NEWS FROM AFRICAN PROTECTED AREAS

NAPA 203

CONSERVING NATURE IN AFRICA

THIS MONTH IN THE NAPA

DOLPHIN & COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION

MOOC, TUTOS AND ESSENTIALS

YOUTH CONSERVATION

THIS MONTH IN THE NAPA

Uniting forces to save a uniquely African dolphin species from extinction!

By Gianna Minton, PhD
General Secretary, CCAHD

The Atlantic humpback dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*), is a dolphin species found only on the west coast of Africa. Confined to shallow nearshore habitats that are also intensely used by an ever-growing human population, the species is considered Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened species. Fewer than 3000 individuals are thought to remain in the 7000km range that extends from Angola in the south to Dakhla Bay, south of Morocco in the north. Populations are fragmented, and dispersed, and exposed to numerous threats, with bycatch in small-scale artisanal gillnet fisheries and coastal development for ports and mining-related activities thought to be the main drivers of ongoing population declines. There are fears that at the northern end of the species range, in Dakhla Bay, only one single humpback dolphin remains, associating with a small group of bottlenose dolphins in the absences of others of its own kind.

In Cameroon, where very little dedicated dolphin research has been conducted, the majority of records are of accidentally caught dolphins reported by fishers, rather than live dolphins observed at sea. In Sierra Leone, the first confirmed record of the species was only documented in 2024, and no one has any idea how many dolphins may be present there, or what areas of habitat need to be protected to ensure their future survival. Although some populations, such as that in the Delta Saloum, Senegal, are well studied, others are at risk of disappearing before they can be properly studied and protected.

In the early 2000s, multiple alarm calls over the years from international organisations like IUCN, the International Whaling Commission (IWC), and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) failed to halt ongoing declines, but a recent collaboration between a wide range of stakeholders from all 19 possible range states offers hope that we can turn the tide for the species.

The Consortium for the Conservation of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (CCAHD) was formed in 2020. Initially an informal network of researchers, the CCAHD now has formal status as a Foundation in the Netherlands, and over 120 partners representing local, national and international NGOs, IGOs, academic institutions, and government agencies in all 19 possible AHD range countries and beyond. With no time to lose, the CCAHD's five-year strategic plan aims to tackle conservation of this species through multiple pathways – including both top-down and bottom-up approaches:

1) Addressing knowledge gaps

Governments and industries require convincing scientific data before they put protective measures in place, and these data are lacking in most parts of the species' range. The CCAHD is mapping where the dolphins are and which areas need to be protected. Projects in the Delta Saloum Senegal, and Guinea are resulting in long-term datasets that allow population estimation and tracking of individual dolphins over time. However, in most countries much more basic data is still needed on where the species occurs and what threats need to be mitigated to protect it.

2) Empowering communities to become conservation partners

Fishers and their families are well placed to share and collect data on dolphin sightings, strandings, and bycatch. By providing them

with the right resources, they can help to design and implement effective means to reduce threats. The CCAHD has developed projects and tools to harness fishers' local ecological knowledge (LEK), and several partners have set up stranding, bycatch, and sighting reporting networks, including those supported by a smart-phone reporting app developed by partners AMCO in Cameroon.

3) Reducing fisheries bycatch

Most small-scale artisanal fishers use gill nets that result in bycatch of turtles, sharks, rays and dolphins. Collaboration between scientists, sociologists, and fishing communities is required to develop alternative fishing gears and practices that will reduce dolphin bycatch without reducing incomes or food security. In January 2026 a pilot project in Congo will work with three local NGOs to train them in the use of a Bycatch Risk Assessment tool, and set up scientifically robust trials of a bycatch reduction method using empty plastic drinks bottles to enhance dolphins ability to acoustically detect and avoid nets.

4) **Supporting managers and decision-makers**

We cannot expect decision makers to enact policies that protect dolphins if they do not know they present, do not know what threats they face, or how to mitigate those threats. Communication, capacity building, and engagement are essential to ensure that these government and industry stakeholders understand why dolphins are threatened and can enshrine protective measures in policies and laws that can be implemented and enforced.

By engaging with Intergovernmental organisations like the IWC and CMS, the CCAHD supports a 'top-down' approach to encouraging range-country governments to take action. The CMS Single Species Action Plan for the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin provides a regional framework for conservation, while CCAHD-supported government engagements have led to ground-breaking dialogues at national levels.

5) Fostering regional collaboration and capacity building

The CCAHD provides a forum for exchange of tools, resources, information and inspiration. A well-resourced Secretariat is needed to support the flow of communication through email, the CCAHD trilingual website, social media platforms, webinars and face-to-face meetings. The CCAHD also invests in multiple forms of capacity building for range country cetacean scientists, including the development of freely accessible research protocols and support in obtaining funding and university places for advanced academic degrees.

The Consortium is young, but every year it gathers strength and momentum, especially as the number of range country partners and awareness of this Critically Endangered dolphin increases.

Follow our website and social media channels to stay tuned and see what happens next !

OUR ONLINE COURSES: MOOCS, TUTORIALS AND ESSENTIALS

Our 8 MOOCs, 4 Essentials and 5 Tutorials are always open and available!

MOOC Conservation is the platform that hosts IUCN-Papaco's online training courses, developed in partnership with the Senghor University, in Alexandria (Egypt).

See you on:

www.mooc-conservation.org

THE MOOCS
THEME-BASED TRAINING

MOOC PA management
Goal: understand the essence and goals of PAs. Students will be able to grasp the importance of PAs, their role and the different management aspects.

MOOC Ecological monitoring
Goal: understand the different techniques used in protected areas to assess the impact of managment by monitoring the ecosystem...

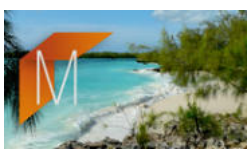
MOOC Law enforcement
Goal: understand the different legal contexts, their strengths and weaknesses as well as the techniques used to enforce rules in parks...

MOOC Species conservation
Goal: understand the techniques developed to conserve species in PAs, in situ and ex situ...

MOOC Valorisation of resources
Goal: how the valorisation of different protected area resources can take place, and understanding protected area valorisation through tourism...

MOOC New technologies
Goal: new technologies applied to conservation, existing techniques, prerequisites for their implementation, their opportunities and limitations...

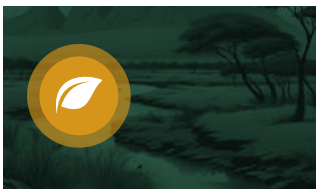
MOOC Governance
Goal: to understand what PA governance is, how to assess it and how to improve it...



MOOC Marine protected areas
Goal: understanding the design and creation of MPAs, governance, ecological monitoring, but also surrounding economic activities...

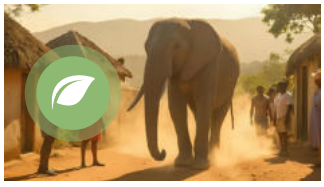
TUTORIALS
TECHNICAL TRAINING

TUTO EDUCATION
For teachers, educators, parents, etc., to provide them with the tools and methods they need to teach the children in their care about nature conservation...



TUTO WORDS
An interactive glossary with 100 essential words and expressions you need to know if you want to conserve nature and understand PA management...

TUTO PLANNING
A step-by-step guide to organising the preparation, implementation and evaluation of your protected area management plan...



TUTO H/W CONFLICTS
A simple method for understanding, anticipating and responding to conflicts between humans and wildlife...

TUTO RESTORATION
A practical guide explaining the different steps to follow to prepare, restore and assess a damaged protected area...

MOOC CONSERVATION IS SUPPORTED BY THE **FONDS FRANÇAIS POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT MONDIAL**

NEW MOOC: COMMUNITIES AND CONSERVATION

Launch date: 19 January 2026

The Communities and Conservation MOOC explains who the communities are, how their knowledge and livelihoods influence conservation, and how to engage them in protected area management.

Registrations are open, click here.

3 COURSES TO UNDERSTAND GOVERNANCE

Two other MOOCs on this topic have been released in recent weeks:

- The Governance MOOC, which forms the foundation of this series. It helps learners understand the basics of governance, the tools associated with it, as well as aspects related to monitoring… in short, everything that contributes to good governance.

- The Human Rights for Rangers MOOC, a partner course developed by the École de Faune de Garoua, the Integrated Polytechnic Regional College of Kitabi, and Amani Protection Lab. It explores a specific angle of governance and helps rangers promote solutions that support both environmental conservation and human dignity, while also recognizing and protecting their own rights.

ONLINE CERTIFICATE IN PA CONSERVATION

Since June 2025, graduates of the Online Certificate in Conservation of PAs from French-speaking Africa and Haiti can apply for a field internship to put into practice the knowledge acquired in the MOOCs.

>> How to obtain the Online certificate? Click here. <<

YOUTH CONSERVATION - HAPPY NEW YEAR!

FOR A GREEN AND COMMITTED 2026!

At the start of this year, one certainty unites us: sustainable commitment grows through action and direct connection with nature. **Educating by and for nature means learning outdoors, experimenting, observing, understanding—and finding meaning.**

Everywhere, on the ground, young people are taking action. They do, they learn, they grow. Through even simple initiatives, they become true agents of change, capable of carrying these values to their friends, families, communities—and far beyond.

We sincerely thank all those who work daily for environmental education. Educators, teachers, facilitators, volunteers: **your dedication opens living spaces for learning and hope.**

In 2026, with the resources and convictions at our disposal, let us choose engagement. Every step counts. Every action nurtures a generation that is curious, aware, and deeply connected to the living world.

Wishing you all a 2026 that is green, committed, and decisively action-oriented.

YOUTH CONSERVATION - VOICES FROM THE FIELD

🌱 LEARNING THROUGH THE EARTH: WHEN COMPOST BECOMES A LIVING CLASSROOM, BY OUR VOLUNTEER TUTOR IN BURKINA FASO, KABRÉ MOUSSA

On December 13th, in Gampela, Burkina Faso, a remarkable initiative took root at the La Grâce primary school. **Thanks to the dedication of one of our volunteer tutors, 40 students were trained in composting to enrich their school garden.**

Beyond the technical task, it was a true life lesson that unfolded that day. Learning to transform organic waste into a resource, understanding that “nothing is lost,” and discovering that the soil needs care, respect, and attention—these were powerful messages delivered through hands-on experience.

In this school garden, compost becomes much more than a natural fertilizer. It is a teaching tool, an open-air classroom where children learn patience, responsibility, and the intelligence of the living world. They cultivate vegetables, yes—but most importantly, they cultivate awareness and understanding.

This initiative perfectly illustrates our vision of environmental education: **educating by and for nature, giving children the tools to act, understand, and envision the future.**
Educating a child today is preparing a responsible adult for tomorrow—a grounded citizen, capable of producing without destroying.
Because the future, like the soil, must be cultivated now, we warmly acknowledge and thank our volunteer tutors, who, on the ground, turn every concrete action into a seed of hope.

YOUTH CONSERVATION - VOICE FROM THE FIELD

🌿 EDUCATE, RESTORE, CONNECT: ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN SERVICE OF RESILIENCE IN GATUMBA, BY OUR VOLUNTEER TUTOR IN THE DRC, SYLVAIN MOISE BUMBA

In Gatumba, Burundi, an initiative led by one of our volunteer tutors as part of the EcoPeaceProjet recently provided children with **a vital space for expression, learning, and recovery following the recent flooding crisis.**
In this context of urgency and vulnerability, **workshops in poetry, drawing, and personal commitments for the future were organized**. These moments allowed children to put words and images to their emotions, regain confidence, and imagine positive solutions for their community together.

Beyond the activities themselves, a collective dynamic emerged. By involving parents, young volunteers, and local actors, the initiative helped strengthen children's resilience, rebuild social bonds, and promote solidarity within a community that had been severely affected.
This testimony highlights another essential aspect of environmental education: **a holistic approach that connects care for ecosystems, human well-being, and the cultivation of a culture of peace.** In Gatumba, learning, expressing, and acting together becomes a powerful lever for rebuilding, fostering hope, and moving forward.

We warmly commend the dedication of our volunteer tutors, who, through sensitive and deeply human actions, demonstrate that environmental education is also a path to resilience and social cohesion.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND NATURE CONSERVATION

DISCOVER OUR NEW MOOC ON WWW.MOOC-CONSERVATION.ORG

INTRODUCTION

This MOOC addresses the topic of community-centered conservation: understanding who communities are, how their knowledge and livelihoods influence conservation, how to encourage pro-conservation behaviors, how to engage them in protected area management, and how to assess their contribution.
It provides a clear learning framework for working with communities in support of conservation.

PLAN OF THE COURSE

This course is composed of six modules.

Module 1: What link between communities and protected areas? Explore the origins of conservation, its evolution toward more inclusive models, and the concept of living landscapes.

Module 2: What are communities? Understand diversity and change within communities, Indigenous and local knowledge, relationships and power dynamics, community well-being, and equity in conservation.

Module 3: How to influence community conservation behaviour? Understand human behaviour and how to positively influence it to support better biodiversity conservation.

Module 4: How do protected areas influence local livelihoods? Explore the economic and cultural interconnections between communities and natural resources, and learn how to support livelihoods through various approaches and incentives.

Module 5: How to engage communities in protected area management? Understand the principles and practices of community engagement and participation.

Module 6: How to assess the role of communities in protected areas? Explore different participatory tools, the MEET, Elinor Ostrom's framework, and tools developed by IIED.

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Summary of Module 1: Connections between communities and protected areas

This module explains how historical and modern conservation practices shape relationships between people and protected areas. It traces the shift from exclusionary models to more community-centered approaches and introduces concepts that view people and nature as interconnected.

1. Historical development of conservation

- Pre-colonial era: Indigenous communities practiced sustainable, culturally rooted resource management (e.g., sacred groves, rotational grazing).
- Colonial era: "Fortress conservation" emerged, removing communities from their lands to create protected areas and criminalizing traditional use. Conservation often served elite interests.
- Post-independence: Many exclusionary practices continued, but by the 1980s reforms began, introducing community-based programs such as CAMPFIRE (Zimbabwe) and conservancies (Namibia, Kenya), with uneven results.

Some challenges persist: Power imbalances, donor-driven priorities, and top-down control still limit genuine community involvement. Security-heavy approaches can create human rights risks.

Today's movement: There is increasing focus on equity, rights, Indigenous governance, and addressing historical injustices.

2. Shifts toward more inclusive conservation

- Protected area categories: IUCN defines six categories, ranging from strict protection (Ia) to sustainable use (VI), with varying degrees of community involvement.
- OECMs: These recognize areas conserved by Indigenous or local communities outside formal protected areas, highlighting long-term customary stewardship.
- Governance types: Protected areas can be government-managed, co-managed, privately managed, or governed by Indigenous and local communities (ICCAs).
- Community roles: When effectively empowered, communities contribute to planning, monitoring, enforcement, tourism, and adaptive management—but many still face marginalization.

3. Living landscapes

Conservation is increasingly understood as something done with people rather than against or apart from them.

- Living landscapes: Areas where human activities and ecosystems support each other.
- Social-ecological systems: Frameworks showing how people and nature co-evolve.
- Human–environment systems: Emphasize continual exchange between people and the environment.

All highlight that humans are integral to ecosystems.

Conclusion of the first module

To achieve fair and effective conservation, past injustices must be acknowledged and community rights prioritized. Inclusive, rights-based approaches and the concept of living landscapes offer pathways where biodiversity protection and human well-being reinforce one another.

Summary of Module 2: What are communities?

This module explains that communities living in and around protected areas are diverse, dynamic, and shaped by complex social, cultural, and ecological factors.

Understanding this complexity is essential for designing equitable and effective conservation.

1. Community diversity

Communities are not homogeneous. They include people with different identities, livelihoods, interests, and levels of influence. They also change over time due to migration, policy shifts, economic factors, and environmental change. Recognizing this diversity prevents oversimplification in conservation planning.

2. Community change

Communities evolve in response to internal dynamics—such as generational shifts or livelihood changes—and external forces like markets, climate impacts, or conservation rules. Conservation must account for this dynamism rather than assume communities are static.

3. Indigenous and local knowledge

Indigenous peoples and local communities hold rich, evolving ecological knowledge developed through long-term interaction with nature. Valuing this knowledge enhances conservation by grounding decisions in local understanding and strengthening culturally rooted stewardship.

4. Community relations and power

Power within communities is uneven. Gender, age, status, wealth, and political roles influence who participates in conservation and who benefits. Without attention to internal power dynamics, conservation efforts may reinforce inequality or trigger conflict.

5. Community wellbeing

Wellbeing includes economic security, health, cultural identity, safety, and access to natural resources. Conservation can support wellbeing (e.g., jobs, ecosystem health) or harm it (e.g., restricted access, displacement). Understanding these effects is key to designing supportive conservation strategies.

6. Equity in conservation

Equity has three essential dimensions:

- **Recognition equity**: respecting identities, rights, and knowledge.
- **Procedural equity**: ensuring meaningful participation in decisions.
- **Distributive equity**: sharing costs and benefits fairly.

Equity builds trust, legitimacy, and long-term support for conservation.

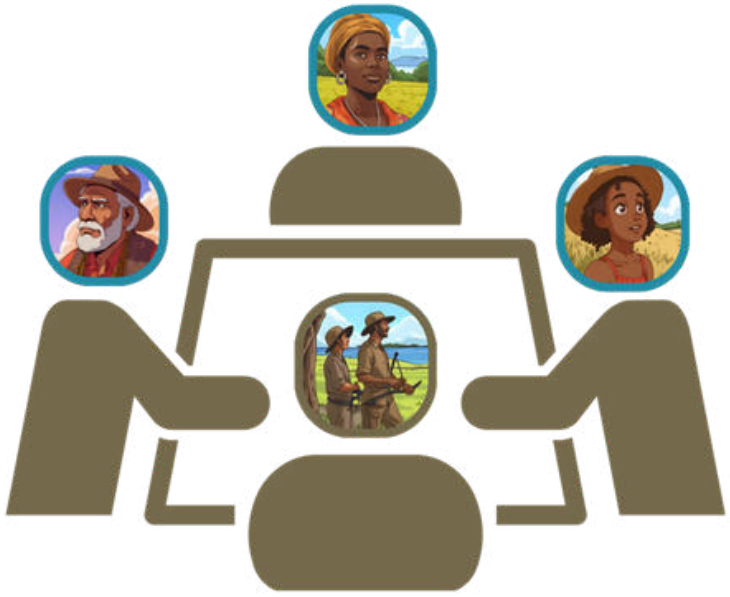
Conclusion of the second module

Communities are complex, adaptive, and deeply connected to nature. Effective conservation requires recognizing this complexity, valuing diverse knowledge systems, addressing power dynamics, and prioritizing wellbeing and equity. This social understanding lays the foundation for inclusive, sustainable partnerships with communities throughout the course.

Want to know more?

Join our MOOC on Communities on **www.mooc-conservation.org**

Registrations are open!



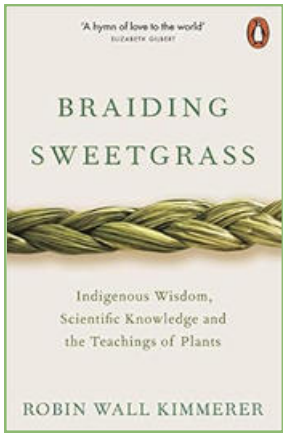
QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Local communities must be at the heart of any initiative to protect the environment."
Wangari Maathai, ecologist and Kenyan activist, Nobel Peace Prize

READING OF THE MONTH

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS: INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS

BY ROBIN WALL KIMMERER



At the intersection of scientific ecology, Indigenous knowledge, and personal narrative, Robin Wall Kimmerer offers **a profound reflection on our relationship with the living world**. She advocates for a vision of conservation grounded in reciprocity, care, knowledge transmission, and community connection.

The book strongly reminds us that **protecting nature cannot be achieved without acknowledging local knowledge, cultures, and the deep, meaningful relationships communities maintain with their territories.** An inspiring read that encourages us to rethink conservation not as a constraint, but as a living, shared relationship.

IN THE NEWS

$24.4 MILLION TO PROTECT COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS

The world's largest climate-focused philanthropic foundation, the Bezos Earth Fund, announced in early December **a $24.5 million grant to protect coastal ecosystems in Central and South America.** This initiative aims to create the world's first cross-border marine biosphere reserve, covering key marine areas in Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, and Ecuador.

These funds will **support local communities and organizations engaged in the protection of critical marine areas, including breeding grounds for hammerhead sharks, turtles, and other marine species.** The largest grant will go to the organization Rewild to strengthen coastal reserves and nursery zones.

This initiative is part of the **global "30×30" goal, which aims to protect 30% of the world's land and oceans by 2030.** Within this framework, the Bezos Earth Fund plans to invest $1 billion, as part of a coalition of philanthropies mobilizing a total of $5 billion.

In just two years, the four countries involved have already tripled the area of their protected seas, covering more than 600,000 km^2. The current ambition is to unify these areas into a single transboundary marine biosphere reserve, highlighting the importance of cross-border cooperation in protecting marine ecosystems crucial for species migration.

Additional funding is planned from 2026 onward, particularly to support the implementation of global biodiversity goals in the Pacific region.

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