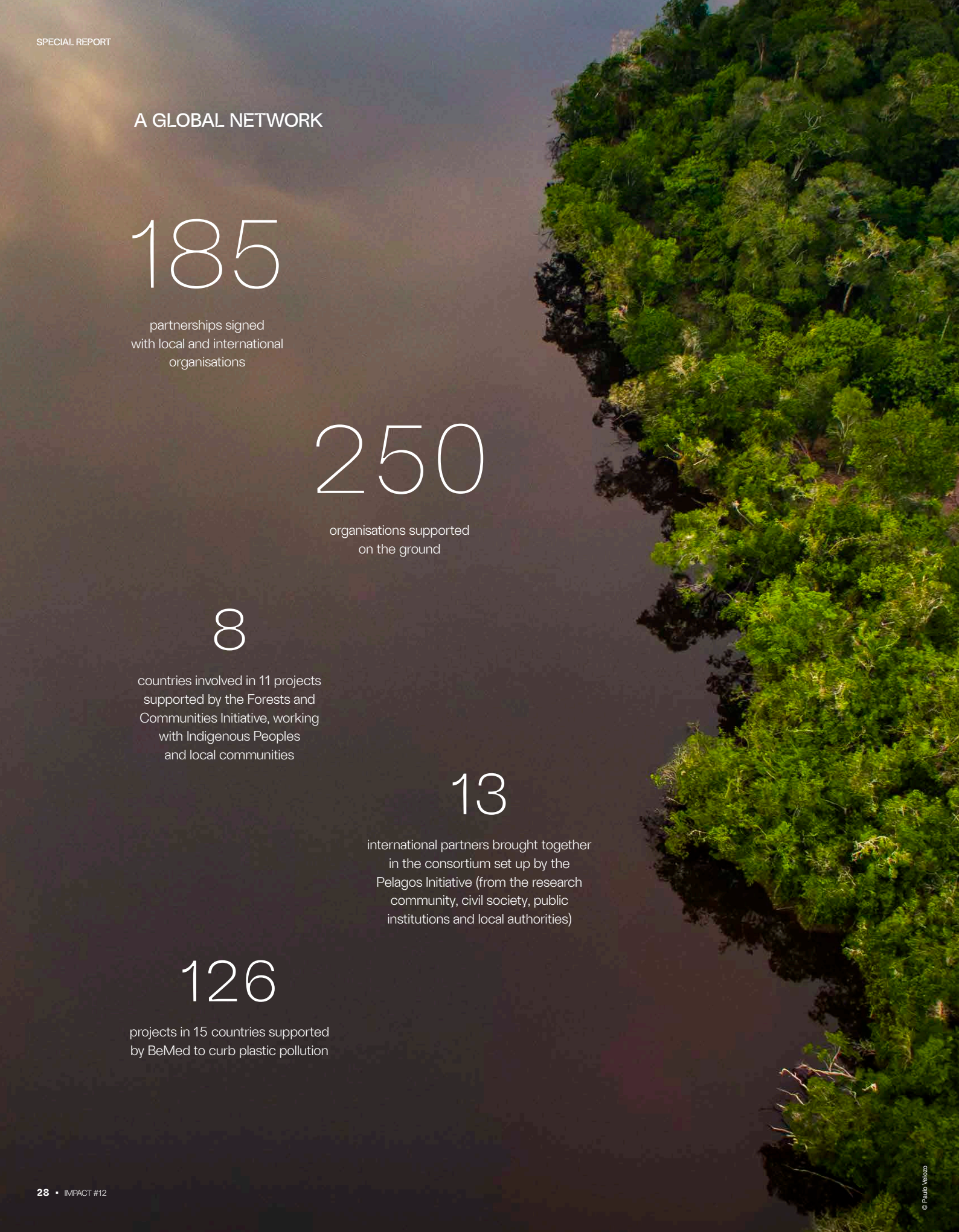
countries involved in 11 projects supported by the Forests and Communities Initiative, working with Indigenous Peoples and local communities

13

international partners brought together in the consortium set up by the Pelagos Initiative (from the research community, civil society, public institutions and local authorities)

126

projects in 15 countries supported by BeMed to curb plastic pollution



© Paulo Veloso

BOOSTING THE ROLE OF COMMUNITIES IN FOREST CONSERVATION



Studies have demonstrated that the best preserved forests are those that are home to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. It was this insight that inspired the Foundation to launch its Forests and Communities Initiative (FCI) in 2022 to support communities around the world to protect their forests. Projects have included Indigenous patrols equipped with surveillance technology in the Amazon, forest ranger training and community livelihood plans in Ecuador, a bioeconomy of wildflower gatherers in Brazil and forest sentinels in Papua New Guinea. How can we boost this role to ensure healthy forests for the future?

We asked **Tim Flannery**, a mammalogist and palaeontologist with 45 years' experience of field work in the forests of Australasia, and the most senior member of the Foundation's Board of Directors.

"You can't protect the forest without Indigenous People and local communities."







What has your field experience taught you about how local communities and Indigenous Peoples protect their forests, day to day?

I've worked right across the region with Indigenous communities, from Australia to Fiji, to Eastern Indonesia, to Papua New Guinea. You see the same thing again and again. Outsiders might just see a wall of green. But local people know the attributes of each tree, what it produces and when, what animals live in it. Their knowledge is encyclopaedic, and that allows them to treat the forest really as their supermarket, their store for building materials, their pharmacy. So they look after that resource very carefully and very well. They are the natural custodians of those environments. They've been looking after them for many thousands of years, and they, more than anyone else, know how to do that correctly.

But the communities are changing. I remember flying across the island of New Guinea in 1984, and underneath me there was nothing but unbroken forest canopy for most of the trip. Now there are logging roads going in everywhere. The forest is under threat and a lot of the traditional knowledge is not being passed on as well as it should be, because the impact of the outside world is now so great.

Two key projects supported through the partnership between the Associação Floresta Protegida (AFP) and the Forests and Communities Initiative: Kayapó Forest School, which trains the next generation of Indigenous leaders through a combination of traditional knowledge and new conservation technologies; and the territorial monitoring and surveillance guard post programme, which trains and employs more than 1,500 Kayapó guards to protect their 2,200-kilometre border.



Photos © Marcos Hlace

In your experience, what role do communities need to play for a conservation project to truly succeed?

I'd like to say the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation is very special, and somewhat rare, in understanding the role of communities. So many organisations think they know the answer, and want to give it to the community. But the community often doesn't want that answer: they have their own understanding. The most difficult thing in working with communities is to step aside, take your prejudices away and just really listen. And learn. The people who've lived in that forest their whole life know far more than we do.

Can you tell us about the diversity of the Forests and Communities Initiative's projects?

I'm extremely proud of what the Foundation has achieved. Although fairly recent, the FCI is already having a wonderful impact, and that only comes about because we start from what communities themselves want, rather than impose our own solution. Indigenous life is diverse, the rainforests are diverse and the challenges are diverse. So of course we have a diverse series of projects.

The one that stays with me most – one of the very first that came up through the Foundation – was the Congo rainforest margins, the buffer regions around the Congo Basin. We have a core zone of rainforest to be protected, and a buffer zone – what we call mixed use – where people might make their gardens, hunt or gather materials. There, it's very important that we get the mixture right between conservation and local people's use. If you get that right, the local people become your natural guardians, stopping anyone else from stealing resources. It was a very well-targeted project, like the Forest Sentinels in Papua New Guinea – another great project.

We have to scale up our action overall and make sure we listen. People have been in those forests for many thousands of years and they have learned how to keep them healthy. By taking them out, we threaten to undermine that health and that diversity.

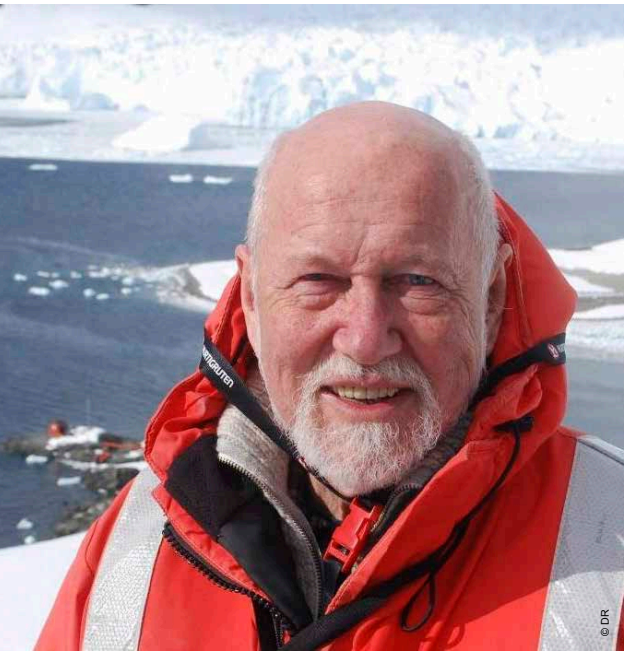
The Foundation has chosen, through the FCI, to directly support local Indigenous organisations rather than funding large international programmes. What does that approach involve?

The challenge of working with smaller Indigenous communities is that it takes a lot more effort on the part of the Foundation. How do we reach out to those people, how do we make time for the meetings? If you just fund a big organisation, they're supposed to take care of that, but often they don't. What the Foundation is doing is so much more responsible. I was at the board-level discussions around the Initiative and it was a fantastic thing.

Looking ahead, what role do you see for a foundation like this in the years to come?

If I can be quite candid, we are very fortunate that the Foundation is driven by the passions of the Prince: those passions are exactly what the world needs today, for conservation, for addressing climate change in all its manifestations, for social justice and in those Indigenous communities. Yes, the Foundation is small, but it is particularly powerful and driven, and can achieve a great deal. The Foundation has been part of great wins in conservation: the Mediterranean monk seal, the vulture in the Southern Alps, etc. These are lighthouse projects that give me hope. We have a better future ahead of us, but we will have to keep working very hard to achieve that end.

CONNECTING THE POLES: SCIENCE WITHOUT BORDERS



What changes have occurred in the polar regions in recent years? Arctic sea ice has reduced to a thin seasonal layer, where there used to be a perennial mass that only nuclear-powered icebreakers could plough through. The edges of the Antarctic ice sheet have been weakened by a warming ocean that is pushing glaciers into the sea. Sea levels are now rising by half a centimetre a year, with ever-increasing waters flowing from the Antarctic.

Olav Orheim has been a member of the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation's Scientific and Technical Committee since 2012. As a scientist and a key polar witness, he reflects on the unique role that Monaco has chosen to play, supporting the polar regions on the world stage, and on the initiative the Foundation has dedicated to them.

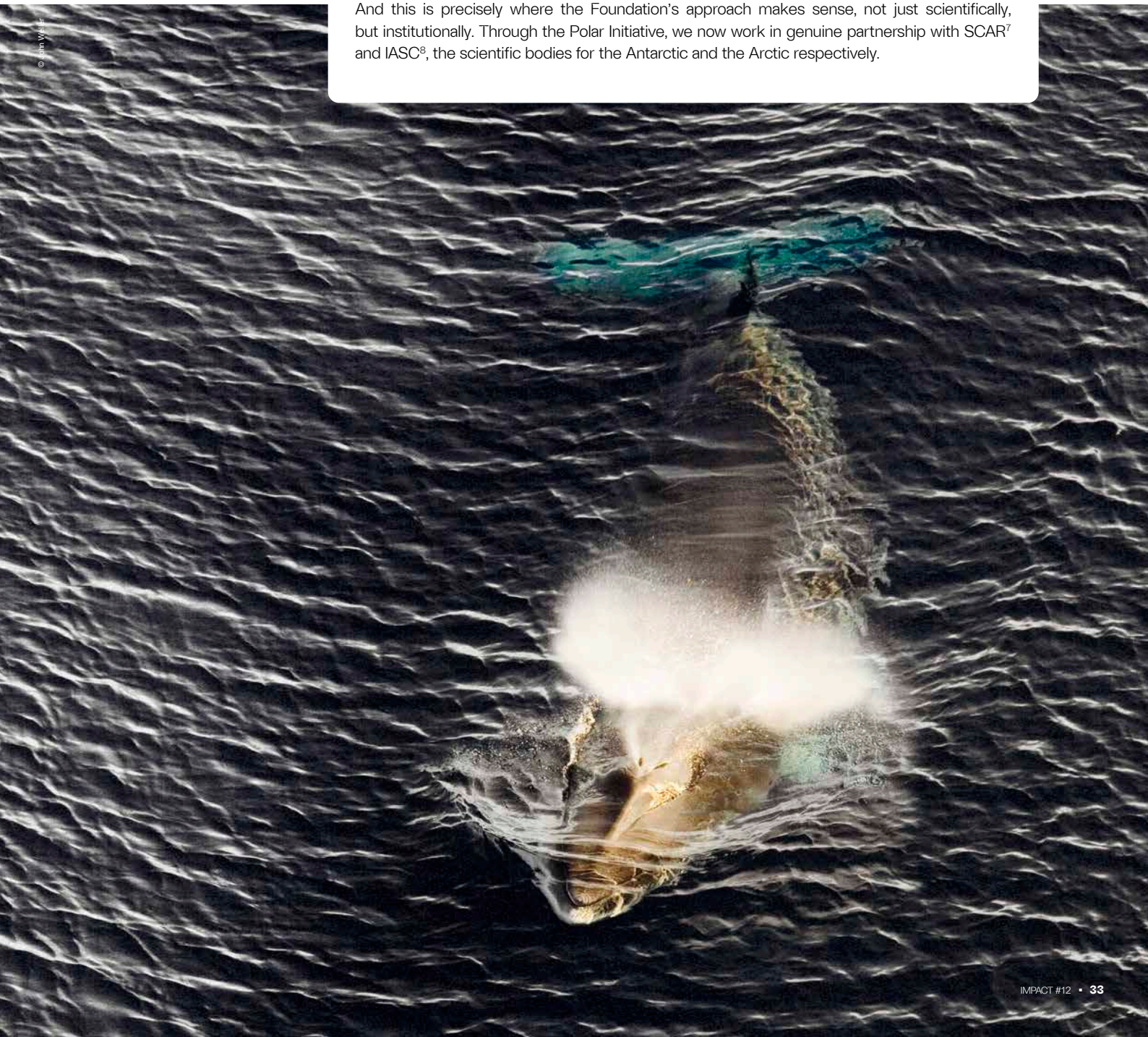
"Monaco played an impressive role in the creation of the world's largest marine protected area in the Ross Sea"

The Foundation has chosen to treat the two poles as a single interconnected system rather than as separate fields of study. Why is this Arctic–Antarctic dialogue scientifically indispensable?

In many aspects of polar science, the two poles are very different: different geology, different ecosystems. For many scientists, working in one or the other region is entirely normal and legitimate. During my formative years I did that myself, working almost exclusively in Antarctica. Glaciology, however, is one area where the fundamental questions are shared, even if the Antarctic and Arctic glaciers are not the same. And beyond glaciology, bipolar science has grown enormously. Physical oceanography, deep ocean circulation in particular, illustrates this growth – as does marine biology, where certain challenges are common to both poles. The Arctic shows us climate changes that are immediate and visible. The Antarctic represents the longer, slower and perhaps more consequential story.

And this is precisely where the Foundation's approach makes sense, not just scientifically, but institutionally. Through the Polar Initiative, we now work in genuine partnership with SCAR[7] and IASC[8], the scientific bodies for the Antarctic and the Arctic respectively.

The Foundation supported the campaign advocating for the establishment of a marine protected area in the Ross Sea in Antarctica, from 2012. Championed by HSH the Sovereign Prince, the Ross Sea Region Marine Protected Area was approved by the CCAMLR (Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources) in 2016 and entered into force in 2017.



Is the protection of the polar regions today more a scientific challenge or a political one? And what kinds of spaces can bridge the two?

Typically, most scientists don't get involved with politics. But in the Antarctic in particular, science also means specialising in how to get there and how to work there. The logistics are an enormous challenge, and nearly all of the Antarctic nations have their own institute that specialises in transport and accommodation, and generally advises on national policy.

What Monaco has done is to bridge a gap that exists outside the established frameworks. In the Antarctic Treaty system, it's countries that speak, with scientists in the delegations. In the Arctic Council, scientists aren't among the decision-makers. At the Monaco meetings, we bring together scientists and decision-makers with no national brief constraining what anyone can say. It's a little like the corridors of the Antarctic Treaty meetings, where the most productive conversations happen – except that here, it becomes the meeting itself. Having chaired both the Committee for Environmental Protection and the political and legal discussions under the Antarctic Treaty, each for five years, I can say the Monaco format stands apart.

At the last Polar Symposium we spent proper time looking ahead: how to build cooperation, and how to move the Fifth International Polar Year forward. We lifted our sights, asking the bigger questions, in an open process. The format (time for discussion, small group work, group summaries) worked very well and many senior scientists said the same thing: it was a symposium that fitted into the system, yet differed from everything else that exists.

When I wrote my first article for the general public in 1981, I argued that we were the first generation that could affect the climate, and the last generation that could get away with it. A generation later, what remains is a political issue more than a scientific one. That is precisely why spaces like Monaco matter.

Over 20 years, the Foundation has supported a range of polar projects. How do you assess their cumulative impact?

In the early years, the Foundation was shooting in many different directions. It's quite another story today: we have a more comprehensive view.

Monaco played an impressive role in the creation of the world's largest marine protected area in the Ross Sea (1.55 million square kilometres) . The Prince can communicate with other heads of government and in some situations that opens doors that science alone can't open (for Russia's and China's participation, for example). It provides a form of political and diplomatic action that a purely scientific foundation can't.

Other projects have left their mark in different ways: the Tara Arctic expedition, the comprehensive mapping of the Antarctic ice sheet's grounding line, the ORCA project on Arctic benthic organisms. And then there is Ice Memory, where the Foundation's role has been pivotal. The Prince became honorary chair about four years ago and the Foundation provided crucial early support at the moment it was most needed.

Beyond individual projects, what has changed is the partnership with SCAR and IASC. That interface gives a much broader view of what is needed and what is coming. It has considerably improved the coherence of what we do. Continuity matters too: sustaining a project over years builds something that one-off funding never can.

[7] Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research.

[8] International Arctic Science Committee.



Denis Allemand, university lecturer and member of the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation's Scientific and Technical Committee.

THE PELAGOS SANCTUARY – PROGRESS THROUGH COOPERATION

"The Pelagos Sanctuary has long represented a paradox: it's one of the most strictly protected marine areas in the Mediterranean, and yet one of the most underfunded to implement its protection. The Pelagos Agreement, which was signed by France, Italy and Monaco in 1999, designated 87,500 square kilometres as a habitat for cetaceans. But the reserve needed more than just a decree. Its resources, limited to annual contributions from the three countries, weren't sufficient to provide field monitoring. It was at risk of becoming purely symbolic.

It was undoubtedly this realisation that prompted the Government of Monaco to host the Permanent Secretariat of the Agreement in the Principality from 2017. However, effective protection required more than a centralised authority. Governance of this cross-border area also needed NGOs, scientists and international organisations to be involved. This is where the Pelagos Initiative came in. When the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation launched it in 2021, in partnership with WWF, IUCN and MedPAN,[9] it signalled a change in approach. Diplomatic efforts were complemented by practical engagement, with managers of marine protected areas, researchers and civil society working together to protect the cetaceans and their habitat.

The most tangible evidence of this collaboration is the Pelagos Forum, which was launched during Monaco Ocean Week in 2023. Its first meeting attracted more than 80 local stakeholders. When it was held for the second time, in March 2024, more than 100 participants came together to discuss key topics such as marine protected areas, sustainable fishing, noise pollution and responsible tourism. Seeing stakeholders with potentially conflicting interests draft joint recommendations proves that protecting the ocean depends above all on collective wisdom.

This two-tiered action – involving both the state and voluntary organisations – continues a historical legacy. Back in 1919, Prince Albert I founded the Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM), the leading joint scientific body for the Mediterranean countries. Prince Rainier III, who chaired the CIESM from 1956, built on this vision by establishing the Monaco Scientific Centre in 1960 and signing the RAMOGE Agreement in 1976. He also supported the creation of Monaco's first underwater nature reserve, which was managed by an NGO, the Monegasque Association for the Protection of Nature.

Today, the Pelagos Sanctuary is still governed by the same principles, based on cooperation, science and civil engagement. The endeavour has now culminated in the Pelagos consortium, which was launched at the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in Nice in 2025. It brings together 13 partners from the research community, local authorities and the voluntary sector to work on four key areas: regulation, science, stakeholder engagement and communication. It is an unprecedented alliance between entities that would never otherwise have collaborated.

This cooperative effort is driving scientific progress: studies into underwater noise and monitoring of collisions are producing data that wasn't previously available.

However, the Sanctuary remains vulnerable: in the absence of a binding framework, its protection is dependent on collective goodwill. Having said that, the approach of drawing in more stakeholders all the time gives us hope that it is still possible to safeguard a third of the Mediterranean."

[9] Network of Managers of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean.

Photo: © Frédéric Larrey/Portrait photo: © DR

3 INNOVATING TO SCALE UP: TECHNOLOGY, FINANCE, TRAINING



© Ceddo

What form of innovation can measure up to the challenges facing the climate, biodiversity and water resources? The Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation is promoting innovation that goes far beyond technological advances. With its roots in a Principality deeply connected to the sea, and to science since the reign of Prince Albert I, its approach is to take a holistic view of environmental and societal action, forge bold partnerships and break new ground. For the Foundation, innovation represents not so much a sector as a strategy – one with several strands.

Over the past decade, the Foundation has undertaken a significant shift: it has linked its historical bedrock of philanthropy with impact investment, to make sustainable economy and finance a driving force for the ecological transition. The objective can be summed up in two words: scaling up. The magnitude of the problems calls for major mobilisation of capital, including tapping into private investment, which has so far been underutilised. The creation of a new form of finance with practical applications was also needed – one grounded in scientific expertise and mindful of both the long-term impact of solutions and the economic viability of the new ground it was breaking.

GETTING THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY ON BOARD

The sustainable, regenerative blue economy, which is so intertwined with the Principality's maritime identity, is providing the first testbed for this approach. This sector, which has long been neglected by investors, is now emerging as an asset class in its own right. The Foundation is taking the lead here. Since 2019, the Ocean Innovators Platform has brought together nearly two hundred business leaders, investors and entrepreneurs, from Monaco to New York to Abu Dhabi. They share the goal of accelerating innovation to protect the oceans, whether through decarbonised maritime transport, sustainable fishing, marine renewable energy or reductions in plastic waste. In 2025, the Blue Economy and Finance Forum, hosted by the Monaco Government, Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation and Oceanographic Institute of Monaco–Prince Albert I of Monaco Foundation, with the support of France and Costa Rica, provided an international platform for discussing and planning these efforts. Its second meeting, held in May 2026 and chaired once again by HSH Prince Albert II, attracted representatives from 47 countries, most of whom were from the private sector, with nearly a quarter coming from institutional investors. They were united around the view, supported by practical evidence, that the solutions and funding are already out there; the task now is to combine the two on a scale that reflects the urgency of the situation. By providing this arena that presents conservation and restoration as investment opportunities for the modern financial sector, the Foundation is acting as a catalyst for concrete commitments.

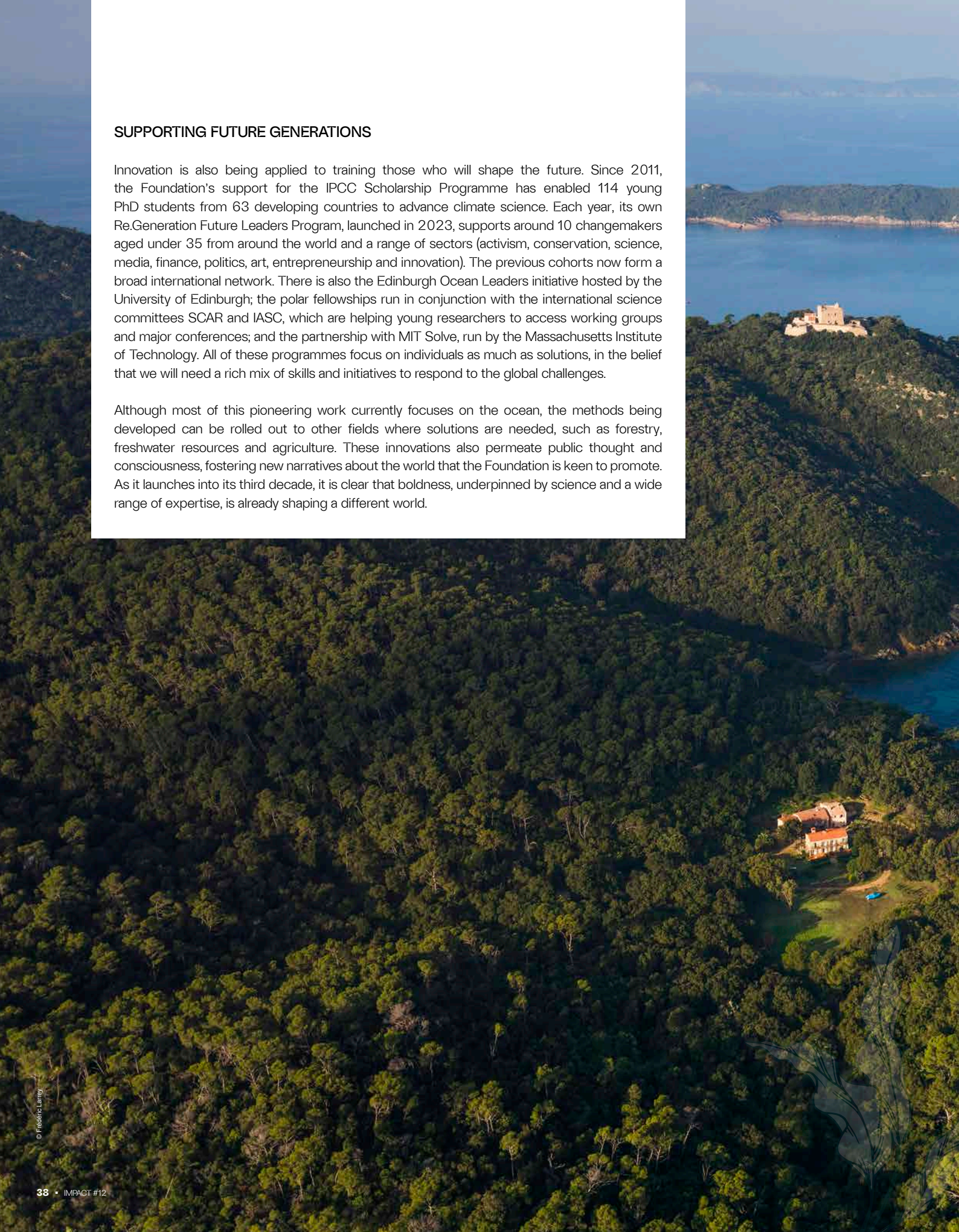
PIONEERING FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

This unique position has resulted in the creation of some unrivalled tools. The ReOcean Fund, run by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation and Monaco Asset Management, is aiming to raise 100 million euros to support the development of sustainable ocean-based innovation in five sectors relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 14: ocean data, blue food, sustainable maritime transport, ecosystem restoration and solutions to plastic pollution. Even the way the fund functions is innovative, with every addition to the portfolio being subject to scientific assessment. Its first investments have been in environmental DNA, wind propulsion and bio-enhancing concrete. Another mechanism, the Blue Economy Index, is channelling capital into a portfolio of companies with outstanding ESG ratings. These instruments are linked by a common requirement: to demonstrate, backed up by evidence, that environmental benefits and economic performance are mutually reinforcing, paving the way for a regenerative economy.

SUPPORTING FUTURE GENERATIONS

Innovation is also being applied to training those who will shape the future. Since 2011, the Foundation's support for the IPCC Scholarship Programme has enabled 114 young PhD students from 63 developing countries to advance climate science. Each year, its own Re.Generation Future Leaders Program, launched in 2023, supports around 10 changemakers aged under 35 from around the world and a range of sectors (activism, conservation, science, media, finance, politics, art, entrepreneurship and innovation). The previous cohorts now form a broad international network. There is also the Edinburgh Ocean Leaders initiative hosted by the University of Edinburgh; the polar fellowships run in conjunction with the international science committees SCAR and IASC, which are helping young researchers to access working groups and major conferences; and the partnership with MIT Solve, run by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. All of these programmes focus on individuals as much as solutions, in the belief that we will need a rich mix of skills and initiatives to respond to the global challenges.

Although most of this pioneering work currently focuses on the ocean, the methods being developed can be rolled out to other fields where solutions are needed, such as forestry, freshwater resources and agriculture. These innovations also permeate public thought and consciousness, fostering new narratives about the world that the Foundation is keen to promote. As it launches into its third decade, it is clear that boldness, underpinned by science and a wide range of expertise, is already shaping a different world.



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BLUE FINANCE IN MOTION



€25 billion

of investments identified at the first Blue Economy and Finance Forum

200

leaders brought together through the Ocean Innovators Platform, in 10 meetings since 2019

5

key sectors within the ReOcean Fund, all aligned with SDG 14: Life Below Water

47

countries represented at the Blue Economy and Finance Forum 2026

WORKING TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE AND REGENERATIVE BLUE ECONOMY AND FINANCE


© DR

The blue economy, which is valued at 2.5 trillion dollars a year, has now reached a tipping point. Having long been sidelined as a philanthropic pursuit, it is now within the scope of institutional investment. However, there is still a significant gap between commitments pledged and capital raised – even though the ocean, which regulates the climate and feeds billions, offers the potential for a truly regenerative economy.

Economist **Paul Polman**, a former CEO of Unilever and a renowned expert in corporate social responsibility, has joined the Board of Directors of the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, which is one of the rare organisations to combine science, advocacy and finance. Is global finance finally ready to invest at the level needed to address the ocean crisis?



"A good idea scales only when incentives are aligned, standards are shared, risk is distributed and governance is clear enough to inspire trust."



© bound4blue

Bound4blue, a world leader in wind propulsion systems, joined the ReOcean Fund portfolio in 2025. Pictured: Norwegian shipping company Odfjell's chemical tanker Bow Olympus.

In what way is the ocean the ultimate symbol of a regenerative economy?

We call this planet Earth but should call it planet Aqua: the ocean covers more than 70% of the Earth's surface and contains 97% of the planet's water. Absorbing more than 90% of the excess heat generated by our economies since the industrial revolution and nearly 30% of our CO2 emissions, it feeds more than 3 billion people, drives 80% of global rainfall and carries 90% of global trade. This is not a peripheral ecosystem: it is the circulatory system of the global economy. What makes the ocean the best test case for Net Positive thinking, beyond its scale, is the complexity of its governance: nearly 200 jurisdictions, including exclusive economic zones, international waters, and a high seas commons long without any binding legal framework. No single government controls it; no single business can restore it alone.

How does the ReOcean Fund change the game compared with conventional philanthropy?

Philanthropy can plug gaps the market ignores, fund research and protect ecosystems with no financial return. The real shift is not replacing philanthropy with investment but combining the two: the returns from successful investments can fund projects the market will never make profitable – the restoration of seagrass meadows and spawning grounds, and support for coastal communities turned into stewards rather than extractors. Cross-subsidised by the more profitable segments of the blue economy, these projects no longer need to offer venture-style returns themselves.

That is the logic of the ReOcean Fund: a financial instrument anchored to the Foundation, whose scientific rigour guides the selection and measurement of projects. Built on measurable impact, this model offers a credible response to greenwashing.

The Blue Economy and Finance Forum 2026 brought together participants from 47 countries, 60% from the private sector and 23% representing institutional investors. Is finance finally stepping up for the blue economy?

The complexity of the ocean rules out the private sector as a mere spectator. Governments set the rules, but it is businesses that control shipping routes, aquaculture systems and fishing supply chains, as well as, increasingly, the capital that will determine whether ocean restoration reaches scale or remains confined to philanthropy. These businesses have the technical capacity, logistical reach and networks needed to shift systems faster than any treaty. It is now up to them to put these assets to work for a system they all depend on.

Five years ago, the blue economy was still a philanthropic conversation; today, it is entering institutional mandates. But every institution must show, in its portfolio, that this shift has translated into action. The question is not whether capital is moving, but whether it is moving fast enough: the gap between what is announced and what is actually invested remains significant.

The BBNJ Agreement offers the first serious legal framework for protecting biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions. But law alone will not save the ocean. Data, monitoring, restoration, enforcement and the business models that turn a legal commitment into practical protection all need financing. We also need to confront the question of deep-sea mining: in the name of the energy transition, it could open the way to a rush to exploit a still poorly understood environment, with major risks to ecosystems and carbon storage.

What obstacles still hold the blue economy back from scaling?

A good idea scales only when incentives are aligned, standards are shared, risk is distributed and governance is clear enough to inspire trust. The blue economy still lacks nearly all of this: fragmented regulatory frameworks, financial instruments that treat ocean projects as very high risk, and insufficient competitive pressure to accelerate behavioural change.

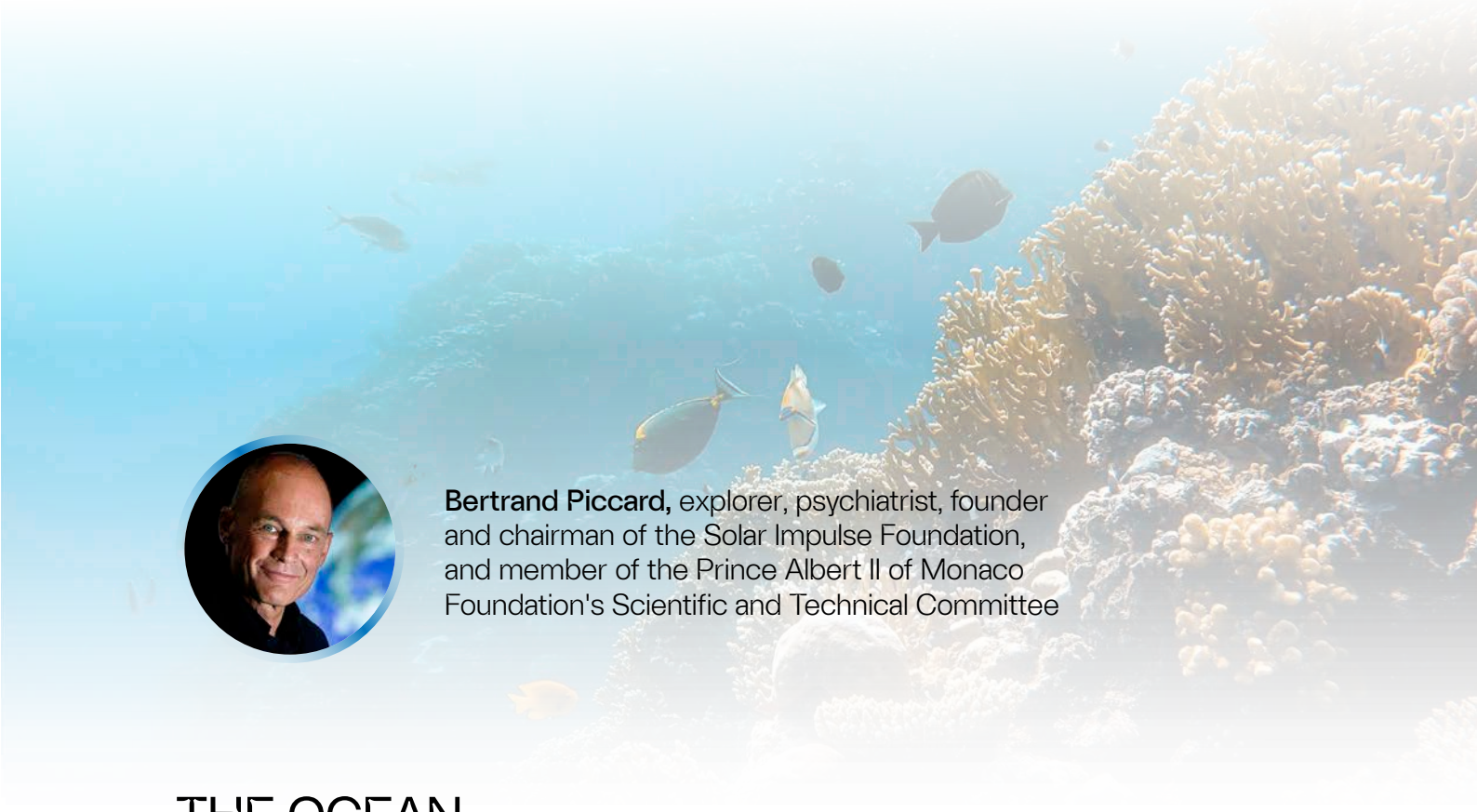
The deepest obstacle remains leadership. Net Positive leadership asks two uncomfortable questions: are you profiting from solving the world's problems, or from making them worse? Is the world better because your business exists? In the blue economy, few industries can yet answer yes to either. The path requires accepting costs before receiving returns, and committing before competitors commit. Those who understand this will set the terms; the rest will spend the decade catching up.

That courage must be supported by governments that follow through on their promises and give responsible companies the confidence they need to invest for the long term. This alliance between private-sector leadership and consistent public action can produce the fastest results. The ocean can't wait for things to move step by step; it needs leaders who are prepared to steam ahead.

Where does the Foundation stand in this landscape?

Many institutions choose between scientific rigour and political influence. The Foundation has spent 20 years rejecting that dichotomy. It brings together scientists, policymakers, entrepreneurs and investors, and turns that dialogue into levers for action. The ReOcean Fund and the Blue Economy and Finance Forum illustrate this role as a bridge between knowledge, public decision-making and capital mobilisation.

Its strength lies in treating ocean protection not as a constraint on growth, but as its precondition. By combining scientific legitimacy, advocacy capacity and financial engineering, it can help take the blue economy from promise to scale. The question for the next 20 years is whether this momentum will drive the structural changes the ocean needs.



Bertrand Piccard, explorer, psychiatrist, founder and chairman of the Solar Impulse Foundation, and member of the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation's Scientific and Technical Committee

THE OCEAN, A REALM OF SOLUTIONS

"I come from a family of explorers. My grandfather, Auguste, reached the stratosphere by balloon. My father, Jacques, touched the bottom of the sea, the deepest point of the ocean, in the Mariana Trench. I'm now preparing to complete the first non-stop, zero-emission flight around the world, on board a green hydrogen aircraft. That legacy has taught me that limits are rarely where we think they are and that exploration is only worthwhile if it opens up new horizons for humanity.

It's in that spirit that I founded the Solar Impulse Foundation, to demonstrate that clean, profitable solutions exist. There are enough of them to transform our economies; what's missing, above all, is the political will to roll them out. Each solution undergoes a rigorous assessment, carried out by independent experts, as part of a certification process accredited by Ernst & Young. To date, more than 1,600 solutions have already been awarded the certification, and we are actively continuing this initiative to identify and promote efficient innovations.

The Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation's Ocean Innovators Platform, now held every year in a major global financial hub such as Monaco, Singapore or Hong Kong, is built on the same principle: combining innovation, rigorous measurement and capital mobilisation to address the ocean emergency. It brings together institutional investors, venture capital funds, entrepreneurs and scientists around a shared conviction. Because wherever there are ocean challenges, there are markets. Solutions such as sustainable aquaculture, decarbonised shipping, reducing plastic waste and monitoring biodiversity through environmental DNA aren't theoretical: they represent existing companies, real-world technologies and robust business models.

The ReOcean Fund – the financial arm of that ambition – goes even further. It is co-managed by the Foundation and Monaco Asset Management with a condition I wish I'd seen earlier in other sectors, namely that a committee of scientific experts holds the right to veto any investment whose positive environmental impact is judged insufficient. Science determines entry into the fund, not the other way around. The ReOcean Fund is mobilising one hundred million euros across five key sectors, with the same rigour that's applied to any other growth investment. That's exactly what the ocean needs: serious capital, guided by science.

What strikes me about the Prince Albert II Foundation's approach is that it understood long ago what many people are only just discovering: pessimism is a luxury we can no longer afford. Solutions exist. The question is whether we are brave enough to fund them, regulate them and roll them out at scale. Twenty years after it was set up, the Foundation is steadfastly continuing this work."

Photo: Pexels/Portrait photo: © Solar Impulse Foundation – Peter Sandground

NURTURING YOUNGER GENERATIONS



For a long time, the idea that ecology and justice are inseparable was a marginal view in the global debate. Today, environmental justice has become the central fault line in the climate crisis. For the younger generations, it is a self-evident truth. They must be given training and support on this path to enlightened and inclusive leadership.

Sunita Narain, a member of the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation's Board of Directors and the winner of its Water Award in 2008, runs India's Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) – one of the most respected research and advocacy institutions in the Global South. She is closely involved in the Foundation's programmes supporting young scientists and changemakers.

"Today's youth are not willing to pass on a world divided and broken."

You have spent over 40 years carrying a vision of the environment as a question of justice. What first convinced you of that?

The missing element in our environmental discourse is still justice, and for me this is deeply personal. When I started my work in the 1980s, I met the women of the Chipko movement in the Himalayas. I'd grown up in Delhi, in an elite school; for me, the environment was about pretty trees. But for those women, the forest was their survival: the biomass for fodder, animals and agriculture. They said: yes, we know we must protect our trees, because that's our home, our future. That learning has never left me: how do you build an economic future based on the natural wealth of people? We forgot those voices. We talked about ecological wealth without talking about community ownership.

If I were to give young people one message, it would be: go out and talk to people. Understand why they see the environment as important for them. That respect for their knowledge is what will help us build a more inclusive world.

How do you look at today's young generations?

There is a divide, but it runs through the youth themselves, not just between nations. The aspirations of poor young people in India are vastly different from those of the rich, and the richer youth of India are connected to the Global North. Across Africa, across Europe, there is a "South" in the youth too: young people who need jobs, whose horizon is the basic wherewithal of life. What we need is greater empathy across that gap. There is only one planet Earth and they will all inherit it.

I'm asking them not to make the mistakes of my generation. Post-Rio 1992, we didn't deliver on equity and justice. In four decades, we made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Today, 70% of the world population has no space to grow. If they're denied that space, they will grow regardless and it will jeopardise the whole world.

My message is clear: build a world that is first inclusive, then sustainable. Today's youth understand this. They are politically savvy, not in party terms but in society terms, and not willing to pass on a world divided and broken.

Since 2023, the Foundation's Re.Generation Future Leaders Program has supported 40 young leaders aged under 35, connecting them to an international network. What makes it powerful?

I am very passionate about Re.Generation. I have been involved from its inception, shaping its design, selecting all four cohorts, giving talks to early groups. It's an incredibly powerful programme.

What makes it stand out is that it's purposely designed to work with partners – organisations in different parts of the world that know the candidates and are already working with them. It's not just casting a wide net: it's identifying people who will go back to their countries as leaders. After every cohort, I ask myself, where will you find good people again? And they come, all of them with hands-on experience, all of them committed.

I keep pushing for more candidates from the South, who will go back to the South. We need capacity, with the skills that Re.Generation provides: public speaking, social media and all the other skills a leader needs today.

The alumni add up – 10, 20, 30, 40 – and it becomes a powerful group. You can argue it's a small drop in the ocean, but the ocean is made from every drop.

The Foundation has also supported the IPCC Scholarship Programme since 2021, enabling young doctoral researchers from developing countries to engage with climate science. Why does this kind of grant matter?

The real gap in the IPCC is equity. Reports are improving, but they remain Northern-oriented, because that's where science is concentrated. Yet science is not about esoteric numbers. It's always shaped by politics, by perspective, by the place you come from. You can't pretend it's purely objective and therefore indifferent to those who produce it.

That's why this initiative goes straight to the core issue: making sure that young people from the South have the opportunity to be part of the IPCC, possibly the only organisation of its kind helping humanity understand where the science stands. In global universities, young researchers gain access through academic networks that lead directly into IPCC working groups. Those pathways don't exist in our part of the world. This scholarship changes that.

How can individual action and systemic change be aligned for these young leaders of tomorrow?

If individuals feel that only they can change the world, they will get frustrated and walk away. I'd say: be the change you want in the world, but also change the world. Those two things must go together.
Take Delhi's air pollution. As a concerned citizen, I should take the bus. But there are no buses. If the system doesn't allow you to walk the talk, individual commitment alone leads nowhere. Gandhi understood this: he lived with extraordinary frugality, but he also fought for independence. Being the change was not enough. He changed the system.
Right now, the world is turning at a pace we have never seen. But the young must not give up hope. There are crises, yes, but there is also opportunity. My generation has squandered time and lost ground, but the opportunity to build a world that is first inclusive, then sustainable, has not. The question now is to seize it.

What role can philanthropy play in the ecological transition?

The Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation has played a critical role, because it has always been a voice of reason, of science, but also of conscience. That combination is what makes it stand apart. HSH Prince Albert II is a man with profound commitments, not just for nature, but for the ethics of conservation, which involve community, people, and growth that benefits large numbers. Above all, this is a foundation with a mission – a deep, sustained commitment. That's the future of philanthropy we need: not to do with the volume of funding, but the depth of engagement.

The 2025 campus cohort of the Foundation's Re.Generation Future Leaders Program, alongside HSH Prince Albert II.



© Axel Bastelic/Palais Princier

PIONEERING INITIATIVES WITH A SHARED GOAL: IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF THE PLANET

HÉLÈNE ONOFORO SANAIA
Head of Projects

The Foundation was set up to support practical projects to protect the environment, at both local and global level. Our firm commitment to working collaboratively has led us to establish rigorous procedures for selecting and monitoring projects, which involve a combined effort between the Foundation's operational teams and its governing bodies. Our work becomes meaningful when it results in a healthy ocean or a restored forest. At every step, it's guided by scientific principles and the pursuit of tangible results for ecosystems and the lives that are dependent on them. To date, we have supported over 850 projects that involve individuals working together to create conditions for a better life and greater harmony with nature. There have been many encouraging successes and sources of hope for the future, as well as opportunities to make plans for sustaining our commitment over the long term.

AURIANE PERTUISOT
Coordinator, Monk Seal Alliance

The monk seal is one of the most iconic species among all our shared heritage in the Mediterranean. Once common throughout the Mediterranean Basin, the species was hunted and persecuted almost to the point of eradication, surviving only by taking refuge in caves that were inaccessible to humans. Twenty years ago, the situation had become dire.
Realising there was a lack of collaboration between those working in this field, the Foundation joined forces with other organisations to create a unique framework for coordinated protection efforts: the Monk Seal Alliance (MSA). By creating links between partners, regions and projects, the MSA coordinates actions to protect the monk seal and its habitat: maximising funding, supporting conservation projects and improving collaboration between donors and stakeholders on the ground, at local, national and regional level. By helping to safeguard one of the world's most endangered marine mammals, it's taking action for the sake of future generations and a thriving Mediterranean.



Original photo © CBD

ROMAIN RENOUX
Executive Director, The MedFund

The Mediterranean Sea is one of the richest marine ecosystems on the planet, but also one of the most endangered. Some of the most effective conservation tools are marine protected areas (MPAs), which are beacons of hope for protecting marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of the coastal communities that are dependent on it. However, simple demarcation on a map is not enough to provide proper protection. MPAs can only deliver their full benefits when they are operationally effective, which requires long-term structural finance. It was the clear understanding of these challenges that led Monaco, France and Tunisia to establish The MedFund in 2015, on the initiative of the Foundation. The aim was to create an innovative trust fund dedicated to financing and developing Mediterranean MPAs. Ten years on, nearly a million hectares of marine and coastal areas are protected by twenty-three supported MPAs in nine countries to the south and east of the Mediterranean Basin.

PHILIPPE MONDIELLI
Scientific Director, responsible for creation of the Pelagos Initiative

The Pelagos Sanctuary emerged from a noble vision by three countries: to provide nature with a haven of calm, respect and protection. The Sanctuary is the first cross-border area of the Mediterranean dedicated to the protection of marine mammals. Covering 87,500 square kilometres between France, Monaco and Italy, it is home to remarkable biodiversity. But this natural marvel is facing pressures and we need joint efforts to regulate human activities if we are to coexist with the living marine world.
The Pelagos Initiative was created to support the signatory states to the Pelagos Agreement in their ambition to make the Sanctuary a blueprint for a large-scale marine protected area. It brings together institutional stakeholders, civil society and foundations to maximise the impact of actions within the reserve. The new consortium of 13 partners is a further example of the Initiative's remarkable ability to engage people around a shared vision – one that could be summed up by the following words: "We're in the Pelagos Sanctuary. Let's slow down and keep quiet. Just look, listen and appreciate."





LUCILE COURTIAL
Executive Secretary, BeMed

The Foundation and its partners created BeMed with the aim of joining forces to protect the Mediterranean from what has become a serious problem of our time: plastic pollution. Once it finds its way into the natural environment, plastic can take up to 500 years to break down. It poses a threat to the health of marine species and ecosystems, but also to human health. We are taking a multi-pronged approach to this challenge: financing projects on the ground, coordinating pilot initiatives and facilitating a community of committed partners. BeMed is now supporting a network of more than 110 organisations, which are working collaboratively, exchanging information and learning from each other. We are also working with businesses to help them understand the environmental and health issues associated with plastic and to ensure they implement adequate solutions to address the problem. Over the past 10 years, the initiative has supported over 130 projects working to curb plastic pollution in the Mediterranean Sea.

RAPHAËL GHIANDAI
Executive Director of the Foundation

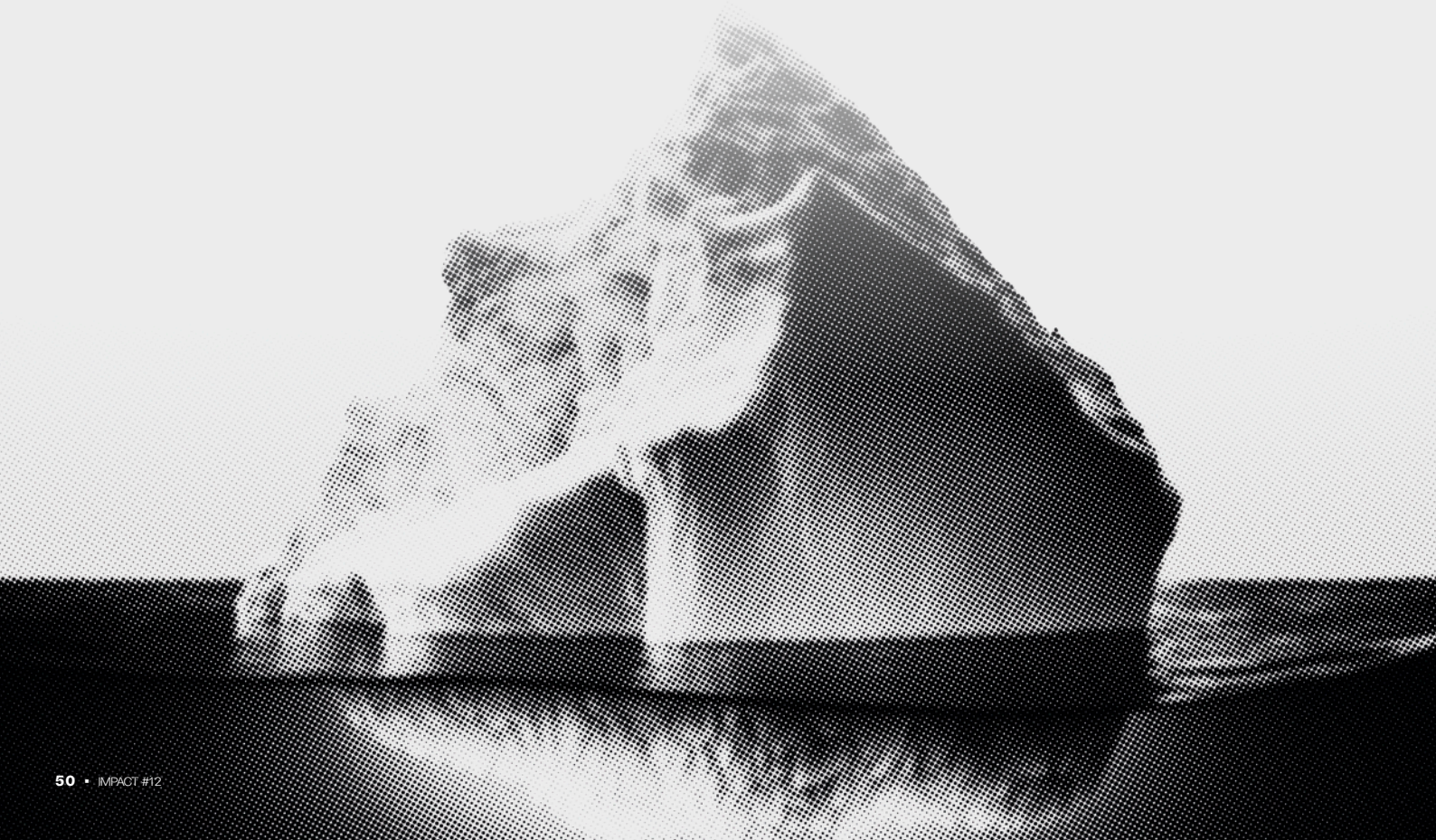
The ocean holds huge potential for tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. Although solutions already exist, many companies still struggle to raise the capital they need to amplify their impact and maximise their environmental and social benefits. The Foundation has set out to address this gap with its initiatives to support the sustainable blue economy, including the ReOcean Fund and the Ocean Innovators Platform, by establishing links between innovation, philanthropy, finance and projects on the ground. By building these bridges, we're helping to nurture a blue economy that is able to both safeguard ocean health and protect the living world. Protecting the ocean doesn't only mean raising awareness, but also being able to support and scale the solutions needed.

RACHEL CLAUSING
Head of Initiatives and advisor for OACIS

The ocean plays a vital role in regulating Earth's climate, absorbing more than a quarter of the carbon dioxide released by human activities. This slows the pace of global warming, but it comes at a cost: absorbing carbon dioxide changes the chemistry of seawater, making it more acidic and upsetting the balance of marine ecosystems. Reducing our emissions is still absolutely vital, but we also need to explore solutions offered by the ocean – in a cautious and controlled way. These include marine renewable energy, restoration of "blue carbon" ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrass meadows and salt marshes, and technological interventions such as ocean alkalinity enhancement. To ensure these strategies are effective and responsible, they must be grounded in rigorous scientific assessment that safeguards marine life and preserves the integrity of ocean ecosystems. This is the approach taken by the Ocean Acidification and other ocean Changes – Impacts and Solutions (OACIS) initiative, which was created by the Foundation and its partners in 2013. It studies the impacts of climate change on the ocean to help identify solutions that could mitigate these effects.

SALOMÉ MORMENTYN
Coordinator, Polar Initiative

The polar regions aren't silent havens: they're filled with the sounds of cracking ice and visible signs of a world in flux. Although they may seem remote, what's happening there affects us all. Changes in the Arctic and Antarctic regions serve as a warning of the threats to Earth's equilibrium: rising sea levels, climate instability and the vulnerability of the natural world. Given that the ice is retreating faster than our policies are progressing, it's time for action. The Foundation has built up expertise on the polar regions since its inception. To make progress as effectively as possible, it has brought together those who understand the changes at both poles, are witnessing them first hand and making decisions about them. Its Polar Initiative promotes dialogue and collaborative action between stakeholders in these regions – scientists, experts and representatives of Indigenous communities – to drive action to protect these fragile environments that are vital for a healthy planet.





Original photo © Xh.Xhemi/PPNEA

LÉA GLÂTRE

Coordinator, DIMFE Initiative

Freshwater ecosystems and wetlands have long been seen as dull, virtually worthless habitats. Yet they're some of the most precious ecosystems on the planet. They filter water, reduce flooding, store carbon, host extraordinary biodiversity and support the livelihoods of millions of people. They act as climate allies and play a vital role in the Mediterranean – a region that's warming faster than the global average and where water is already becoming a scarce resource. The Foundation and its philanthropic partners decided to join forces to address those issues. They established the Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE) to support projects that are restoring and protecting ecosystems in the Mediterranean Basin and giving them the recognition they deserve.

ESTER BORGIOLI

Coordinator, Human–Wildlife Initiative

We are living in an age of disconnect and alienation from the natural world, in which species are disappearing at an unprecedented rate. Although large carnivores and other wildlife are essential for balanced ecosystems, human coexistence with them has become a source of tension and misconception. Examining our ability to share spaces with other species involves questioning our collective choices and our shared values. This is the thinking behind the Human–Wildlife Initiative, which takes an unusual approach by negotiating shared land use. It supports projects on the ground that combine scientific knowledge, local context and collective action. Rather than simply designating areas of land as sanctuaries, it aims to find practical solutions to reconcile human activities (such as livestock farming, agriculture and outdoor sports) with the protection of vulnerable species, especially large predators.



Original photo © A.Rivelli



Original photo © Simone Giovine

JUSTINE FURTADO FERNANDES

Coordinator, Forests and Communities Initiative

Combating deforestation has been a key priority for the Foundation since its inception. As forest ecosystems play a crucial role in supporting biodiversity, regulating the climate and protecting water resources, it has supported numerous projects on the ground in partnership with organisations working in the world's three major forest basins. But the Forests and Communities Initiative has a new commitment: to listen to and amplify the voices of Indigenous Peoples. Because these ecosystems can't be protected without, or at the expense of, the people and communities who live there, know them well and are already looking after them. By putting Indigenous Peoples and local communities at the heart of conservation solutions and strategies, the Initiative is laying the foundations for effective and sustainable collective action that is sensitive to the land in its full complexity: to forests, water and species, but also to humans with their knowledge, culture and ways of life.

THÉO PANIZZI

Coordinator, Re.Generation Future Leaders Program Initiative

"We don't inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." This saying, which reminds us of the extent of our responsibilities, underpins the Foundation's work aimed at the younger generations. One such initiative is the Re.Generation Future Leaders Program, which was set up specifically to support talented young people from around the world who are set to take on the most senior roles in the field of environmental protection. Every year, the programme selects around 10 young people from a range of different specialisms and career paths, including scientists, activists, entrepreneurs and athletes. These individuals receive tailored training and masterclasses to help them develop their skills, along with several opportunities for public speaking at international events. By opening up its network to a whole community of committed young leaders, the Foundation is empowering the next generation.

CÉLINE VACQUIER-BEKKARI

Joint Coordinator, Green Shift Initiative

Awareness-raising has always been central to the Foundation's work. The Green Shift Initiative has taken this commitment even further, with its ambition of bringing the public together around positive and inspiring environmental narratives. Recognising that scientific messaging, however essential, doesn't always trigger the necessary action, this Initiative draws instead on art and culture, which are vehicles for powerful emotions. It provides platforms for discussion, charts potential new pathways for engagement and sparks the creative thinking we need to address the challenges of our time. Through the Environmental Photography Award, the Green Shift Festival, and support for culture and fashion professionals in adopting more environmentally responsible practices, the Initiative puts people at the heart of the ecological transition to help build a fairer and more sustainable world together.



Original photo © Philippe Fitte/FPA2

A 10-HOUR EXPLORATION IN THE DANGER ISLANDS

TEXT: ANDREAS WOLFERS
PHOTOS: ESTHER HORVATH

The expedition started in Ushuaia, Argentina, on 18 November 2025. It lasted three weeks in total with a single day's exploration of Brash Island in the Danger Islands. There were 14 participants on board: 7 scientists, 4 sailors and 3 journalists, including author Andreas Wolfers and photographer Esther Horvath.



In 2024, the Danger Islands were designated as an Antarctic Specially Protected Area. To better understand and protect them, an initial expedition was launched in late 2025 on board Boris Herrmann's *Malizia Explorer*. On this extraordinary adventure, the scientists had only 10 hours to complete their mission. Here is the story of a race against time.



They thought they were almost there. But now they stare in amazement at the rocky outcrop rising from the sea ahead of the ship. Where on earth are they supposed to go ashore? A steep bank of ice and snow encircles the island, which is just under two kilometres long. Frozen cliffs rise up to 10 metres high.
The scientists – six men and one woman – aim to be the first people ever to set foot on this island in the Southern Ocean. But the path seems blocked. They stand silently on deck, scanning the island through binoculars.
Boris Herrmann, a professional sailor and the yacht's owner, launches his camera drone. It flies slowly along the shore. Suddenly, he brings it to a stop. A gently sloping channel appears on the remote control screen like a funnel, the tip of which opens out into the sea. "Look at that!" he calls out. The researchers in the cockpit move closer. Penguins are visible – an endless succession of penguins sliding belly-down into the sea. Others are shooting up out of the water like arrows, landing on the channel and waddling upwards.
It would be a good spot for the crew to reach the island, were it not for the flood of penguins.

The seven scientists have flown halfway around the world to board the sailing yacht *Malizia Explorer* near Cape Horn. During the last four-day crossing to Antarctica, almost all of them were plagued by seasickness. From the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, a 30-hour slalom through dense pack ice followed; they managed that too. And now a few metres of icy cliff face are supposed to stop them? As the drone reaches the eastern end of the island, a flat snowfield can be seen on the monitor, with rocks right at the water's edge. They could serve as stepping stones for the ascent. "I think it'll work there," says Herrmann.

The island is called Brash. It belongs to the Danger Islands archipelago – seven small, closely clustered islands bearing names such as Darwin, Beagle and Heroina. Since the discovery of Antarctica, only a few ships have made it into the archipelago. Too remote, too uninteresting. And the journey through the pack ice zone is also too risky. But the Danger Islands have recently been recognised internationally as a new protected area in Antarctica. Germany, and in future probably Monaco too, is responsible for managing the area. The scientists are tasked with carrying out a survey: what exactly are the islands like and how untouched is the ecosystem? Above all, they are to find out: why does one of the world's largest penguin colonies breed here? And what consequences does climate change have for them?
The ship sets course for the landing site. The crew begins stacking a dozen boxes in the cockpit, packed with camera drones, batteries and measuring instruments. Added to these are large bags for emergencies, containing tents, sleeping bags, food and phones. Everything is ready for the journey into the unknown.



Boris Herrmann, professional sailer, ship's director and owner of Malizia Explorer, with the team of scientists.



Malizia Explorer at anchor in Potter Cove during a storm.

Antarctica is larger than Europe and Australia combined. The Danger Islands cover a total of five square kilometres. Just some crumbs in the polar ocean – no more than a tiny fraction of the icy continent.

No continent is drier, colder or stormier than Antarctica. It is emptier than the Sahara and higher than Switzerland. It is sunnier than California. And it remains unknown territory, terra incognita, at least in large parts. When the *Malizia Explorer* had passed an island near the Antarctic Peninsula at a safe distance the day before, it looked on the digital nautical chart as though the yacht were sailing over land; the island had obviously been incorrectly surveyed. And the waters between the Danger Islands are marked several times on the chart as "uncharted area", as unknown depths.

Slowly the ship feels its way towards Brash Island, without sails, under engine power alone. The temperature is minus four degrees. It promises to be a magnificent summer's day.

A small Argentine flag flutters in the breeze from the mast – the guest flag that was already flying there in Ushuaia, Argentina's southernmost city. Strictly speaking, it could be taken down. Antarctica belongs to no state. Since 1961, a coalition of 54 states has jointly administered the continent.

The coalition aims to ensure that certain regions remain completely untouched by human influence. To this end, it has designated just under 80 protected areas in Antarctica, mostly established for specific animal species. In 2024, Germany and the USA successfully campaigned to have the Danger Islands placed under protection as well: the archipelago is home to the world's largest colony of Adélie penguins, the most widespread penguin species.

When Brash Island is just a few hundred metres away, Lucas Lanusse, the Argentine captain, stops the ship's engine. In the sudden silence, the island can be heard. A background hum of a thousand squawks and chatters drifts across the water. And now the penguins can be seen with the naked eye: a layer of black dots cloaks the snow-covered island, like a fine-meshed grid moving up and down the slopes. On Brash alone, there are said to be more than 100,000 penguins at the start of the breeding season. Across all 7 islands combined, the figure is estimated to be at least 1.5 million. No one knows the exact number, which is one reason why the scientists are here.

The crew lower the dinghy into the water. "Good luck, explorers," says Herrmann as he helps the scientists hoist the equipment into the dinghy. "It feels just like Humboldt."[1]
Boris Herrmann, Germany's best-known ocean sailor, has never been to Antarctica. Instead, he has rounded Cape Horn six times during round-the-world sailing races. Since 2016, he has been supported in this by the Yacht Club de Monaco. Together with its Vice President and his friend, Pierre Casiraghi, Herrmann founded Team Malizia that same year. On the high seas, he noticed how much the ocean, "my workplace", was changing year after year. The experience turned Herrmann into an environmental activist; for years, he has been using every platform to campaign for greater ocean protection. He and his wife Birte also founded the educational initiative My Ocean Challenge, an international teaching programme for schools, which has been supported by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation since 2018.

To support the scientific exploration of remote seas, Herrmann recently purchased a 27-metre yacht and had it converted into a research platform under sail. He hopes to capitalise on the advantages a yacht offers over large research vessels: greater flexibility, largely emission-free operation, and suitability for shallow waters due to its shallow draught. The German Federal Environment Agency, which is responsible for managing the Danger Islands, did not hesitate for long before booking the *Malizia Explorer* for the first systematic survey of the protected area.







Biologists working in the field on Brash Island, attaching GPS units to the backs of Adélie penguins to track their foraging routes.



Photo of Malizia Explorer taken by the drone between Cape Horn and Antarctica.

As the dinghy reaches the shore, around 50 penguins are standing at the top of the icy cliff edge, looking down. They see colours that do not exist in their black-and-white world: yellow protective suits, red hoods, orange emergency bags. They see creatures larger than anything else standing on this rocky, treeless island. They hear sounds they have never heard before. The penguins watch for a while, showing no visible reaction, then waddle on along the edge, looking for a spot to jump into the sea.

The scientists pull and push each other up onto the island. The team has a good 20 years' experience in Antarctica, gained at research stations run by Russia, Germany, Argentina and Uruguay. Expeditions have taken some of them to the Antarctic Peninsula, others to the icy high mountains in the east of the continent. Now they are setting off on their first joint mission.
They are hoisting their rucksacks onto their shoulders when there is a crackle from one of the radios; Lanusse comes on the line. The captain has remained on board with Boris Herrmann. They want to study the incoming wind and weather reports and new satellite photos of the surrounding ice fields. Should the wind veer east, the pack ice could encircle the archipelago like a cuff and trap the sailing yacht.
"At the moment, it looks as though we'll be safe until midnight," says Lanusse. "Even so, you need to hurry. The weather can change incredibly quickly here."
It is 11 o'clock in the morning. They are carrying sufficient provisions and 80 kilograms of equipment. Their plan has been meticulously worked out. Yet they suspect it might be a close call.

The drone team sets off first. Osama Mustafa, a black-haired giant with a wildly unkempt beard, straps a box the size of a cubic metre onto his back. Inside the box sits the "20,000-dollar baby", as the German geographer calls his drone. Then, step by step, he trudges uphill with a colleague. A layer of bodies covers the gently sloping rocky hillside as the penguins waddle, stand and crouch, packed tightly together. The breeding season began a few weeks ago. Each pair has made a nest of pebbles, in the centre of which one or two eggs now rest.

When the two men reach the plateau, they drop their luggage into the snow, exhausted. The expedition team has planned a week to explore the entire archipelago. But no one knows whether the ice conditions will allow them to land anywhere else. Mustafa therefore wants to send the "20,000-dollar baby" out over the sea. From Brash, the drone can reach any other island, take off autonomously and take a photo every two seconds. The scientists want to use the images to create precise maps of the islands and to determine the exact number of penguins.
Not a breath of wind blows over the island's summit, the sun is shining, visibility is clear. Perfect flying conditions. About 10 kilometres away, a massive white-brown hill rises from the sea between the icebergs: Beagle Island, the nearest to Brash.

Several penguins march towards the two strangers and their equipment. They stop a few metres away, turning their heads curiously from side to side. When nothing exciting happens, they waddle back, upright, with their wings spread. All around the snowfield where the men are, tens of thousands of penguins are crouching on their nests; others are sliding belly-down in wide columns towards the sea to set off on the hunt. Or they are simply loitering about, waiting for an opportunity to steal a pebble from a stranger's nest. A loud, incessant chatter hangs over the island, along with the putrid stench of guano, the penguins' droppings.

Among the few ships to have reached the islands to date is the cruise ship *Le Commandant Charcot* in early 2024. On board were renowned penguin researchers and the heads of global energy and financial conglomerates. The Oceanographic Institute of Monaco had organised the voyage, which HSH Prince Albert II also took part in, with the aim of "fostering a dialogue between scientists and business leaders". Once there, the business leaders were to experience the magic of, and the threats facing, Antarctica. For Prince Albert II, who was visiting the ice continent for the second time, this was a matter close to his heart: "Coordination between scientific research, business and political action must be central to our generation's commitment to saving this most precious asset".[2]

[1] Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), a famous German scientist and explorer, known as the father of ecology and modern geography.
[2] Foreword by HSH Prince Albert II, *In Defence of Antarctica,* Oceanographic Institute of Monaco, Flammarion, 2024.

Céline Le Bohec from the Monaco Scientific Center coordinated the researchers' work on board. On its way to the Weddell Sea, the ship anchored off the Danger Islands for two days. Using drones, the scientists discovered that more than the estimated 1.5 million penguins were breeding on the tiny rocky islets. "Many of them could be climate refugees", says Céline Le Bohec. Penguins spend most of their time in the water and on pack ice. But in West Antarctica, the ice fields are melting and the climate is warming twice as fast as the global average. As the pack ice disappears, so do the penguins; their populations in the west of the Antarctic Peninsula have declined significantly.

East of the Antarctic Peninsula, however, the 2,000-kilometre-wide Weddell Sea remains covered in ice all year round. The Danger Islands lie on the edge of the sea. In winter, pack ice surrounds the islands and, in summer, open sea. The location is tailor-made for penguins: they need the ice to rest and the sea to hunt. And the seven islands provide a place to breed undisturbed. They are a refuge for many penguins that may have fled from the west.

Germany intends to have the foraging grounds around the islands placed under protection as well. But how far out do the penguins swim to find food here during the breeding season? The research team from the *Malizia Explorer* also wants to find that out, with the help of tiny trackers attached to the penguins. Simeon Lisovski, 43, a scientist at the Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research, has already spent six summers in Antarctica. It takes him little time to catch the animals and stick the tiny box between the back feathers. The trackers remain attached there for three or four months, after which the annual moult begins; the animals lose their plumage and, with it, the transmitter.

It is early afternoon and there is still no sign of the feared easterly wind. The backdrop of dark blue sea and icebergs looks peaceful, as if frozen in time. But if you look a little longer, you can see that a gentle current has begun to slowly push the pack ice fields together.

Time is running out for the expedition, and the Danger Islands could suddenly live up to their name.

The archipelago got its name in 1842 from a British expedition whose ship nearly ran aground on one of the islands. The crew had overlooked them amid the vast mounds of piled-up ice. The crew of the *Malizia Explorer*, however, has satellite imagery and has examined it closely. Over the past 20 years, there has been little ice around the islands at the start of the breeding season. Yet this year of all years, the pack ice from the Weddell Sea has pushed far north, past the archipelago. And now it seems to be piling up between the islands as well.

The evening sun begins to cast a reddish glow over the snowfields on Brash Island. A light wind picks up. Down on the coast, thick ice floes drift past. Shortly afterwards, Boris Herrmann comes on the radio: "Guys, we'd better call it a day!". The easterly wind has arrived earlier than expected and is quickly picking up. "Be at the landing site in 30 minutes," says Boris. "Then we'll bring you back."

By the time the scientists arrive, the ship has moved several hundred metres away from the island. Fields of pack ice drift close to the shore. The little dinghy races in a zigzag pattern through narrow gaps between the ice fields, which open up only briefly. If they are unable to bring the researchers on board one by one, the last ones will have to stay ashore overnight and open their emergency bags containing the tents.

At 9 pm, the entire crew is on deck and the *Malizia Explorer* sets off immediately. Lanusse, the captain, steers the ship, while Herrmann sends his drone ahead. The screen shows that more than two-thirds of the water is covered by pack ice. "Brace yourselves for a gruelling night," says Lanusse.



Andreas Wolfers, born in 1958, worked for 13 years as a reporter for *GEO* magazine, was editor-in-chief at *Stern* magazine and headed the Henri Nannen School of Journalism in Hamburg. Wolfers has been sailing since childhood and has even crossed the Atlantic. He has written two books about Boris Herrmann and his races around the world, both of which became bestsellers in Germany: *Alone between Sky and Sea* (2021) and *Adventure Ocean Race* (2023).



Esther Horvath is a National Geographic Explorer and photographer for the German Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research. Since 2015, she has dedicated herself to photography in the Arctic and Antarctic where she has covered 28 scientific expeditions, and behind-the-scenes stories of climate science. In 2020 she was awarded first prize in the World Press Photo Award in the Environment single category.

The scientists are sitting down in the warm saloon. They are sorting, labelling and packing their findings: blood samples, penguin eggs, rocks, feathers, water samples. The drone images of the seven islands are all complete, all sharp. And the penguins' trackers are already sending the first positions. One penguin has set a course similar to that of the yacht. In a straight line and significantly faster, it races under the ice fields towards the north-west.

Five months later, in May 2026, most of the trackers have fallen silent. The penguins have shaken them off during moulting. The recorded routes convey bad news. Normally, during the breeding season, the animals return after a few days at the latest to relieve their partners on the nests. Yet most of the penguins from Brash Island were on the move for weeks, swimming up to 200 kilometres and never returning to the island. To avoid starving, their partners will eventually have left the nest and abandoned the eggs.

Most of the other penguins have likely fared the same. It would then be a poor summer for the colony, with few offspring. The unusually dense pack ice this time around appears to have blocked the nearby hunting grounds. Yet, say the scientists, such years are already factored into natural reproduction. In November 2026, the penguins will simply return and breed again.

The planned week-long expedition in Antarctica was cut short to just 10 hours on Brash Island. The researchers are nevertheless satisfied. With the help of drone images, they were able to create precise maps of the islands for the first time. And the size of the colony has now also been precisely determined: just under 1.7 million penguins, 10 per cent more than at the last scientifically verified count.

Simeon Lisovski, biologist at the Alfred Wegener Institute, and Noelle Heid, biologist at Think Jena, getting ready to catch Adélie penguins.

First mate Marin-Louis Moreau looks out from the mast of *Malizia Explorer* for a passage through the thick pack ice around the Danger Islands.





WHAT IF THE *ECOLOGICAL* TRANSITION WAS REBRANDED AS AS THE *"HUMAN* TRANSITION"?



INTERVIEW WITH STÉPHANE LA BRANCHE

Climate sociologist and Scientific Coordinator at the IPBC (International Panel on Behavior Change)

What if a successful ecological transition hinged more on our behaviour and how we engage our emotions than on our knowledge of the global environmental crisis? The transition is taking time to get off the ground. Scaremongering and sharing climate science-heavy information do not seem effective at removing the behavioural barriers that are hindering action.

Stéphane La Branche is a Canadian sociologist based in Grenoble in south-eastern France. Since the early 2000s, he has been working at the intersection of sociology and behavioural science, exploring the human dynamics behind the ecological transition, which he believes would be better termed the "human transition". As co-founder of the IPBC – intended as an "IPCC for human behaviour" – he has just coordinated the organisation's first report: an international review of behavioural sciences literature, with proposals by 45 authors from 20 countries and 14 disciplines, examining how Western societies function. The aim was to produce an accessible overview of how behavioural science can contribute to the transition. Some unexpected opportunities for action emerge from the report.

What did you learn through coordinating this collaborative project by the IPBC?

The first thing that struck me was that authors from very different disciplines, who had not consulted each other, had reached the same conclusions. This indicates a level of robustness I hadn't expected. It has become clear that, however reliable it is, scientific data alone does not change behaviours. There are more powerful drivers of behaviour change, such as emotions, values, implicit (unconscious) perception and social relationships; in other words, our subjective experience – what we feel, the meaning we attach to things, and the bonds that bind us.

The natural sciences can steer change though. Natural scientists set targets – boundaries not to cross. But when they start telling people how they should change, they step outside their remit. They just don't have the tools to understand areas like subjective experience, emotions and the meanings people attach to things. That requires specialised methodological skills – and that's where behavioural science comes in.

Another thing I realised is that, when discussing the transition, our first thoughts are about the climate. But the report highlighted the relationship with biodiversity and confirmed that the two crises elicit different behavioural responses. The climate crisis triggers fear, anxiety and catastrophic thinking. With biodiversity, it's very different – people automatically switch to a holistic perspective. They talk about the interconnections between animal, vegetable and



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mineral, and can see themselves within that network: "I am part of biodiversity". Biodiversity stimulates the senses and connections, feels almost personal, whereas the climate often remains abstract and intellectual. This has huge implications for the transition: it means we can't use the same tools, messages and emotions to tackle both crises.

You talk about the "human transition" rather than the "ecological transition". Why do you feel that switch of focus is so important?

So we can stop confusing cause with effect. The ecological transition is an outcome, a consequence. What needs to change is our behaviour, our production and consumption patterns, and our mindsets. Saving the bees doesn't happen by adding more hives, but by addressing the human-driven causes of their decline. However, to understand why it's so difficult to make these changes, we need to look at what's holding us back – and here we come up against two major collective delusions.

The delusion of abundance makes us think the world can give us what we want instantly, ever faster and in unlimited supply: it's the "fast food" attitude, but faster still, given that we now feel irritated if a web page takes three seconds to load. I see that in myself! This is a very powerful delusion, especially among younger generations who have grown up used to having things instantly. And then there is the contrasting delusion of catastrophe, which conjures visions of a dystopian future, with Europe surrounded by barbed wire amid conflicts over water, energy, rare-earth elements and so on.

Caught between those two delusions, it's not surprising people experience eco-anxiety. Because we're not being presented with a vision of a situation between the two – i.e. a desirable and achievable future. This is compounded by a problem well documented by cognitive science: mental load. The greatest barrier to change is no longer physical inconvenience or discomfort; it is the discomfort of constantly having to monitor yourself. "This is bad for my carbon footprint; that is bad for biodiversity..." It's exhausting.

"The ecological transition is an outcome, a consequence. What needs to change is our behaviour, our production and consumption patterns, and our mindsets."

There is also widespread resistance to the very idea of behaviour, which can be seen as an accusation against us as individuals...

It's almost a knee-jerk reaction: talking about behaviour is seen as putting all the onus on individuals. People automatically equate the two. However, behaviour is also at collective, organisation and institution level. And, as confirmed by our report, an individual is always embedded in a context, such as their family, town, political affiliation or culture. I think it's time we started looking at the collective context when discussing behaviour. Focusing on individuals is the wrong approach – especially when lots of people are already feeling trapped, with very little room for manoeuvre. Telling them "it's up to you" is not only inadequate; it's counter-productive.

How can behavioural science contribute practically to the human transition?

First of all, by asking the right questions. Rather than starting with the premise that the climate is a driving force for change, we need to question that premise. Take the example of cycling. Why do people do it? Because it's enjoyable in summer and it's faster than driving a car. Why don't they do it? Because it's too far away, it's raining or they're scared of accidents. Climate change is never mentioned, either as a motivating factor or as a barrier. So if you run a whole campaign to encourage cycling based on the climate argument, you'll only reach committed environmentalists – who already cycle.

The drivers of change vary depending on the subject. What motivates people to cycle is different to what motivates them to stop eating meat or to renovate their home. So we need to take a different approach for each sector. The same applies in business: small or medium-sized companies often commit to the transition for unexpected reasons. If a company boss is accused by their own children over the dinner table of contributing to the destruction of the planet, it's a pivotal moment. It's nothing to do with the climate for the climate's sake; it's personal relationships and the opinions of loved ones that make someone change. Another driver is that more and more well-qualified job applicants are asking about corporate social responsibility at interview. If they don't get a satisfactory response, they won't stick around. Employers are aware that they'll miss out on talented candidates if they don't get on board.



You question the notion of *homo economicus* in classical economic theory. How can you deconstruct something so deeply ingrained?

I don't begin by attacking the concept head-on; that would be counter-productive. Instead, I start by questioning practices – for example, what assessment criteria do you use? Have you considered triple bottom line accounting, where well-being at work is included as part of a full performance review? Then I show them that the image of a company boss who thinks only of profit is a stereotype rather than reality. Many business leaders see their companies as stakeholders in the local community, committed to more than just profitability. More recently, I've noticed another motivation: bosses tell me that when they arrive at the office in the morning, what they want is to see their colleagues smiling. They don't see human beings as lemons to squeeze every last drop out of. What I find really harmful is when classical economic theory is taken out of the academic sphere and used as a template for public policy. That produces outcomes that are incompatible with the transition and with what it truly means to be human. If there were no impact on reality, it would be just an intellectual game. But there is a very real impact.

If we need to move on from the concept of *homo economicus*, what would you replace it with?

I recommend the expression *homo socialis*, because we are profoundly social creatures. But in the context of the transition, perhaps it would be better to refer to *homo ecosocialis* – a person who is aware they're part of the living world, while also having human bonds. This character does not ignore money as a factor in decision-making; they simply put it in its proper place, alongside other factors.

The marketing profession has used behavioural, psychological and emotional drivers effectively for decades. Why haven't those driving the transition tapped into these techniques before now?

The answer is largely to do with ideology. Many environmental activists are anti-capitalist and as such reject marketing. Personally, I don't have a problem with it. In fact, I've worked with Paris-based organisation *Entreprises pour l'Environnement* on a study into social representations and imagery in advertising. The findings were eye-opening. One of my favourite examples was a beer advert where the camera spent more time focusing on the meat on a barbecue than on the beer it was meant to be promoting. It could have been vegetables instead – the producers probably didn't even think about it. It is an example of implicit perception: "What makes a good barbecue? Meat". The study resulted in a report aiming to "decarbonise imagery". Is that what we need to do before we can change practices, or is it the other way round? The two are interconnected – there is no straightforward cause-and-effect with people. We need to tackle both at the same time.



Can behavioural science help to build those visions of desirable futures?

Absolutely. We're seeing increasing research into the narratives surrounding the transition – not only catastrophic or nostalgic mental images, but visions of desirable futures. Several national armies have even hired science fiction writers to help them plan for the future. The French Agency for Ecological Transition has developed four scenarios with different narratives about how people might live in the future. This provides a gateway to a collective vision, which is infinitely more helpful than a temperature curve. And when these exercises also draw on behavioural science, they can create a more realistic categorisation of the population, comprising people who accept the new reality to varying degrees. We can move away from fairy-tale scenarios where everyone does morning yoga. It's more honest, and therefore more constructive.
I don't agree with the view that we need to achieve consensus – that has never really happened in the whole of human history. The idea that billions of people could change simultaneously strikes me as utopian. What really happens during any major social change is that a tipping point is reached: those who resist become the minority, while those who are driving the change become the majority. Rather than being helpful, seeking consensus shuts down scenarios that could be valuable. And that's exactly what we can't afford given the urgency of the situation.

Faced with this unprecedented challenge, how can we harness the power of emotion across society?

Firstly, by recognising that human beings are complex and multifaceted, and rejecting once and for all the idea of a single cause. There are different priorities and points of leverage for different groups and contexts. We can also draw on the pleasure principle, which is vastly underutilised. Two different arguments can lead to the same environmental outcome, but one is more effective than the other: "Cycle for the sake of the climate!" versus "Cycle because it's fun!". Or, even better in a society obsessed with looks and body shape: "Cycle to keep fit!". Fear can also be of some use in driving behaviours, but it's essential that it's accompanied by practical options. Fear without solutions results in shock, denial and paralysis. If we doom-monger without offering any practical ways forward, we just make things worse.

You emphasise the importance of having a deeper – almost spiritual – connection with nature. Why is that?

The consumerist mindset is so powerful that we can't confront it head-on; we'd be fighting a losing battle. One of the most effective approaches is to focus not on the fear of loss, but on love. This is not just wishful thinking. In surveys I've conducted in France, 20 to 25% of respondents readily identify with having a spiritual connection to nature. People don't often talk about it openly, for fear of being judged, but it's a real phenomenon.
Fear of loss always starts with loving something. If we don't really care about it, we're not afraid of losing it. So rather than starting with the fear of extinction, why not start by encouraging a desire to protect? Psychological studies show that those who want to protect the environment as adults had a close relationship with nature during childhood, which is more powerful than anything they could have learned at school. A child who plants a fruit tree and comes back 10 years later to admire it and eat its fruit forges a connection that no biology lesson can convey.

In organisations that manage a successful transition, what makes the difference?

The attitude to mistakes. We live in a society that punishes mistakes – at school, every error loses us a mark. And yet very successful business models, such as in the pharmaceutical industry, operate with a 90% failure rate. Ninety medicines will never make it to market, for every ten that do and go on to generate a fortune. If I tell people this and ask them if that's a successful model, they give me a funny look. But there it is.

In every local authority I've encountered that is ahead of their neighbours, I've consistently found that they have a positive attitude towards making mistakes. After a failed attempt, they sit back and analyse what went wrong and why, then they call in researchers to help them understand. French leisure operator Compagnie des Alpes, who I work with, even awards an annual "prize for the best mistake" to one of their teams. It's a bit of fun, but behind it is genuine learning that is widely shared. This is essential for our times, because the transition depends on innovation, and innovation depends on making mistakes. Experience shows that the more we embrace making mistakes and learning from them, the fewer we make in the long run. In the medium to long term, it really pays off – in every sense.

The IPBC strives to make itself heard beyond the scientific community. How are you addressing this challenge?

We produced a practical summary for each chapter in the report and devoted half the pages to specific, instantly actionable measures. But, most importantly, we did something I'd never seen done elsewhere. After drafting the summaries, we gave them to non-scientists and asked them just one question: do you understand this or not? If they told us they didn't, we rewrote them. Behavioural science is of no use if it just stays within our own circle.

More info on IPBC and its first report:
www.ipbc.science



TEN YOUNG LEADERS WHO ARE *CHANGING* THE GAME



Article photos © Thibault Sman/FPA2

The 4th edition of the Re.Generation Future Leaders campus programme, held by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation from 22 to 30 May 2026, brought together a new cohort of 10 young international pioneers driving environmental protection.

HERE WE MEET THE INSPIRING INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE SHAPING TOMORROW'S WORLD.



ENGINEERING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



Aman KC (Nepal)

Glaciologist and PhD researcher specialising in glacier dynamics and climate impacts on vulnerable mountain ecosystems and downstream communities.

Joseph Nguthiru (Kenya)

UN Young Champion of the Earth and Climate-Tech Engineer. Founder of HyaPak, converting invasive water hyacinth into sustainable, biodegradable packaging to tackle plastic pollution.

What do you think is the role of innovation and data in advancing science and solutions?

Aman: I work mainly with data in my research. The data I use comes largely from innovation. If you look at older approaches in glaciology, researchers had to go out into the field and spend months on expeditions. It required a huge amount of time, effort and energy to collect data. Today, because of innovations such as satellites and other remote sensing technologies, we no longer necessarily need to be physically in the field to gather information. Satellites continuously collect data, depending on the system, every six days, every sixteen days, or even more frequently.

Because we now have access to such large amounts of data, we can closely monitor how glaciers are changing over time.

Innovation has really shaped the way we see glaciology as a scientific field, because we're now able to answer questions that were previously impossible to address. We can better understand glacier retreat, sea-level rise and many other environmental processes, because we have access to this abundance of data.

Joseph: Science is advanced by innovation, and innovation is advanced by science. The two must go hand in hand. With ever newer technologies and innovations being developed, we have to break boundaries in science and increase the potential of what humans can do. This can be done with AI, with cutting-edge technologies such as those used in space exploration, and with innovative alternatives to plastics, like we are trying to do at HyaPak.

Why is it important for these advances to be shared with as many people as possible?

Joseph: I think the biggest problem we have right now in the academic world, globally, is that a lot of good research usually ends up as papers that are published and just filed away in university libraries and somewhere on the internet that no one will ever read. It's really important to make master's degrees and PhD theses better aligned with what societies need and with the problems facing communities around the world.

At HyaPak, in addition to addressing the pollution and water hyacinth problems, we create economic benefits for communities, such as additional incomes and green jobs, by having community members harvest the water hyacinth plants for us. Also, unlike plastics and microplastics, this product does not affect human health. I think it's really important for science and innovation to be deeply involved in solving human problems and community challenges.

Aman: Public engagement is extremely important, especially in science. Historically, scientists have not always been very good at translating their findings into accessible language. As a result, many people are not fully aware of what's happening around them. We don't want science communication to be reduced to sensational headlines or dramatic news articles. We want to present reality to people in a way they can understand, along with the impacts of what's happening. It's important that people are aware of both the positive and negative aspects of scientific developments. We don't only want them to hear about risks, such as losing homes or communities being affected by environmental change. We also want them to understand what scientists are doing to improve lives, develop early warning systems for floods and better understand environmental changes that may affect local or Indigenous communities.

People within academic circles are already aware of these issues, but the broader public also needs access to that knowledge.

How do you manage to translate specialised knowledge for a non-expert audience?

Joseph: One of the key things I know, even from pitching, is that when you're speaking, you should keep in mind that there are people in the audience who might have a basic idea about the industry, and some who might have no idea at all about your solution or about the challenges involved in what you're trying to solve. So whenever you're explaining something, try and explain it as if you're addressing a small kid or your grandmother.

Aman: For me, translating specialised knowledge is about changing the data-methodology-conclusions framework of academic research questions. When I'm talking to a non-specialist, I start with the real-world impact in their own communities, such as how changes in remote ice environments like Greenland are going to affect water security.
For decision-makers, the aim is to give concrete evidence so they come up with justifiable long-term policies for the planet.

FASHION
AS A LEVER FOR TRANSITION

How can we balance aesthetics, innovation and sustainability in the fashion industry without one compromising the other?

Ge: For me, aesthetics is really important, because without beautiful clothing my business wouldn't last. But without sustainability, I see no meaning in doing this business.
Innovation links design to sustainability. For example, when I use AI and 3D watercolour, it reduces water pollution. We still make very beautiful pieces, but only 25% of the dyeing process produces wastewater.
In my opinion, there is no perfect solution. But for me that is also a fun part of the problem: I learn from my peers and from the industry.

Thamires: Because I majored in fashion design, I believe that beauty is important, but it should, and can, go hand in hand with innovation and sustainability. With our project, we wanted to address some of the major environmental problems we already know about. For example, we know about the issues linked to cotton cultivation, such as the intensive use of pesticides and insecticides. In our case, we don't need those inputs; we only need seawater, sunlight and CO2. Another major problem in the fashion industry is microplastic pollution. Around 75% of microplastic pollution comes from the way we wash our clothes, which is massive. It is also the source of a large proportion of the microplastics found in the ocean.

Since we have the opportunity to create something new, why not have innovation and sustainability as core principles from the start? It's what our customers and brands are looking for. They need something sustainable, they need good performance and they need something that looks good at the end of the day.

How can these issues be communicated to consumers?

Ge: As a designer, my first thought is to design long-lasting garments and to create designs that understand the needs of the consumer, making them more adaptable. This "functional" or "conscious" design helps preserve a lot of resources through the design itself.
Another thing is that I have always loved to keep my storytelling accessible to as many people as possible. I try my best to run my own social media, to share the story behind what I am making, and in doing so I have attracted more than 40K followers for my brand on a mainstream Chinese social media platform.

Thamires: Since the world of fashion is driven by trends, we have a responsibility from the outset. What we choose to share with consumers and the wider public matters. We can educate consumers, showing them what we can offer, explaining how we do things and demonstrating why our approach is different. Maybe this is our superpower: the ability to reshape the fashion industry through transparency, education and innovation.

Thamires Pontes (Brazil)

Founder and CEO of Phycolabs, pioneering seaweed-based textile fibres to decarbonise the fashion industry.



Ge Yu (China)

Sustainable fashion entrepreneur and founder of Aunderstand, advancing circularity and cross-cultural dialogue.

What might an ideal fashion industry look like 10 years from now?

Ge: A circular system. I believe that if clothing could be 100% resold, that would be amazing. I don't think people want to wear the same designs every year; we would get bored. And that's okay. But when you do get bored, why not have your old clothes recycled? Then, through a circular cycle, they can continue to have a life and you can get new clothing.
I also hope the supply chain will become transparent in terms of sustainability. Right now, it's not 100%.

Thamires: Ten years is not a very long time, especially considering that some materials and commercial systems have existed for decades. However, one of the biggest challenges facing the fashion industry today is sustainability. What I truly desire, and what I am working towards, is creating a fair value chain for the fashion industry, from raw material production to garment disposal or recycling. From my perspective, it's important to develop materials that generate a positive impact, not only during cultivation but throughout production, manufacturing and every stage of the value chain. I would like to see a world where the diversity of materials creates a positive impact on people, the industry and the environment.

TOWARDS AN *INCLUSIVE ECOLOGY*



Garvita Gulhati (India)

Social entrepreneur and sustainability advocate, founder of Why Waste?, transforming water conservation practices at scale and connecting grassroots action with global capital.

Fiorella Herrera (Peru)

Marine biology student and environmental advocate, founder of We Can Be Heroes, leading large-scale conservation and regeneration projects in the Amazon.

Dayana Blanco (Bolivia)

Indigenous regeneration leader and founder of the Uru Uru Team, restoring high-altitude wetlands through a combination of ancestral knowledge and scientific methods.

How do you define environmental justice?

Fiorella: Environmental justice is a matter of survival and dignity. It is the defence of life in all its forms and the understanding that human rights and the rights of ecosystems are inseparable. Throughout my journey – from the moment I discovered a dead dolphin on a Peruvian beach, to my work defending native communities and conserving biodiversity in the Amazon – I have seen that environmental degradation is an act of violence that always targets the most vulnerable. To me, true environmental justice means giving a voice, visibility and legal protection to those who protect our planetary balance, but are systematically ignored.

Garvita: Yes, that's exactly it. Justice is all about closing that gap and ensuring that the communities who are on the frontlines of scarcity actually have a seat at the table where decisions are made. It includes access to clean water being treated as a right, rather than a privilege. The burden of conservation has to be shared equitably rather than quietly placed on the shoulders of those with the least power to carry it.

Dayana: Through the Uru Uru team, we have witnessed how pollution can threaten not only an ecosystem, but also a community's culture, identity and way of life. Environmental justice is not only about repairing environmental damage, it is about restoring dignity, recognising ancestral knowledge and ensuring that communities are active leaders in creating solutions. When we restore a lake, we are also restoring hope, opportunities and connections between people and nature.

Ecology stimulates complex thinking. In your opinion, what do we need to learn in order to better connect?

Fiorella: Ecology teaches us that nothing exists in isolation; the destruction of an Amazonian peatland impacts the climate buffer of the entire planet, just as the industrial overexploitation of our sea destroys coastal livelihoods. We need to learn to build bridges between scientific rigour and ancestral Indigenous wisdom, recognising that both are vital for facing the climate crisis. It requires deep empathy and active listening to understand the reality of different territories. Human survival is inextricably woven into the tapestry of all living things; biodiversity is the silent anchor keeping us alive at this very moment.

Garvita: We need to put people back in proximity to the natural systems they depend on, whether it's a child watching where her water actually comes from or a policymaker standing in a dried riverbed. We learn about challenges by standing in the fields. Interdependence is a felt experience and not just an intellectual concept.

Dayana: Every plant, animal, person and ecosystem is connected. Working with my community has taught me that solutions emerge when different perspectives come together, when all the community members are included and involved: Indigenous elders, children, teachers and scientists. Each one holds a piece of the puzzle. We need to understand that no one has all the answers and that collaboration is stronger than individual action.

You all work closely with communities. What motivates people to unite around a common goal?

Fiorella: Through over a decade of leading We Can Be Heroes across Peru's coast, highlands and jungle, I have learned that a common purpose is never imposed; it is cultivated from the ground up. What truly unites communities – whether protecting 25,000 hectares of Amazonian forest against illegal logging or driving local environmental laws – is the collective hope of reclaiming their dignity and securing a future for their children. Furthermore, as a young woman who has faced sexism and underestimation, I know that a shared purpose becomes unbreakable when we transform obstacles into collective strength, showing people that, through solidarity, they have the power to become the heroes of their own territories.

Garvita: I truly believe in the power of shared stories. When I started Why Waste? I didn't lead with the number of litres lost, I asked people: When did you last fill up with water? Have you ever known what it feels like not to have access to it? Questions like that open something up in people's minds. When something feels personal, people stop being an audience and actually start becoming participants. The community I have worked with, from schoolchildren in India to partners across continents, all came together because they recognised similar loss and held similar hope. And when you provide a solution that anyone can easily adopt into their own world, it's creating a success.
When we see people going to restaurants and filling their glass half full, they know why they're doing it. It has changed how they think about this resource.

Dayana: In my experience, people come together when they feel they belong to something larger than themselves. What unites people is not only a problem, but also a vision of hope. When community members see that change is possible, they become part of the solution, they create common stories, share dreams and experiences, and act together. This leads to trustful, strengthened relationships. Lasting change happens when everyone feels respected and valued.

STORYTELLING THAT DRIVES IMPACT

How has your own personal story shaped the work you do today?

Flora: Growing up, I was fascinated by the ocean, water and the living world. From a young age, I knew I wanted to help protect them. I work as an agricultural engineer, managing environmental projects, but my experience in high-level sport has given me an additional perspective. It's shown me how sport can bring people together, inspire them and lead to behaviour change. I've realised that athletes are not just focused on competing; with the right support they will champion causes close to their hearts and become ambassadors for change.

Amber: When I first began studying during my PhD, I recognised that many of the traditional structures of marine conservation weren't best serving the communities we were collaborating with. So in my work today I really try to stretch and rethink how knowledge is produced. My goal is to ensure the coastal communities are actively involved in producing that knowledge and can also see and benefit from the solutions that emerge from it.

Grace: I think what shapes my work today is that I didn't first approach the polar regions through politics or science. I approached them from a very personal perspective, simply by spending a lot of time there. It's that sense of place, almost a sense of home, that gives me such a deep emotional connection and love for those regions. Because of that, I can now take more political or scientific perspectives and apply them to places that genuinely mean a great deal to me.

You all work with narratives in different ways – through sport, communication and cultural stories. What makes a story truly transformative?

Flora: I think a story can be powerful when it resonates with people's lived experience and helps them see things in a new light. Facts are essential, but it's often narratives that inspire us to take action. I wanted to explore this idea in organising the Roca Cup, a wingfoil festival that also acts as a testbed for social and environmental innovation. We only planned to run it as a one-off event, but it generated much more interest than we expected. Perhaps that's the power of a transformative story: when it stops being something that's just told and becomes something people experience.

Amber: In my work, I try to integrate local narratives and stories into both the science and the communication surrounding the work. I think what makes a story truly transformative is its ability to connect people who may not have anything obvious in common and who may not face the same challenges. When you help people understand what others are experiencing and connect on a deeper level, even if their lives might never cross in reality, that can be incredibly powerful.

Grace: I agree! A transformative story goes beyond hard data or analytical thinking. It brings in emotion and a strong sense of place. I work in regions that are incredibly remote and most people will never have the opportunity to visit them. So when it comes to telling stories about those remote environments, it's essential to help people feel as though they are experiencing them themselves, even from afar.

Flora Artzner (France)

Wingfoil world champion, biodiversity expert, founder of Ecowave, coordinator of Athletes for Science, and organiser of the Roca Cup, connecting sport and environmental conservation.



Amber Carter (United Kingdom)

Marine social-ecological scientist working at the intersection of science, policy and communication to support community-led ocean conservation.

Grace Cordsen (United States)

Explorer, researcher, and storyteller working across the Arctic and Antarctic to study human impact, climate change and conservation.

What responsibility do communicators have in shaping the future imagination of younger generations?

Flora: Public figures, including athletes, have more influence now than they've ever had. They shape what people see as desirable, inspiring and even possible every day. And that comes with huge responsibility, given the major climate and biodiversity crises we're facing. We have to show that action can be taken and that we also need to feel hope, courage and ideally joy when thinking ahead to the future. That's the idea behind the Athletes for Science initiative: it connects scientific researchers and athletes on environmental issues close to their hearts so that athletes can step up their support.

Amber: Communicators do indeed have a huge influence on public understanding of the issues we are facing, especially environmental issues. They have a great deal of power in shaping how people perceive and engage with these challenges. I would love to see more of them play a proactive role in helping younger generations understand environmental issues. And I think this can be done in a way that is engaging and even fun. Once these conversations become part of everyday culture, people are more likely to take action and work on solutions together, rather than viewing environmental challenges as abstract issues that feel disconnected from their lives.

Grace: Climate work is fundamentally focused on the future. Of course it's about issues that are happening in the present, but, ultimately, it's about what will affect the future. It's about asking how we can prepare ourselves, our communities and our environments not just to survive, but to thrive in the years ahead.
In my role, when I'm speaking with younger people, I like to think about ways we can preserve that imagination, that sense of curiosity, joy, passion and creative spark, while also ensuring people remain grounded in facts and evidence.

CONVEYING *BEAUTY, URGENCY* AND *HOPE*



Since 2021, the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation has been holding its annual Environmental Photography Award to recognise photographers who are committed to protecting the species and ecosystems of our living world. This year's Award proves once again that conservation photography and environmental photojournalism are powerful tools for raising awareness.

In showcasing the beauty of our planet – deep within forests, polar regions and mesmerising marine environments – but also documenting the impacts of human activities, whether destructive or regenerative, the goal of the Environmental Photography Award is to convey meaningful stories to as wide an audience as possible. The Competition Chairman, Sergio Pitamitz, is a wildlife and conservation photographer and a contributor to *National Geographic* magazine. He explains that the Award seeks images that are not only visually compelling; above all, they must "inform, engage and raise awareness about the urgent challenges facing our planet".

This view is shared by the high-level panel for the 2026 Award: Jasper Doest, Chair of the Jury, a photographer specialising in conservation and wildlife issues (Netherlands); Angel Fitor, a natural history photographer and photojournalist specialising in aquatic ecosystems (Spain); Tom Gilks, Managing Director and Head of Content at Nature Picture Library (United Kingdom); Sharon Guynup, journalist, author, photographer and National Geographic Explorer (United States); Florian Ledoux, filmmaker and photographer specialising in the Arctic (France); Steve Winter, photojournalist and documentary filmmaker specialising in big cats (United States); and Christian Ziegler, photojournalist and filmmaker specialising in natural history and science-related topics (Germany).

These eminent panel members, who share a commitment to protecting nature, had the daunting task of shortlisting 36 photographs for the 2026 edition from among nearly 8,000 images. Seven photographs, which are presented on the following pages, received awards. The Grand Prize of the 2026 Environmental Photography Award was presented to photographer Britta Jaschinski for *Handprint on Sea Turtle*, an image which "aims to highlight the fragility of species but also the vital role of science in protecting our extraordinary wildlife". In her words, "while traces of human presence can be unsettling, this photograph tells a story of progress – where innovation gives wildlife a voice, transforming evidence into a powerful force for awareness and accountability".

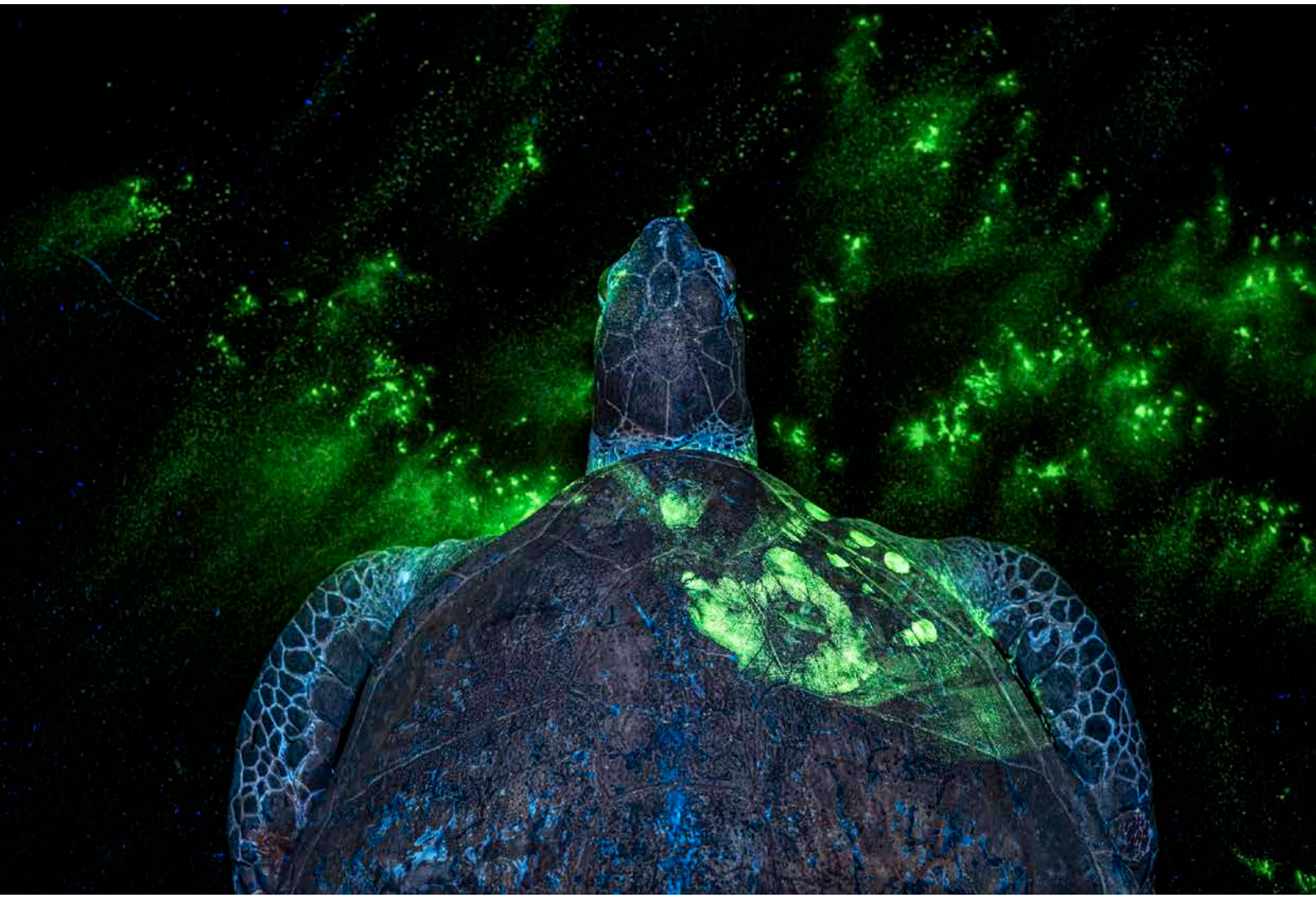
Following their exhibition in Monaco from 28 May to 30 July 2026, the images chosen for the 2026 Environmental Photography Award are touring internationally to continue to bring their stories to life and communicate their important messages. Since the Award was launched in 2021, it has provided international visibility for over 200 images. This outstanding collection will soon be supplemented by the new photographs selected for the 2027 edition, for which submissions are open until 1 November 2026.

MORE INFO

fpa2photoaward.org

"The environment and wildlife can't ask for help. The Environmental Photography Award gives them a voice."

Sergio Pitamitz,
Contest Chairman



Britta Jaschinski
Handprint on Sea Turtle
Combating illegal wildlife trade with forensic science, United Kingdom, 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL PHOTOGRAPHER 2026 CHANGEMAKERS CATEGORY WINNER

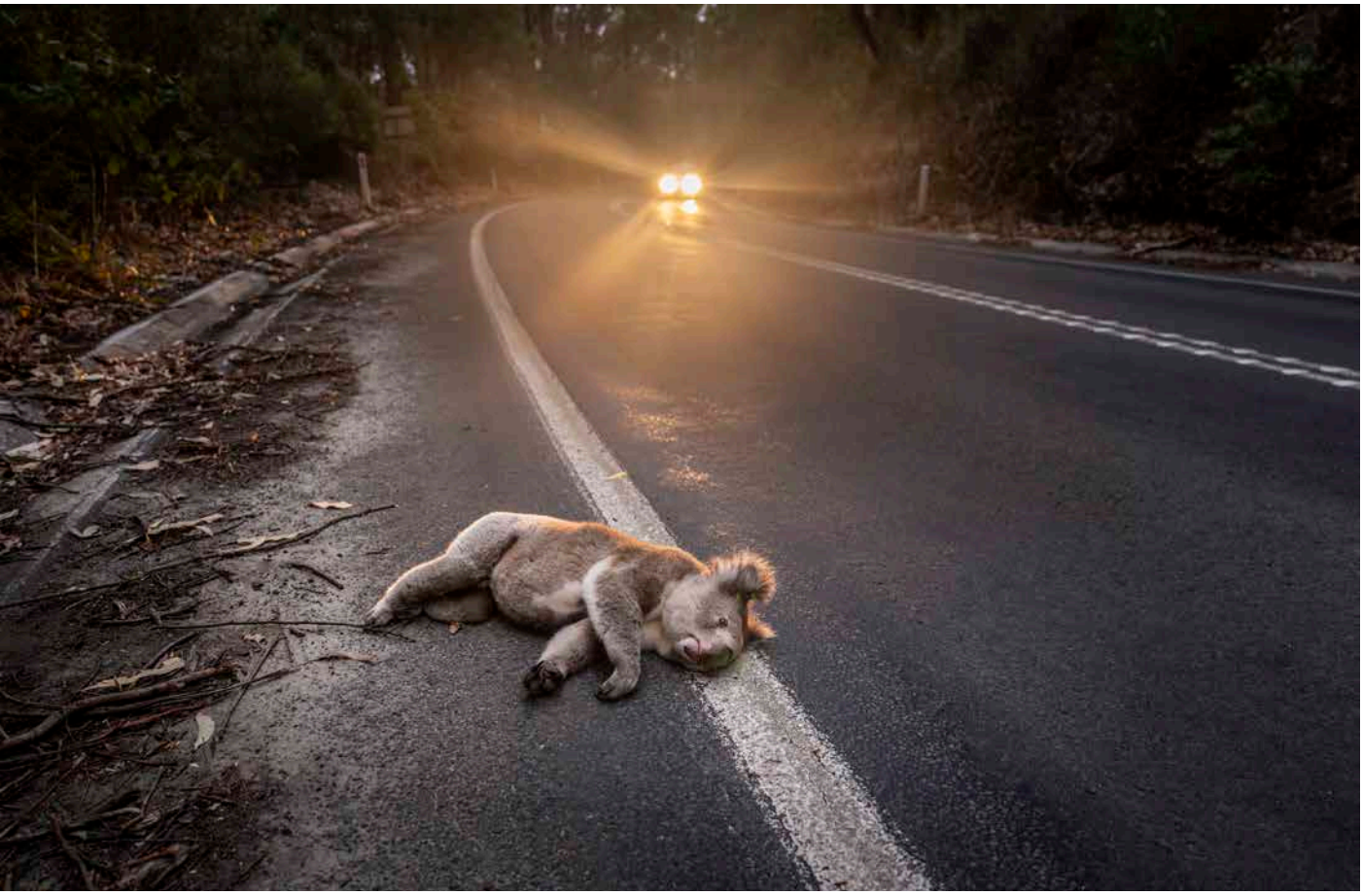
Every crime leaves a trace. On the hunt for smugglers with wildlife forensics: the work that aims to disrupt or even dismantle illegally run wildlife trade chains. At first glance this may appear to be an underwater photograph of a green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), but can you spot the human handprint? This scene demonstrates a method for securing forensic evidence that can help to catch poachers and animal traffickers. Special fluorescent powder dyes, photographed under ultraviolet light, reveal traces of hand- and fingerprints, blood and other bodily fluids, and gunpowder residues, among others. Wildlife forensic experts Dr Alexandra Thomas and Louise Gibson from the ZSL Wildlife Forensic Lab, London, are developing methods like these to assist law enforcement. Six of the world's seven sea turtle species are classified as threatened, endangered or critically endangered due to human persecution, habitat destruction or marine pollution.

HUMANITY VS NATURE CATEGORY WINNER

The hunting and trade of shark fins are among the main threats to marine biodiversity and the balance of ocean ecosystems. In Brazil, enforcement authorities have revealed a recurring pattern of fraud, with shipments repeatedly containing protected and critically endangered species. In 2023, the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) carried out the largest shark-fin seizure ever recorded in the country – 28.7 tonnes – which corresponds to the death of at least ten thousand sharks, including threatened species. As biological materials, these fins are required to be incinerated after official processing. This photograph records the incineration carried out in São Paulo in 2025, under IBAMA supervision. The act symbolises both the enforcement of environmental law and the urgent need for public policies capable of ending a trade that turns apex predators, essential to the health of the ocean, into waste consigned to flames. In a historic milestone, IBAMA announced a nationwide ban on the export of shark fins on Thursday 26 March 2026. Brazil also banned the import of any shark classified as a threatened species on its official list.

Fernando Faciole
Born for the Ocean, Fated to the Flames
Incineration of shark fins after seizure, Brazil, 2025





Doug Gimesy
Koalas are Dying for You to Slow Down
Koala hit by a car, Australia, 2025

PUBLIC AWARD
HONOURABLE MENTION, HUMANITY VS NATURE CATEGORY

With koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) often crossing roads to access food, mates or shelter, road trauma is sadly a major threat to this iconic Australian species, with high traffic volumes, inappropriate high speed limits – especially between dusk and dawn – and inconsiderate driving all playing a part. But vehicle strikes are not just a conservation issue, they are a huge wildlife welfare issue, resulting in crippling injuries such as fractured jaws, broken limbs or spinal damage. Whilst a few may be found, rescued and treated, many crawl off into the bush to die slow horrible deaths or live crippled and in pain. Drivers slowing down could help prevent so much death, pain and suffering.



Arnaud Farré
Spirits of the Falls
Iguazu Falls, Argentina
and Brazil, 2024

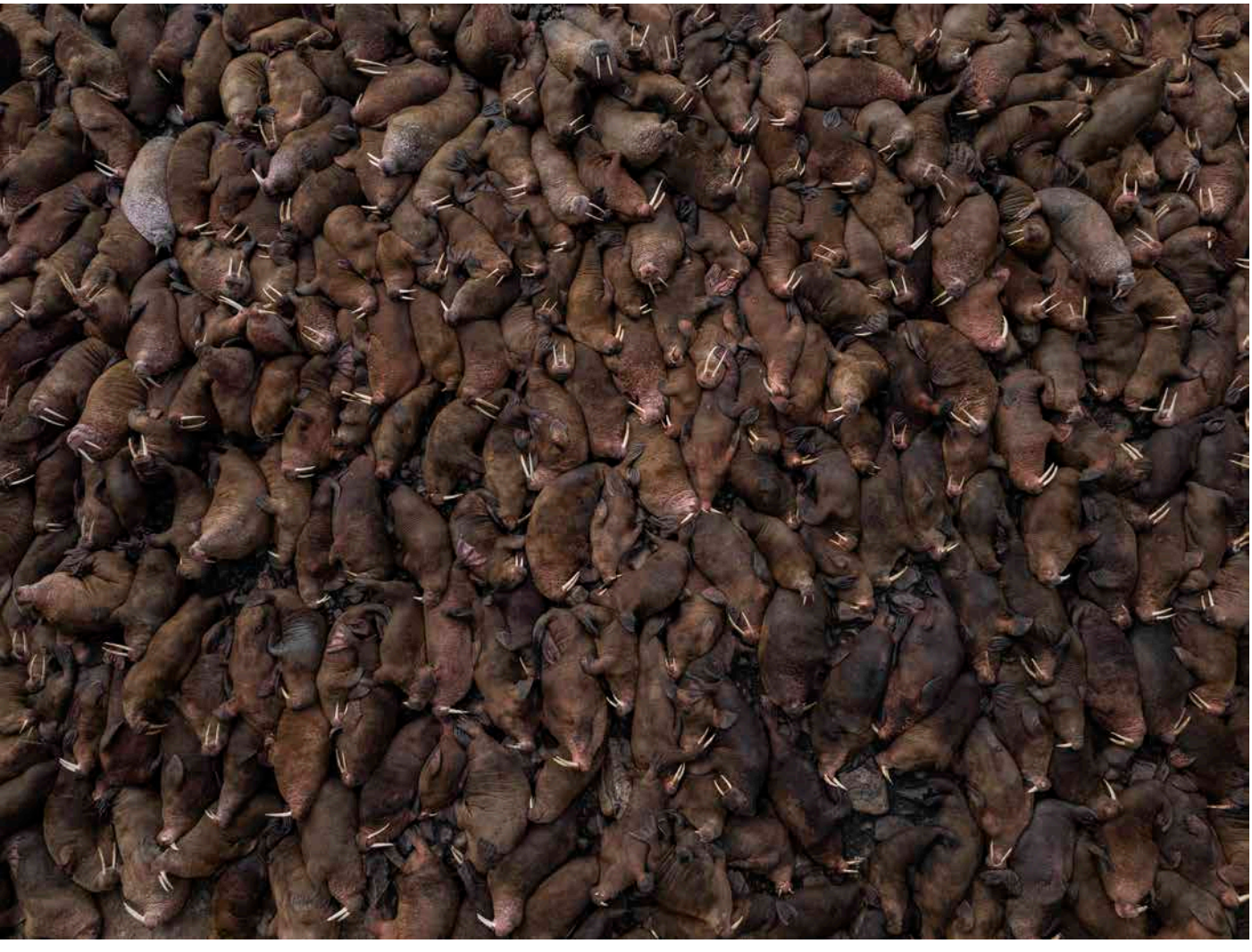
FORESTS CATEGORY WINNER

The Iguazú Falls ("great water" in the Indigenous language) have the distinction of being split between two countries, Argentina and Brazil. They consist of a system of 275 waterfalls spanning nearly 3 kilometres and are protected by a national park in both countries. On the Argentine side, Iguazú National Park covers 67,000 hectares. It was created in 1934 to protect one of the country's most beautiful and most visited natural sites, and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984. The park is home to more than 450 bird species, including the toco toucan (*Ramphastos toco*), an iconic bird native to the subtropical forest. It is the largest species in the toucan family and can be identified by its long bright orange bill. These birds feed on fruit and inhabit the upper canopy.

POLAR REGIONS CATEGORY WINNER

The Pacific walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus divergens)* is the largest species of walrus – males can reach up to 4 metres in length and weigh as much as 1.5 tons. This photograph shows a walrus haulout on Ratmanov Island, on the maritime border between Russia and the United States. The entire southern coastline of the island is occupied by walruses, most of them males. Females only come ashore during the breeding season. They may appear immobile on land, but are fast and agile in the water. Understanding how they use the coastline helps keep encounters safe for both wildlife and people.

Vadim Makhorov
The Gathering
Pacific walruses,
Russia, 2025



OCEAN CATEGORY WINNER

Off the Eastern Pacific coast, a wedge-tailed shearwater (*Ardenna pacifica*) plunges into a football-pitch-sized school of lanternfish, struggling to single out a target. The fish move as one, their schooling defence working perfectly. The bird surfaced without catching anything and circled back for another dive. Shearwaters are exquisitely adapted for life at sea and depend on healthy fish stocks. This encounter captures a rarely witnessed moment of open-ocean abundance, and one of the most extraordinary days of my career as an underwater photographer. Lanternfish are thought to be the most numerous vertebrates on Earth, accounting for up to 65% of deep-sea fish biomass. They form a critical link in the ocean food web, sustaining predators from seabirds and dolphins to tuna and devil rays. The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement (BBNJ), which came into force at the beginning of 2026, is the first international legal framework to protect scenes like this across the roughly half of our planet that lies beyond national waters.

Henley Spiers
Shearwater's Dilemma
Wedge-tailed shearwater in a school of lanternfish, Costa Rica, 2023





Arnaud Farré
Up is Down
Humpback whale and her calf,
Réunion Island, 2023

STUDENTS' CHOICE
OCEAN CATEGORY RUNNER-UP

From June to October, large numbers of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) gather along the west coast of Réunion Island, especially in the Bay of Saint-Paul, to breed and give birth. Cap La Houssaye marks the southern limit of the bay and the starting point of the Marine Nature Reserve, consisting of 35 square kilometres of protected reefs. It is an ideal location for whale watching. Drone flights are prohibited inside the marine reserve without prior permission, but this mother and her calf were spotted just 200 metres from the beach, outside the boundary of the reserve. The mother is diving, followed by her calf, just before sunset. Only their flukes (tails) are visible as the pair begins their plunge to the depths, leaving behind a circular ring called a "fluke print". This striking, rare scene illustrates the harmony that exists between these marine mammals and the ocean.



IN THE FIELD WITH BRITTA JASCHINSKI

The 2026 Environmental Photographer of the Year, Britta Jaschinski, is an acclaimed wildlife photographer, renowned for her investigative reports on crimes against nature and wildlife. Her work in conjunction with environmental authorities and organisations is regularly featured in many leading international magazines, including *National Geographic*, *Time Magazine* and *GEO*. With her raw candour and uncompromising documentary style, she single-handedly captures the urgency of truth. Her goal is to inspire both policymakers and citizens to fight for a future that is more supportive of the living world, which we are all part of and depend on.

© Cat Garcia/Vanity Fair



© B. Jaschinski

Using a magnetic powder, Mark Moseley, a forensic investigator at London's Metropolitan Police, detects human fingerprints on a confiscated elephant tusk at Heathrow Airport, UK.

EVERY CRIME LEAVES A TRACE

By Britta Jaschinski

WILDLIFE CRIME HAS BECOME A GLOBAL OPERATION – FAST, COMPLEX AND DEEPLY PROFITABLE

From illegal ivory and rhino horn to trafficked pangolins and tiger parts, the trade is driven by transnational criminal networks that move quietly through supply chains connecting poachers, middlemen, corrupt officials and end consumers.

Despite growing international efforts to curb it, successful prosecutions remain rare. Law enforcement faces major challenges: limited resources, jurisdictional barriers and, perhaps most critically, a lack of hard evidence.

Now, a new generation of forensic science could change that. In the fight to protect endangered species, conservationists and forensic experts are turning to investigative techniques long associated with serious human crimes, such as homicide, sexual assault and organised violence. The same tools used to solve murders and rapes are being used to solve wildlife crimes.

THE PRINCIPLE IS SIMPLE: EVERY CONTACT LEAVES A TRACE

And it's on those traces – fingerprints, DNA, ballistic fragments and biochemical residues – that investigators are beginning to build cases.
Wildlife forensics focuses on collecting and analysing evidence from animals, their body parts and the tools used to hunt or move them: bones, shells, fur, traps, vehicles and weapons. Ivory and rhino horn become not just contraband, but crime scenes. A single fingerprint on a tusk can link a poacher to a larger network. A fragment of DNA in a vial of 'medicinal wine' can reveal the presence of an endangered species.
But collecting this kind of evidence is not straightforward. Many wildlife materials have irregular surfaces (porous ivory, curved scales, fur and feathers) which makes lifting fingerprints extremely difficult. In hot or humid environments, traces degrade rapidly. Traditional forensic powders have often failed to capture viable prints.

That changed with a breakthrough led by a forensic investigator at London's Metropolitan Police and researchers at King's College London. Together, they researched known and untested forensic powders, resulting in the discovery of a new magnetic fingerprint powder that can recover prints from wildlife items – including ivory – for 28 days after contact, and in some cases even longer.
Over 200 fingerprinting kits using this technology were distributed to border forces across 40 countries in Africa and Asia. The results were immediate. In Kenya, evidence recovered using one kit led to fifteen arrests, including five police officers, and the seizure of eleven elephant tusks. For the first time, ivory was not just proof of a crime, it was evidence of *who committed* it.
A white variant of the powder is now being used to recover prints from rhino horn, pangolin scale and turtle shell. The powders are low-cost, field-deployable and can be used in locations where DNA testing is not feasible.

DNA, MEANWHILE, REMAINS THE GOLD STANDARD FOR WILDLIFE IDENTIFICATION

In forensic labs, genetic material from animal tissue, blood or fur can be used to identify species, determine geographic origin, assess whether the animal was wild or captive and even match individual parts, like tusks, to a specific carcass.
Now, it is even possible to detect tiger DNA in traditional medicine and wine using a rapid multiplex quantitative PCR assay – a test that can identify multiple big cat species at once. This technology is crucial in prosecuting cases where wildlife products have been heavily processed or disguised.
Globally, there are only a dozen or so dedicated wildlife forensic labs across ten countries, according to CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). These labs are working not only to solve individual cases, but to build global databases of genetic and forensic information that can help trace trafficking routes and identify repeat offenders.

In the field, portable forensic devices are making these techniques more accessible. Multispectral imaging tools, adapted from crime scene investigation, can detect fingerprints and bodily fluids, and trace evidence on difficult surfaces like scales and shells. These handheld devices use UV, visible and infrared light to reveal what would otherwise be invisible.
Researchers at London's Institute of Zoology are exploring devices tailored for use in remote, resource-limited environments. But the biggest barrier isn't always the technology – it's that wildlife crimes are often not treated as crimes at all.
Law enforcement officers may not recognise a poaching site as a crime scene. They may not know how to preserve forensic evidence or call in experts. As a result, crucial evidence is lost – and cases collapse before they even begin. This is where awareness becomes as important as innovation.

WILDLIFE FORENSICS IS NOT ONLY ABOUT CATCHING CRIMINALS – IT'S ABOUT DETERRENCE

Criminal syndicates often see wildlife trafficking as low-risk and high-reward. Conviction rates are low, penalties are often light and the likelihood of being caught is minimal. But as forensic science improves, that equation could shift. If poachers and traffickers know that a fingerprint can tie them to a seized tusk or that DNA in a bottle of wine can link them to a protected species, the perceived risk rises.

Forensic evidence introduces accountability in a space that has long operated without it. And in doing so, it helps shift the status of wildlife crime from an environmental concern to a serious criminal offence.

The future of wildlife forensics lies not just in better tools or faster lab results. It lies in integrating these tools into enforcement systems, training officers to recognise their value and creating a culture where wildlife crime scenes are treated with the seriousness they deserve.

Behind every illegal tusk, scale or claw is an animal that should still be alive. And now, the invisible traces left behind can help ensure that someone is held responsible.

Lion Paws turned into Bottle Openers
Photograph by Britta Jaschinski, showing a hunting trophy seized by customs in the UK, from the Environmental Photography Award 2026 (honourable mention, Humanity vs Nature category).



ECOncrete, *building* COASTAL *RESILIENCE FOR THE FUTURE*

During the second Blue Economy and Finance Forum in Monaco in May 2026, one thing became increasingly clear: the blue economy is no longer just a theoretical goal, it is a real-world area of work where key elements of the ecological and economic transition are taking shape. ECOncrete technology bridges science, innovation and industry, and shows how economic growth can go hand in hand with ecosystem regeneration.



Port of San Diego, 14 months post installation, 2022

© ECOncrete/Jeff Stein

With the ocean experiencing simultaneous impacts from climate change, biodiversity loss, multiple forms of pollution and increased maritime traffic, it is no longer a case of simply improving protection for marine ecosystems, but of fundamentally rethinking our relationship with coastlines.

Central to this challenge is the critical role played by coastal infrastructure. Seawalls, breakwaters, artificial rockfill and flood barriers are essential constructions to help regions adapt to rising sea levels and extreme weather events. However, most are designed without taking sufficient account of their ecological impact. In developed coastal areas, “grey” infrastructure – predominantly using conventional concrete – is increasingly replacing the natural habitats of marine species. Yet these species play a vital role in protecting biodiversity, combating erosion, maintaining water quality and storing blue carbon. The absolute priority today is to identify and implement solutions to protect communities and economic activities without exacerbating the degradation of marine ecosystems.

To address these interrelated challenges the ReOcean Fund is investing in ECOncrete. The private equity fund, launched by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation and Monaco Asset Management to support UN Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water, invests in companies with the potential to accelerate the transition towards a sustainable blue economy through innovation, scaling up and measurable impact. Adding ECOncrete to its portfolio aligns with one of the five key areas supported by the fund: sustainable marine infrastructure and biodiversity restoration.

ECOncrete’s contribution is both simple and revolutionary, redesigning concrete so it is no longer an inert surface imposed on the living world, but a structure capable of hosting and regenerating marine biodiversity. Using patented technology, the company is developing solutions that retain the structural integrity expected of coastal installations, while improving their biocompatibility. In other words, we no longer have to choose between coastal protection and nature conservation, as coastal engineering is evolving towards designs that work with ecosystems rather than against them.



Close-up of the ECOncrete concrete texture

© ECOncrete



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Installation of the ECOncrete tide pools in the port of Fontvieille in Monaco, in 2019

This approach has struck a particular chord in Monaco, a hub committed to the blue economy but also a practical testing ground where the solutions it supports can be implemented, monitored and developed. As attested by Céline Caron-Dagioni: Minister of Public Works, the Environment and Urban Development: "Saving biodiversity is no longer simply about protecting the existing natural environment. In a region as densely built up as Monaco, we also need to give space back to the living world within our urban development, both on land and in the sea. This is the reasoning behind the “Renaturer la Ville” (‘Re-naturing the City’) initiative recently launched by the Government.

The strategy is already being implemented along our coastline. Since 2019, rockfill at the port of Fontvieille has incorporated five ECOncrete tide pools, which have been designed to retain the installation’s protective function at the same time as improving its ecological value. Six monitoring surveys comparing the tide pools with nearby control areas, carried out over nearly six years, have provided clear evidence of the impacts. They show a sustained increase in biodiversity in the areas with these installations, along with a gradual stabilisation of marine ecosystems.

Environmental innovations have to follow a rigorous process of experiment and evaluation, with solutions that prove effective then being incorporated into projects. What we found at the Fontvieille site prompted us to select ECOncrete structures again when upgrading the seawalls at Larvotto. This is a tangible demonstration of our commitment to striking a better balance between meeting urban development needs and restoring biodiversity."

INTERVIEW WITH IDO SELLA

Co-founder and CEO of ECOncrete



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What is your company's ambition?

At ECOncrete, we provide a technology that empowers local supply chains to provide their markets with ecologically sensitive concrete solutions for marine construction. Since 2012 we have been operating across the world, from Canada to New Zealand. We have set up, and are monitoring, more than 50 international infrastructure projects, all of them based on the long and extensive research we have conducted on how biodiversity and ecosystem services can be increased on concrete structures.

Marine infrastructure is often seen as a threat to biodiversity. How can it become part of the solution?

Marine infrastructure will never be a substitute for natural habitats, but we can harness it to provide us with ecosystem services. If we look at the global map, most of our coastlines are completely armoured, and 70% of coastal infrastructure worldwide is made of concrete. We need to address that infrastructure as a system that will provide additional functions to those it was built for. We are focusing on concrete infrastructure in marine construction because of its environmental impact. We have shown that if you treat and address concrete appropriately, you can significantly increase biodiversity and other ecosystem services, while still being fully compliant with industry standards and ensuring the proper service and operation of the infrastructure.

Close-up of the ECOncrete concrete texture





Port of Fontvieille in Monaco, 12 months post installation, 2020

What changes are made when coastal infrastructure is designed with nature in mind from the start?

The changes that we make to marine infrastructure to accommodate biodiversity and different species are actually very small. First, we address the substrate – the concrete itself. Marine concrete is a chemical mix that is not just cement and aggregate; there are a lot of other additives. Because of them, the surface is ineffective at supporting species. The reasons why those structures are usually associated with a negative impact on the marine environment are low biodiversity, dominance of invasive species and poor water quality. With the ECOncrete technology we affect the chemical composition of the concrete through a set of admixtures: materials that we add into the local concrete in very small quantities, enabling us to control the leaching out of different components that negatively affect the ability of the concrete to recruit organisms. By doing that, we significantly increase the number of local species that can settle on the concrete and reduce the dominance of invasive species. The other change we make to the infrastructure (and the technology can be applied to any type of concrete structure) is subtly altering the morphology of the surface by accommodating the different niches required by those organisms at their very juvenile phases. And we do all this without affecting structural performance, longevity or local supply chains.



What would it take for nature-positive infrastructure to become the new standard?

I truly believe nature-sensitive infrastructure is already becoming the new standard, specifically in regions like Europe, the US and more progressive areas that are looking at the importance of preserving natural assets. But it is a slow process – not due to cost, but to how the value of the ocean and the economics of the system itself are understood. As we slowly (more slowly than expected) come to understand the financial value of this huge asset, it is becoming increasingly important to build in a way that does not affect, and can positively support, ecosystem services.

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