NEWS FROM AFRICAN PROTECTED AREAS

NAPA 207

CONSERVING NATURE IN AFRICA

THIS MONTH IN THE NAPA

EDITO

Bats: invisible, indispensable... and finally revealed through citizen science.

By Dimitri KOTO, Executive Director of the NGO Groupe d'Action pour le Développement à la Base and specialist in wildlife ecosystem conservation

For a long time, the conservation of protected areas has been built around emblematic species. Yet ecosystem resilience also depends on discreet, often overlooked species… such as bats.
In northern Benin, in Parakou, a recent study on bat conservation highlights a key reality: protecting these species means safeguarding the invisible processes that keep our ecosystems alive.

Essential allies… yet invisible
As key agents of seed dispersal and pollination, bats play a direct role in the regeneration of tropical forests. Without them, certain ecological balances would quietly collapse.
And yet, they remain largely ignored, sometimes feared, and rarely considered a priority in conservation strategies.

Growing threats, beyond protected areas
Urbanization, habitat fragmentation, and the loss of roosting sites are increasing pressures, even in urban environments.
This points to an increasingly clear reality: conservation can no longer be confined to protected areas. It must also be embedded in human-dominated landscapes, where a growing share of ecological dynamics now unfolds.

Citizen science: a powerful lever to shift perspectives
One of the most promising insights from the study conducted in Parakou lies in the involvement of local communities.
Through their knowledge, practices, and close relationship with these species, communities become essential contributors to both understanding and protecting biodiversity.
Observing, documenting, sharing: citizen science helps fill scientific gaps while also transforming perceptions.

By giving citizens an active role, it brings overlooked species into the spotlight and supports their integration into conservation policies.

Rethinking conservation, together
Protecting bats means protecting far more than a single species: it means preserving the capacity of ecosystems to regenerate.
But it also means rethinking our approaches:

- broadening our focus beyond emblematic species,
- integrating biodiversity into everyday landscapes,
- and above all, making citizen science a cornerstone of conservation strategies.

Because those who live closest to nature are often its most attentive observers… and its first guardians.

Bats are not just discreet inhabitants of our landscapes.
They are their nocturnal gardeners and, thanks to citizen science, perhaps soon better recognized and protected.

Poached bats

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Learn more about the online certificate here
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OTHER MOOCS AVAILABLE ON MOOC-CONSERVATION.ORG


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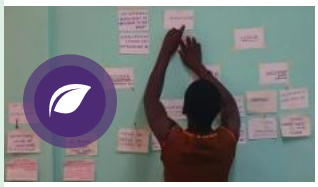
An interactive glossary with 100 essential words and expressions you need to know if you want to conserve nature and understand PA management...



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

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT
A simple method for understanding, anticipating and responding to conflicts between humans and wildlife...

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

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How to sustain your protected area and develop a powerful business plan...

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

ON MOOC-CONSERVATION, THIS MONTH:
HOW TO USE MOOC-CONSERVATION.ORG: EXAM ATTEMPTS AND DISCUSSION BOARDS

EXAM ATTEMPTS

To pass a MOOC (thematic courses - see the list on the previous page), you must achieve an average mark of at least 75%. Each MOOC has two exam papers: the first relates to 'cohort A' and the second to 'cohort B'. By default, cohort A is selected.

If you have taken all the exams but have not achieved the required average, go to the main page of the relevant MOOC, where you will see that the "Change Cohort" button is enabled. By clicking on it, you will switch to Cohort B and thus have a second chance to pass the MOOC.

Please note that once you have completed the second set of exams, you will have exhausted all your chances of obtaining the certificate of completion. Get ready before you start!

DISCUSSION BOARDS

The courses on mooc-conservation.org have several thousand enrolled students. **Discussion forums** are important sources of information, but also often overlooked drivers of discussion. The **forums for the MOOCs on Governance, Communities and Conservation and One Health** are particularly active, and taking part in the discussions is well worth a look.

Please feel free to read everyone's contributions, and above all, to reply to them to offer guidance, provide further insight, or simply add your own valuable input.

Next month: a new tutorial on the restoration of mangroves

ONLINE CERTIFICATE IN PA CONSERVATION

Since June 2025, graduates of the Online Certificate in Conservation of PAs from West and Central Africa and Haiti can apply for a field internship to put into practice the knowledge acquired in the MOOCs.
Get ready and pass the exam!

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

2026
MOOC CONSERVATION CALENDAR

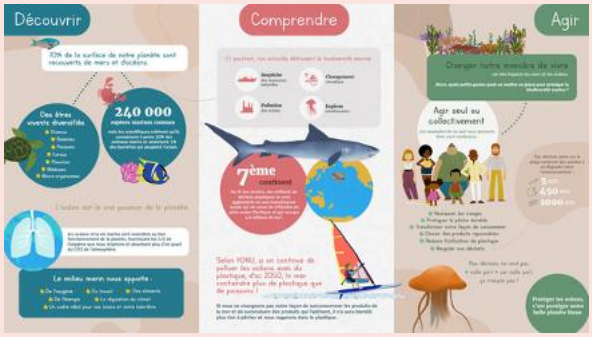
17 June: Online certificate exam for English speakers
>> Click here to learn more

YOUTH CONSERVATION

DEDICATED RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO RAISE AWARENESS AND INSPIRE THEM TO TAKE ACTION!

On the Youth Conservation environmental education platform, you will find dedicated resources tailored to children and young people, available in a variety of formats to suit different needs. Everything is 100% free and open access, and the content is offered in several languages, including national and regional languages. Please feel free to share widely to help educate, raise awareness, and inspire younger generations to take action!

Tailored video learning pathways



Clear, illustrated posters

Audio content available on Spotify and YouTube

YOUTH CONSERVATION - VOICES FROM THE FIELD

EMPOWERING AN ENGAGED GENERATION: THE NGO EEDDG-GUINÉE LAUNCHES THE ECO-LEADERS PROGRAM

In the face of accelerating environmental and climate crises, local initiatives led by civil society play a crucial role in preparing for the future. In Guinea, the NGO Éducation en Environnement et Développement Durable-Guinée (EEDDG) is fully part of this momentum with the **launch of an ambitious new program: Eco-Leaders.**

🌱 **A concrete response to today's challenges**

Climate change, ecosystem degradation, lack of civic engagement… the challenges are numerous and particularly visible on the ground. For EEDDG, it has become essential to act at the root: to train and support a new generation of engaged young people, capable of understanding these issues and responding to them in practical ways.

It is in this spirit that the Eco-Leaders program was created—designed as a lever for both individual and collective transformation.

🎯 **Train, equip, empower**

At the heart of the program lies a clear ambition: to give young people the tools to become true agents of change.

Over the course of two months, a first cohort of at least 25 young volunteers takes part in an intensive, fully funded program structured around several key areas:

- environmental education, to understand the issues and their local impacts
- leadership, to build the ability to mobilize and unite others
- communication, to raise awareness effectively
- community engagement, to take action close to realities on the ground

The goal is not only to transfer knowledge, but to nurture leaders who are ready to take action.

👥 **Youth at the heart of change**

The program is open to a wide audience: school pupils, students, recent graduates, community leaders, and associations. All share a common drive—to get involved and take action for their environment.

Beyond training, Eco-Leaders aims to support these young people in implementing concrete initiatives within their communities. Awareness campaigns, local projects, collective actions… each participant is encouraged to become an active driver of change.

🚀 **Long-term perspectives**

The ambition of the program goes far beyond these initial training sessions.

Through Eco-Leaders, the NGO Éducation en Environnement et Développement Durable-Guinée (EEDDG) seeks to help build a strong network of engaged young people capable of:

- leading high-impact social and environmental initiatives
- positively influencing local dynamics
- promoting sustainable solutions tailored to Guinean realities
- contributing, at their own level, to the ecological transition

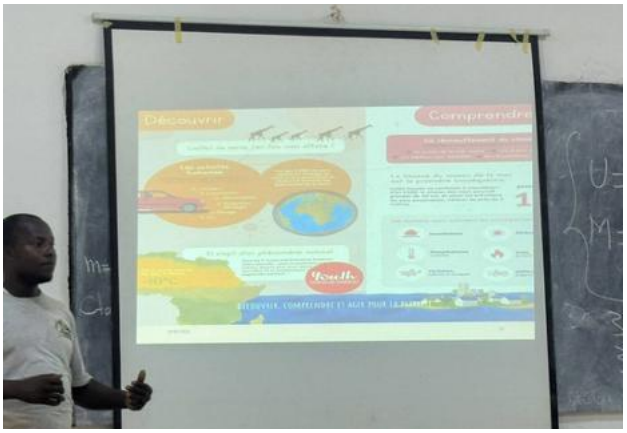
By investing in youth, the organization is betting on lasting change driven from within communities.

✨ **Educating today to transform tomorrow**

EEDDG's experience in Guinea reflects a strong conviction: environmental education is a powerful driver of transformation.

By empowering young people to take action, the Eco-Leaders program helps build a more aware, more engaged society—better prepared to face the challenges ahead.

An inspiring initiative, reminding us that solutions also, and above all, lie in the hands of those who will shape the world of tomorrow.



CITIZEN SCIENCE

IUCN EXPLAINER BRIEF - JANUARY 2026

This NAPA presents a brief produced by IUCN on **citizen science**.

Citizen science, also called **community science**, is a common term for a wide range of participatory practices involving scientific data collection and analysis.

Citizen science is important for science, research and policy, and has multiple benefits for society and for participants themselves by **expanding knowledge, increasing awareness** and **fostering stewardship**.

While some scientists remain cautious about the quality of citizen science data, **acceptance** within the broader scientific community is steadily growing.

Measures to strengthen the role and impact of citizen science include **enhancing policy and funding support**, continued training of educators and leveraging existing data collection technologies.

What is it?

Citizen science is the practice of **public participation in scientific research** with the aim of increasing scientific knowledge and contributing to data collection.

The practice of citizen science is a key tool in nature conservation and is present across a wide range of disciplines – from the natural and social sciences to the humanities. Within each, its interpretation and application may vary.

Citizen science can take many forms, including:

- co-developing **research questions**;
- designing and conducting **experiments**;
- collecting and analysing **data**;
- interpreting **results**;
- developing tools and **applications**;
- helping solve **complex problems**; and
- communicating results.

In many cases, citizen science operates through **crowdsourcing**, where organisations issue open calls for contributions from a broad network of participants to support distributed research and problem-solving. Depending on the objectives and nature of the project, **volunteers can be involved**.

Modern advances in technology, such as mobile phones, digital cameras, artificial intelligence and chatbots make citizen science more accessible today than ever before. Citizen science apps **can turn smartphones into research tools**, letting users contribute data for science projects by recording observations. Popular examples include iNaturalist for identifying plants, animals and fungi, eBird for recording bird observations and iSPEX for measuring air and water quality.

The success of any citizen science project depends on the establishment of a well-devised monitoring programme and the **dedication of its participants**.

What are the benefits?

Citizen science helps engage citizens in science and inform responses to environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Data generated by citizen science can be invaluable to professional researchers, allowing them to survey larger areas and cover longer timeframes than they could achieve on their own.

With support from a network of volunteers, scientists and conservationists can document broader ecological patterns and long-term trends, such as changes in wildlife populations, to better inform biodiversity management and policy.

Likewise, data generated through citizen science can help support education initiatives. By enhancing collaboration between the scientific community, the general public and local communities, citizen science fosters public understanding of science and improves science literacy. An example is the #NatureForAll initiative, an IUCN-led coalition of more than 600 partners that is inspiring people to connect with, learn about and experience nature. In countries such as India, Belgium and Nepal, local organisations have launched effective programmes that empower youth, engage communities and promote conservation, such as the Himalayan Pollinator Patrol, led by the Nature Conservation and Study Centre.

Importantly, **citizen science democratises access to data** when results are freely available, but it is more than just data collection. It fosters connection, care and collective action, leveraging the diverse knowledge and traditional uses of biodiversity by Indigenous Peoples, local communities, rangers and civil society. Rooted in community and culture, **it turns curiosity into stewardship**. Initiatives like 'bioblitzes' – intense surveying events conducted by groups of scientists, naturalists and volunteers – help bring people together to learn about biodiversity, share knowledge and build lasting relationships with nature and each other.

What are the challenges?

Some scientists remain cautious about citizen science, particularly with respect to **data quality**. Despite these concerns, studies have shown that data collected by trained volunteers can be as useful and credible as that collected by scientists.

Citizen science often also lacks formal government and institutional recognition due to concerns about data standards, institutional norms and limited awareness of its policy value. Yet, the practice is gaining recognition across the broader scientific community and represents an emerging area of engagement for IUCN. A recent study looking into citizen science contributions to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ found that the best input came from projects led by recognised experts who championed and validated citizen science data, conferring greater confidence in its accuracy.

The adoption of a resolution on citizen science at the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress marks a significant milestone – the first time the topic is formally recognised within IUCN.

What's next?

Initiatives are underway and need continued support to grow the role and impact of citizen science.

These include:

Enhancing **citizen science frameworks** and partnerships, such as the European Citizen Science Association and the IUCN Task Force on Citizen Science.

Continued **training of educators** on citizen science approaches.

Enhancing **policy and funding support**, such as the European Horizon programme.

Leveraging existing and identifying **new technologies** to enhance data collection, strengthen **citizen engagement** and demonstrate the value and impact of citizen science.

Supporting **global advocacy** through initiatives like the Citizen Science Global Partnership and the 2025 Charter for Citizen Science.

Collecting and sharing **case studies** of impactful applications of citizen science.

More info: find the brief here

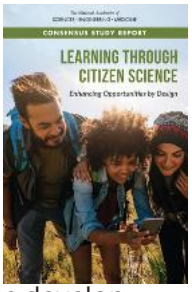
QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Citizen science has become an essential tool for monitoring biodiversity at scales that would otherwise be impossible to achieve."

IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services)

READING OF THE MONTH

LEARNING THROUGH CITIZEN SCIENCE: ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES BY DESIGN



What if learning also happened through action?
That's exactly the idea explored in Learning Through Citizen Science, coordinated by Kate Haywood and Darlene Cavalier.
This report highlights a simple yet powerful insight: citizen science is a remarkable driver of learning… and engagement.

Key takeaways:

Learning differently: by taking part in real scientific projects (biodiversity monitoring, air quality, etc.), citizens develop practical skills that go far beyond theory.
Reconnecting with nature: observing, measuring, understanding… all of these actions help strengthen our connection to the living world and encourage more responsible behaviors.
Empowering engaged citizens: citizen science is not just about collecting data. It fosters critical thinking, a deeper understanding of environmental challenges, and the ability to take action.
A powerful educational tool: schools, NGOs, communities… everyone can use it to make learning more concrete, participatory, and inspiring.

In a nutshell:

Citizen science turns each of us into an agent of change—able to understand the world… and help protect it.
A particularly inspiring read for anyone working in education, conservation, or civic engagement! Summary available HERE.

IN THE NEWS

LOOKING BACK AT THE LATEST ONE HEALTH SUMMIT – APRIL 5-7, 2026 – LYON, FRANCE

🌍 One Health: global recognition, action still to come

In early April 2026, the city of Lyon hosted the One Health Summit, marking an important milestone in the international recognition of the "One Health" approach.
There is now broad consensus: **human, animal, plant, and ecosystem health are deeply interconnected.** Long driven by the scientific community, this vision is now emerging as a true policy framework for public action.
The summit also confirmed several key priorities: **infectious and zoonotic diseases, antimicrobial resistance, sustainable food systems, and the fight against pollution**. These are all interconnected challenges that require integrated responses.
Another key takeaway was the strengthened link between **health, biodiversity, and climate**. Deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate change are directly contributing to the emergence and spread of new health risks.
While the willingness to act is clearly present, a major challenge remains: turning commitments into concrete action. Despite numerous announcements, **a comprehensive and structured global roadmap is still lacking.**
Finally, the summit highlighted both the **need for stronger international cooperation**—particularly in data sharing and surveillance—and ongoing tensions, notably around agricultural models and funding priorities.

The Lyon One Health Summit reflects a global momentum that is still taking shape. The next step is to translate it into concrete, coordinated, and lasting action.

Join our MOOC One Health on www.mooc-conservation.org

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To contribute to a NAPA (article or publication on protected areas, cover photo, job offer, etc.), contact us at moocs@papaco.org.