

The background of the image is a dark, monochromatic photograph of a tropical forest. It features several tall palm trees with large fronds, and a dense undergrowth of various ferns and other tropical plants. The lighting is soft, creating a sense of depth and texture in the foliage.

2024 | **COMON** Foundation



WIJNAND PON AND JOHN LOUDON IN MALAWI

It is inspiring to see how traditional nature conservation organisations are evolving.

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2024

For COMON, 2024 was an extraordinarily **successful year**. We were **proud to see how our key partners** made significant steps in **their ambitious plans** for large-scale landscape restoration and nature conservation. It is **inspiring to see how traditional nature conservation organisations are evolving** and turning their focus on the **people living in the buffer zones** of protected areas.

For the restoration of degraded landscapes and nature conservation, it is crucial for organisations to better understand the dynamics in these areas and the needs and behaviours of the communities living there. This requires innovative thinking, new expertise and a genuine willingness to work with humanitarian organisations.

Collaborations

A great example of this is the collaboration between Peace Parks Foundation and The Hunger Project in Banhine and Zinave (Mozambique) and Simalaha (Zambia). Together, these organisations support local communities in improving their livelihoods, such as by increasing their resilience to climate change, ensuring access to



WIJNAND PON VISITING A ONE ACRE FUND FARMER IN RWANDA

education for their children and creating markets for their agricultural produce.

The collaboration between Peace Parks Foundation, the World Wide Fund for Nature and Commonland is also promising. Their joint programme for the Kavango-Zambezi cross-border region, which covers the five countries around the Victoria Falls,

has a duration of no less than 20 years. The aim is to collectively raise €100 million. This project also puts people first: listening to them and identifying their needs creates commitment and ownership, which is crucial for long-term success.

This forms the basis on which landscape restoration and nature conservation can flourish.

Management changes

Management changes took place at two of our core partners this year. At Commonland, Gabrielle Taus, from NIVOS, has taken over from Willem Ferwerda, who is now in an advisory role as Founder of Commonland. At Wetlands International, Han de Groot will hand over the baton to Coenraad Krijger, from IUCN Netherlands, in early 2025. Both new directors face challenging assignments in a world full of geopolitical tensions.

COMON visits

We also visited One Acre Fund in Rwanda for the third time in five years. Their tree planting programme is ahead of schedule and the impact is impressive. No other organisation in the world maintains contact with four million farmers every fortnight to support them in more efficient farming and recognise trees as an important crop. By 2030, there are expected to be one

We continue to believe in the power of organisations and people who bring positive change to hundreds of landscapes worldwide every day.

billion trees standing in Rwanda and surrounding countries, including Nigeria.

In Malawi, we visited the Nyika Plateau and the Vwaza Marsh Reserve, where the first official co-management programme between the Malawi government and the Peace Parks Foundation was launched. Together with local organisations, Peace

ON SEPTEMBER 13TH 2024, MANAGEMENT AND KEY PARTNERS GATHERED TOGETHER AT NATURALIS, LEIDEN



WILDEBEESTS AND ZEBRAS, BY WIJNAND PON

Parks Foundation ensures that 40,000 residents near these parks have access to clean drinking water, less than 200 metres from their homes.

In the Galapagos Islands, we laid the foundation stone for a new building that will house the Galapagos collections. Despite the sad loss of Phil van Haarlem, the Charles Darwin Foundation's finance director, the organisation remains resilient. The Galapagos itself faces major challenges, including invasive species, tourist pressure, a growing local population, sustainability issues and political instability. Nevertheless, the islands remain a source of inspiration and maintain their status as number one on the World Heritage List.

Fund for landscape restoration

Finally, in 2024, COMON launched a major initiative to bring together donors into a fund for large-scale landscape restoration. Together with Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA), we investigated the need for such a fund. During a meeting in Zurich, there appeared to be great interest. This fund aligns with the wish of donors to contribute to joint initiatives that achieve real impact on the ground. The initiative will be followed up in 2025.

We close 2024 with pride and hope. This year we invested more than €21 million in transformative programs, reinforcing our commitment to landscape restoration and nature conservation. Despite the world's challenges, we continue to believe in the power of organisations and people who bring positive change to hundreds of landscapes worldwide every day.

We close 2024 with pride and hope.

We are working with determination towards a future in which large-scale landscape restoration and nature conservation are the norm, so that future generations can grow up in a liveable world.

Our thanks go to everyone who has contributed in 2024 to making COMON's mission and vision again one step closer to reality.

Wijnand Pon
John Loudon



Key partner



Commonland From start-up to scale-up

Over a year ago, Gabrielle Taus became Commonland's new managing director. She took over from founder Willem Ferwerda, who now focuses primarily on outreach, external relations and fundraising. With a fresh perspective, Taus reflects on her first year, Commonland's challenges, successes achieved and her strategy for the coming years.



Gabrielle Taus
COMMONLAND'S NEW MANAGING DIRECTOR

Gabrielle Taus began her career at Commonland with great enthusiasm. As an experienced director at NIVOZ Foundation, where she also succeeded the founder and thus knows this fragile situation well, she was used to leading an organisation from a holistic perspective. The transition at Commonland went smoothly thanks to the good collaboration with founder Willem Ferwerda, who supports her in this new role, she says. "A good transition is essential for the progress of the organisation and also to strengthen my position as a leader. Willem is good at letting go, which is very admirable when you have set up an organisation with such heart and soul."



MAIKEL LARA'S FARM IN THE ALTIPLANO ESTEPARIO IN SPAIN, BY GABRIELA HENGEVELD

From start-up to scale-up

According to Taus, Commonland is in the process of transitioning from a *start-up* to a more mature organisation, a *scale-up*.

"In the start-up phase, you try many things, but as you grow, it becomes important to focus," she explains. "Our mission now is to leverage lessons from the last decade, across the different landscapes where Commonland operates, to scale-up." She focuses on developing so-called *landscape leadership programmes* that

teach people and organisations how to develop the 4 Returns Framework (return on inspiration, social capital, nature and investment). "Until recently, we worked one-on-one with people in the different landscapes. If you want to keep working that way, you have to grow tremendously yourself. That is not our ambition. With these landscape leadership programmes, we are accelerating. In areas where it is needed, for example towards politics and business, the different landscapes pull together and have a much louder voice."



PRATIMA AND HER FLOURISHING KITCHEN GARDEN IN INDIA

Internal changes

An important step here for Commonland itself is the integration of different activities and teams to achieve greater effectiveness. “The Dream Fund, which provides scope to scale up with funding over 10 years, plays a crucial role in this. But in doing so, we also had to involve other funding. I am proud that in the past year, we managed to tie up some very nice new funds for the longer term. Funds that, like COMON, are much more focused on *process funding* than *project funding*. They have confidence in our mission and our approach.” According

to Taus, having several major donors is essential. “For a long time, COMON was the only major donor; we owe our existence to them. But as an organisation, it does make you vulnerable if you depend too much on one party.”

Multiple highlights

Commonland experienced more highlights last year. “We reviewed Commonland’s strategy, which led to a clear focus and some changes in the organisational structure. That clarity and energy can be felt in the organisation,” she says.

With landscape leadership programmes we are accelerating.

Another highlight was Commonland’s 10th anniversary, which was celebrated in a major way in April. “That provided an opportunity to look back on successes and challenges together with global partners. This celebration was not only a moment of reflection but also a day to honour the work of Willem and all key stakeholders, including, of course, Wijnand Pon.” Another important success, according to Taus, is the collaboration in the KAZA (Kavango-Zambezi) region with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Peace Parks Foundation. “It is of course great that we can collaborate with these major parties, but it is also very nice to see that we actually add value with the 4 Returns Framework,” says Taus proudly.

Maintaining course and strengthening leadership

Taus will maintain its chosen course for the coming years. An external evaluation will also take place of the five main landscapes where Commonland operates. This evaluation should help to further enhance Commonland’s impact.

And so there are more challenges. Taus: “Commonland is working on ways to find funding for the transition to regenerative agriculture and other necessary interventions around landscape restoration. Although

there is growing interest from the business community, it is difficult to engage companies in transitions that require time and money. For example, who pays for the transition when farmers switch to regenerative agriculture? Many companies want large numbers, but they are often not available yet.”

The political climate is also a challenge for long-term sustainability goals. Nevertheless, she sees opportunities to gain political support with concrete examples.

A positive future in sight

After a year of strategic realignment, collaborations and growth, Gabrielle Taus is ready for the next steps. She is determined to strengthen Commonland not only as an organisation, but also to contribute to a sustainable future on a global scale. With a clear vision, broad collaboration and a shared focus on holistic landscape restoration, she hopes to take Commonland’s work to an even higher level. “The transition takes time, but it’s worth it,” she concludes. “We want to show that things can be done differently and that in the long run everyone will benefit from the 4 Returns Framework.”



SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED INDIAN LANDSCAPE

Key partner



Charles Darwin Foundation Pioneering Conservation and Education in the Galapagos

After years of trial and error, the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF) in the Galapagos Islands is doing well. New substantial funds have been added, and the board is strong. Science Director María José Barragán Paladines looks back on 2024 with satisfaction and discusses the challenges and milestones achieved during the year.

“Since I started at CDF in 2018, we have grown on a personal level, on a technical-scientific level, and on a performance level,” says Barragán Paladines. “In the process, the scope and scale of our work have greatly improved. This allowed us to expand geographically beyond the Galapagos archipelago area by 2024. Very important because the challenges, threats, and problems also extend far



GALAPAGOS LANDSCAPE FROM ABOVE, BY RASHID CRUZ

beyond the official boundaries of the archipelago.” Barragán Paladines explains that for this reason, CDF has also adjusted its mission. “From being a pure knowledge, science, and information provider, we want to be an active organisation that takes on challenges through scientific research on a larger geographical scale.”

Sharks, rays, and deep-sea landscapes

Last year, CDF launched two major projects based on this new mission. Barragán Paladines elaborates: “First is Habla Tiburón, aimed at the conservation of sharks and rays by employing more sustainable fishing methods. Secondly, there is a research project into deep-sea landscapes in the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean that includes Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia in addition to Ecuador.”

In addition to these major projects, several new initiatives were already underway, such as research into areas of sustainability. “What is new about this is that residents are much more included and involved in what



María José Barragán Paladines
CDF'S SCIENCE DIRECTOR



PLANTING GALVEZIA LEUCANTHA IN BOLIVAR CHANNEL ON ISABELA ISLAND, BY CARLOS ESPINOZA

we can and want to do here so that they too see the need for sustainable governance of marine protected areas.”

Bureaucracy and unstable politics

CDF always faces a large number of challenges at different levels, says Barragán Paladines. “We routinely struggle with the bureaucracy surrounding the hiring of new staff, which prevents us from deploying people as quickly as we would like. Furthermore, we have to relate to Ecuador’s highly unstable politics. In the Galapagos Council and the Galapagos government,

there are many people connected to the now incumbent political current. So instability also affects our bodies and therefore projects. And then there are the usual challenges, such as shipments not getting through on time and delayed funding for projects.”

Avian flu and bird deaths

These are all challenges over which CDF can exert little influence except to vigorously lobby. Internally, the challenges mainly concern our own research. “We always have to deal with unforeseen

circumstances that require you to adapt your research,” Barragán Paladines explains. “For example, we had to deal with bird flu this year. One of our principal investigators then set up an ad hoc task force that fortunately prevented a major outbreak.”

Another example was the large number of land birds lying dead along the roads. “That had been going on for years. After being able to show that the biggest cause of these bird deaths is car traffic, we launched a more active awareness campaign aimed at motorists. It has had an immediate effect.”

The Galapagos must be the example for the rest of the world.

Debt-for-nature swap

In 2023, CDF concluded the debt-for-nature swap with the government of Ecuador, whereby part of the country’s debts were cancelled in exchange for local investments in the protection and conservation of Hermandad, a new marine park north of the Galapagos Islands. That has certainly paid off, says Barragán Paladines.

“We have been able to convert existing research into seabirds, including penguins, cormorants, and albatrosses, into long-term research. We can now closely monitor the various seabird populations for a longer period of time and investigate how climate changes affect them. A milestone, because

climate change-induced phenomena can really only be understood within a long-term perspective.”

COMON was instrumental in the creation of this debt-for-nature swap, from which CDF will receive at least a welcome \$13 million for targeted projects in the coming years.

Milestones

And there were more milestones this year, she says. “We have put the mangrove finch, a critically endangered land bird species, back on the map. There are now a much larger number of flocks and youngsters. We also discovered a place on Isabela Island where the Scalesia forest species grows, a crop we thought was extinct. In addition, we have managed to promote entrepreneurship among small fisheries. Some of these fishermen have launched and successfully marketed their innovation projects.”

High expectations

She has high expectations for the coming year. “2025 is a year of consolidation. The interdisciplinary approach we have applied in our research in recent years now enables us to conduct more applied science. There will certainly also be a crucial role for CDF in demonstrating how humans and nature can co-exist. In doing so, the Galapagos should be the example for addressing sustainable society and climate issues in the rest of the world.” But the most exciting thing, as far as she is concerned, is that CDF might announce the discovery of new species. “In recent years, we have been researching potentially new species for science, and the results are promising.”

The Science Experience Centre: A new chapter

We want to become a major destination for nature-based tourism

In alignment with its expanded mission and the milestones achieved, CDF took major steps last year to make the planned Science Experience Centre a reality. This centre will consist of two parts, namely the Life Science Laboratory and a revamped Exhibition Hall. Science Director Barragán Paladines talks enthusiastically about the progress made this year.

“The Science Experience Centre is not ready yet,” she begins. “But this year we have done an incredible amount of work. We went through an extensive process involving brainstorming sessions, workshops, and knowledge sharing between the different disciplines. The expertise of the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, USA, and Naturalis Biodiversity Centre, with their Museum Naturalis in Leiden in the Netherlands, helped us to develop a concrete and strong concept.” Barragán Paladines herself also visited Naturalis in Leiden. “I am grateful to have been lucky enough to visit Naturalis. It is a great place that has given us a lot of inspiration for what is possible in this field. That is also the basis on which we arrived at the current plans.”

More than beauty

Visitors to the Galapagos Islands now usually get a glimpse of the splendour of the Galapagos Islands. Barragán Paladines explains that with the Science Experience Centre, people are going to experience a lot more. “The aim is not only for visitors to the Galapagos Islands to see how beautiful it is there, but also to learn a lot about the islands, its special flora and fauna, and the CDF itself. Important topics are covered. These include information about how we could and should deal with nature and the climate.”

A wonderful glimpse

The Science Experience Centre will consist of two parts. “The first concerns the Fischer Complex, formed by the north and south buildings and designed by local architect Fabián Salame,” she says. “The northern building will soon house and display the natural history collections. Construction of this complex is in full swing and progressing steadily. The southern building concerns the Life Science Laboratory, a complex where scientists can stay and conduct their research. That too will be, at least largely, public for visitors, giving them a wonderful insight into what the scientists are working on and into the

progress. And so they can directly ask the scientists questions and thus feel more involved in what we are all doing, so that it becomes more alive.”

In the second part of the Science Experience Centre, the Exhibition Hall will be completely renovated: “A real experience for visitors and an exceptional local natural history museum of the highest level.”

Exhibition Hall

It is still unclear when the Exhibition Hall will be completed in its entirety. “It depends, among other things, on how fast the construction of the other buildings proceeds and on available funding. It is clear that the COMON

Foundation plays an important role in this, as in everything the Charles Darwin Foundation does. Something we are very grateful to them for.”

With the Exhibition Hall, the CDF aims to provide an attractive venue for tourists. Barragán Paladines explains: “The idea is that they walk through different spaces here and thus not only see but really experience the extraordinary nature and history of the Galapagos, and at the same time gain a lot of knowledge about the science behind it, the conservation that takes place here, and the history from the Charles Darwin Foundation. This is done through five themes: evolution, ecology, contemporary threats, solutions, and

NORTH EXTERIOR OF THE FISCHER COMPLEX, DESIGNED BY FABIÁN SALAME



opportunities. With this format, we aim to ensure that visitors to the Galapagos Islands return home well-informed. If we will soon have 200,000 visitors a year – there are almost 120,000 now – we will also realise 200,000 global ambassadors for the Galapagos every year. And that includes the 30,000 residents of the Galapagos.”

Hopeful future

She says the centre will also address contemporary challenges facing the Galapagos and the CDF. “Consider invasive species, animals or plants that do not occur naturally here, which have entered our natural environment through human activity. And think about pollution, unfortunately another big problem we are struggling with.”

The final part of the tour of the Exhibition Hall will focus on the future. “Here we show

GALAPAGOS WILDLIFE, BY CARLOS ESPINOSA

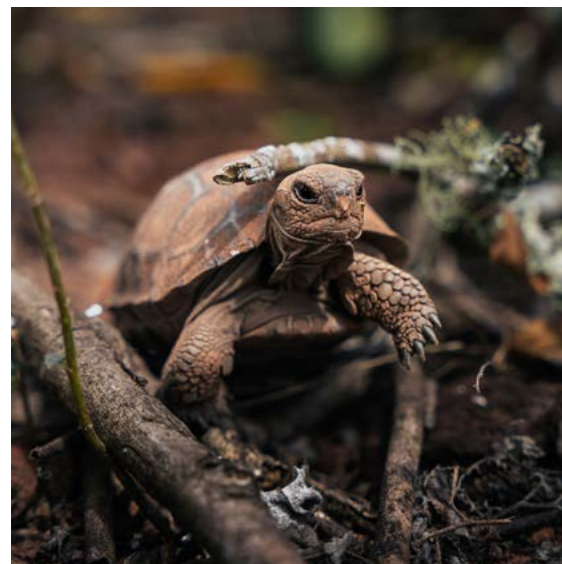


CDF is setting a global standard for sustainable coexistence between humans and nature.

how we can meet the challenges we face to achieve our conservation and sustainability goals. The exhibitions will not only provide facts and figures but also highlight the social-ecological dynamics within the Galapagos and show what we are doing to protect and restore nature. Our aim is also to offer visitors a hopeful glimpse of the future.”

A unified vision

All these efforts – the expanded mission, the new projects, the challenges addressed, and the development of the Science



GALAPAGOS LANDSCAPE FROM ABOVE, BY RASHID CRUZ

Experience Centre – are part of CDF’s unified vision for the future. As Barragán Paladines emphasizes, “We want the Galapagos to be the example for addressing sustainable society and climate issues in the rest of the world. Through science, education, and active involvement, we aim to demonstrate how humans and nature can co-exist.”

But perhaps the most exciting prospect, as far as she is concerned, is that CDF might announce the discovery of new species. “In recent years, we have been researching potentially new species for science, and the results are promising.”

With high expectations for the coming year and beyond, CDF continues to forge ahead, backed by strong partnerships

and a dedicated team. COMON’s support remains instrumental. “COMON is our main donor,” reiterates Barragán Paladines. “Their financial support, as well as the broad help and involvement, has largely contributed to putting CDF on the map as a scientific organisation and has allowed us to continue our work.”

As the Galapagos faces ongoing environmental and political challenges, the work of the CDF becomes ever more critical. Through the combination of cutting-edge research, public engagement via the Science Experience Centre, and a steadfast commitment to conservation, the CDF is not only preserving the unique biodiversity of the islands but also setting a global standard for sustainable coexistence between humans and nature.



Peace Parks Foundation

Wider perspective

NYIKA NATIONAL PARK IN MALAWI



For Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), 2024 was an exciting year, especially regarding developments in Simalaha Conservancy, says Ghislain Rieb, Senior Programme Manager at PPF. Politically, there were big challenges, but now that these have been overcome, Rieb primarily sees many positive developments.

COMON supports multiple PPF projects. Such as Banhine National Park in the heart of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park and Maputo National Park, both in Mozambique, Nyika National Park in Malawi, Herding 4 Health, aimed at nature conservation and restoration and reducing poverty among people in rural areas, the Partners4Nature Fund, a flexible fund aimed at strengthening collaboration between different partners in southern Africa with project funds, and Simalaha, in south-west Zambia.

According to Ghislain Rieb, Simalaha is a great example of how local communities can build a balance between economic progress and nature conservation. "By involving local people in the projects, they feel more responsible which also makes them more committed to nature conservation."

Thus, a number of residents from the area were appointed as community wardens. "They now play a crucial role in the day-to-day protection of the area, including fighting illegal logging and poaching. This helps protect biodiversity in Simalaha and strengthens the sense of community." Unfortunately, Simalaha's

success also had a downside, Rieb says. "Due to its growing income, Simalaha began to attract the attention of people who were more focused on personal benefits than the collective interest. This led to a governance crisis. Partly due to the involvement of local people, who were strongly opposed to it, the crisis could be resolved. Now Simalaha is looking ahead to a new phase: Simalaha 3.0."

The role of PPF

Simalaha started out as a project-based organisation. With the arrival of its own Conservancy Management Unit (CMU), which now has 100 employees, the organisation became more structured.



Ghislain Rieb
PPF'S SENIOR PROGRAMME MANAGER

“This CMU plays a central role in managing budgets and work plans, contributing to Simalaha’s development as an independent organisation,” Rieb explains. “But after the governance crisis, based on discussions with traditional leaders, it was decided to restructure the management and also clarify the role of PPF.”

PPF is now involved with Simalaha in three areas: strategy, capacity building and fundraising. “PPF wants these three roles to be clearly defined in the agreement with Simalaha, in conjunction with traditional leadership,” says Rieb. A key focus for the future is also developing a strategic business and management plan that is widely supported within the local communities. Rieb: “Although local communities were involved, previous versions still lacked local ownership. With the new leadership agreements, that is really changing and a shared vision can be created. This revamped business plan will serve as a guideline for Simalaha’s future growth and ensure its sustainable existence.”

Agri-hubs

One of the core initiatives here are agri-hubs, local centres of agricultural production that provide the community with stable income. Rieb explains that these agri-hubs play an important role in the region’s economic future. “By focusing on sustainable agriculture, communities can not only provide for their own food supply, but also bring products to market,” he says. In collaboration with IFC Grounded, a regenerative agriculture company, farmers receive technical guidance and

are supported in developing new markets. “For example, a recent sales agreement with a major food producer in the United States means that the community can now export chilli, providing a stable income stream and improved living standards.”

The Herding 4 Health programme was also successful in 2024 and continues to expand. This involves farmers grazing their cattle on a different piece of land each time, which benefits both the animals and the landscapes. “Other organisations such as WWF, Commonland and regional KAZA (Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area) projects in Namibia and Botswana are adopting and applying the H4H model,” Rieb explains. “Although the programme has yet to stabilise, it is working as an important pilot that demonstrates that livestock and nature conservation can reinforce each other.”

Wider perspective

According to Rieb, COMON plays an important role in developments in Simalaha. “Thanks to COMON, the salaries of employees within the Conservancy Management Unit, among others, can be covered,” he says, ‘enabling continuity and efficiency in the enforcement and protection of Simalaha. In addition, COMON helps facilitate training and monitoring in

The crisis could be resolved through the involvement of the local population.



COOKSTOVES IN THE SIMALAHA REGION, ZAMBIA

collaboration with communities.” Finally, Rieb says that thanks to the collaboration with Commonland, also funded by COMON, 10,000 cookstoves are also being used in the Simalaha region. “These in turn generate a substantial, annual financial flow for local community projects through the sale of carbon credits”.

Simalaha’s success is not just locally significant; it is an important building block for the larger KAZA, which covers five African countries. Within KAZA, Simalaha serves as a model for conservation where communities are actively involved and

economic progress goes hand in hand with ecological conservation. Climate change and increasing drought highlight the importance of resilient landscapes like Simalaha, where nature is balanced with economic activities.

“Simalaha proves that conservation and economic development can reinforce each other,” Rieb argues. “We want to expand agri-hubs, involve youth in education projects, distribute more cookstoves and develop ecotourism. In this way, we are working towards an economically self-reliant and ecologically strong region.”

Highlight Peace Parks Foundation

With the aim of **better managing and protecting** the cross-border nature reserve of **Nyika National Park**, Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) entered into a **co-management agreement with the Malawi government** in 2024. This agreement is for a period of **20 years** and the management will be carried out through a **specially created body**: the Nyika-Vwaza Co-management Trust.

Nyika National Park

The excitement is palpable



George Nxumayo
PPF'S PROJECT MANAGER OF NYIKA NATIONAL PARK AND VWAZA MARSH WILDLIFE RESERVE

"The Nyika Vwaza Co-Management Trust is PPF's first *special purpose* vehicle in which a large number of parties are represented," George Nxumayo, PPF's project manager of Nyika National Park and the adjacent Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve, proudly tells us. "Representatives of the Government of Malawi, traditional leaders of local communities, PPF delegates, private sector representatives and local municipal councils jointly hold sway. With 13 members representing different interest groups, it is a particularly strong body."

The aim of the co-management programme is to address a number of key challenges in the management of the cross-border nature reserve. "Although PPF has been active in this landscape since 2004 and has raised financial support from several,

major donors, this support has not proved sustainable enough," Nxumayo explains. "Projects were short-term, usually less than five years, so the impact was often temporary. Once the funding ended, much of the progress expired, leading to a cycle of peaks and troughs in effectiveness."

More efficient collaboration, local involvement

And there was another problem. PPF was responsible for raising funds and providing technical support, but had no control over government-controlled personnel in the area. "The quality of activities was variable as a result," says Nxumayo. He believes this will change with the co-management programme. "The trust can better coordinate stakeholders such as NGOs and donors, leading to more efficient collaboration and utilisation of existing knowledge. In doing so, the co-management model enables effective personnel management, allowing employees to be properly managed and assessed. Last *but not least*, having local communities represented gives them a say in decision-making processes, ensuring a more inclusive and sustainable approach."

Alternative livelihoods

Unfortunately, poaching, often involving burning, is a major problem in Nyika National Park. As is the exploitation of the area's special orchids. "We have as many as 214 species, 31 of which are endemic," says Nxumayo. "It is vital that we better protect these special plants otherwise they may soon no longer exist." Here, too, the

co-management programme can play a crucial role, he believes. "Local, vulnerable communities often have a hunting culture. And they manage to earn good income from the orchid trade. With the trust, we can offer them alternative livelihoods, such as working in ecotourism. It is precisely because we have a lot of knowledge and resources from PPF and maintain a long-term planning, of at least 20 years, that a different path can really be taken. If communities become structurally less dependent on natural resources, there will be room to see how important these resources are to them. As a result, they will want to protect them rather than abuse them."

Work to be done

The question is whether there is sufficient support now, at the start, to take on this major change. "The response has been mostly positive," says Nxumayo. "Government approval shows that there is political support. Businesses, communities and local authorities welcome being involved in the process and have the opportunity to monitor and influence the use of resources. The excitement is palpable, having seen what the PPF has achieved with fundraising from donors such as COmON and the World Bank." Nxumayo acknowledges that these high expectations also bring a major challenge. "We have to deliver on them to remain credible. There is real work to be done. For more tourism, for example, access to protected areas and infrastructure must be improved." According to him, a great success is the

realisation of a drinking water project. "Water sources in communities are often salty and unfit for consumption. Nyika, on the contrary, has pure, fresh water. This is now being extracted and transported to communities via reservoirs 95 kilometres away. It boosts the local economy, encourages tourism in the region and makes local communities guardian angels of the park."

Pure, fresh water boosts the local economy.

Feeding goats

"COmON also plays a crucial role in supporting Nyika National Park," says Nxumayo. "With the support of COmON, 13 community guards have been recruited, which has drastically reduced illegal activities. But even more important is their contribution to programmes that involve local communities in seasonal activities, such as firefighting and sustainable landscape management." He tells how he enjoyed the visit of Wijnand Pon and John Loudon and their spouses to Nyika last year. "What I found really special is that Wijnand Pon connected so naturally with the locals. When we passed a goat farmer, he hugged the man, shared his knowledge as a rancher and helped feed the goats. Wow, I thought, he's not just coming to watch, he's immediately rolling up his sleeves!"



YOUNG ELAND ANTELOPE IN NYIKA NATIONAL PARK

Key partner



Wetlands International

A new phase

At a key strategic meeting in Panama last autumn, Wetlands International (WI) embarked on the journey to define its new strategy. According to Maria Stolk, Director of Network Development at Wetlands International, the organisation is at the beginning of a new phase of growth and transformation.



Maria Stolk
WI'S DIRECTOR OF NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

In October 2024, 26 WI leaders gathered in Panama for their annual strategic meeting, where the organisation discussed its vision and approach for the coming years. "It was a crucial and inspiring meeting," says Maria Stolk. "With the support of the COMON Foundation, and from early March 2025 under the leadership of our new CEO Coenraad Krijger, we are at the beginning of a new phase."

Stolk says that during the meeting in Panama, it became even clearer that for more impact, scaling up WI's activities is necessary. "This means we need to look at setting up new offices and strengthening the capabilities and leadership of our



MANGROVE FOREST IN PANAMA

teams in existing offices and key landscapes. In doing so, we always try to find the right balance between these priorities and the changing context in which we operate. And between being locally rooted and globally relevant."

Wetland Impact Fund

An important step in this regard is the launch of the Wetlands Impact Fund. "This aims to secure about 3 million hectares of crucial and connected iconic wetlands by 2030, such as peatlands, mangrove forests and delta areas," she explains. "This fund will

not only attract new funding but also foster partnerships with the private sector and local communities; essential to ensure the sustainability of the changes we bring about."

The fund is being established with substantial support from COMON. "The collaboration with COMON acts as a powerful catalyst for further growth and innovation," Stolk emphasises. "Thanks to COMON's contributions, we can invest more resources in our activities and organisation, but also convince other partners to support us sooner."



WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL LEADERS GATHERED IN PANAMA

More internal and external collaboration

The meeting in Panama also discussed organisational challenges and the integration of renewed working practices.

Stolk: “We first examined WI’s identity and history. WI initially focused on aquatic bird conservation, but gradually moved to large-scale protection of wetlands themselves, the people who live there and the economies around them. To succeed, reducing poverty and improving living conditions have become a key pillar. We are in a very different place and world now than we were 60 years ago. That requires a different approach.”

The insights led to two main conclusions, Stolk says. “Our offices must work together more closely and more effectively to facilitate better knowledge sharing. In addition, much more collaboration with both the private and corporate sectors is needed to address wetland degradation and promote recovery. We will be investing heavily in this in the coming years.”

AI offers opportunities

The use of artificial intelligence was another exciting topic discussed in Panama. “Our teams at all offices are now using AI on a small scale and independently,” says Stolk. “But we can use it much more intelligently and effectively, in multiple areas. We aim for AI to be a powerful

knowledge-sharing tool by mid-2025, improving programme effectiveness and collaboration between regions. To achieve this, we have set up a pilot project with the offices of Panama, Indonesia and the Global Office in the Netherlands, exploring this. This can later be rolled out to the entire network of offices.”

We can use AI much more intelligently and effectively, in multiple areas.

Engaging the new generations

A final, but by no means insignificant, concern that was addressed in Panama was the involvement of young people in WI activities.

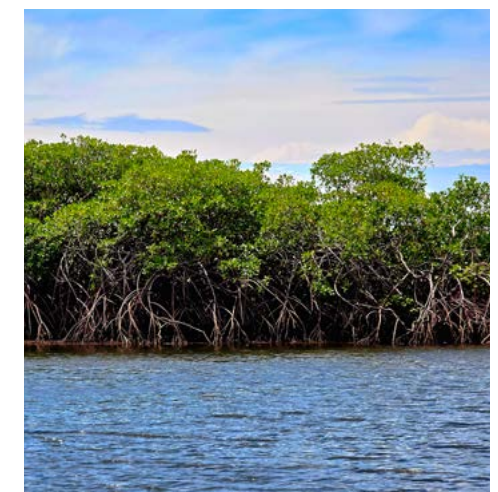
“Effective knowledge transfer and empowerment of the next generations are essential for the long-term sustainability of our work,” Stolk explains. “If we don’t engage young people now, our impact, and thus the wetlands we want to protect, will eventually be lost. In Panama, we were inspired by the work of our local team that launched the ‘Youth Accelerator Programme’. And the ‘Wetlands Defenders Program’ and the ‘Democratic and Environmental Leadership Accelerator’ are also initiatives aimed at promoting environmental management and leadership among young people. We link these programmes to youth groups we already

work with, such as in Kenya where young people are already working with mangrove restoration and at crab farms.”

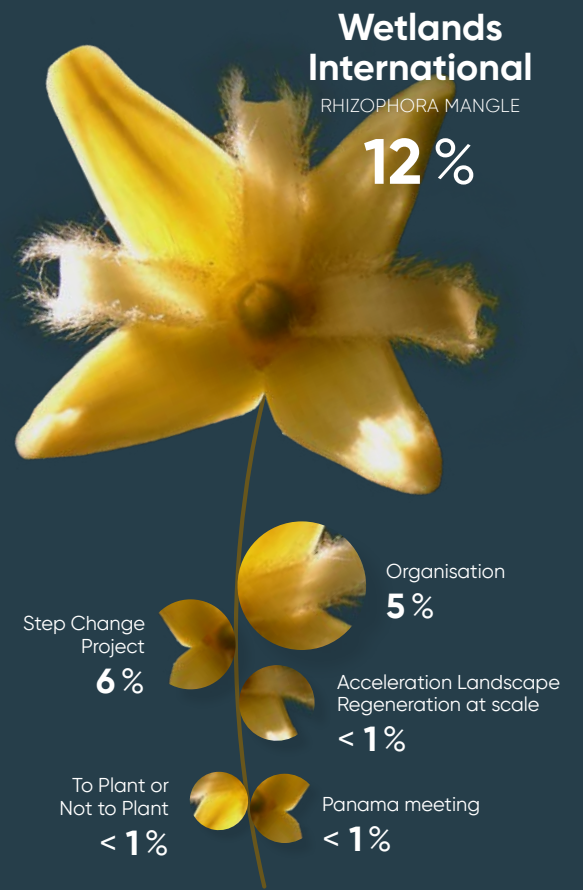
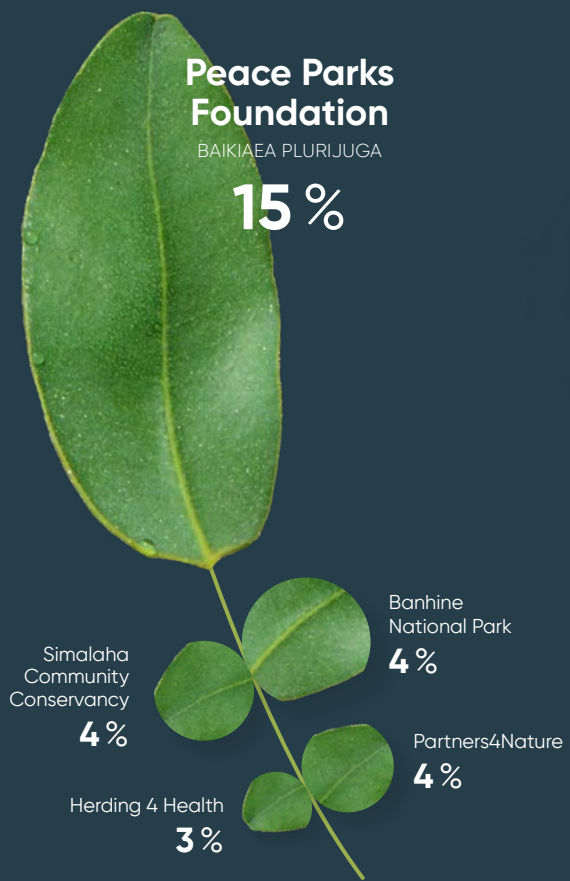
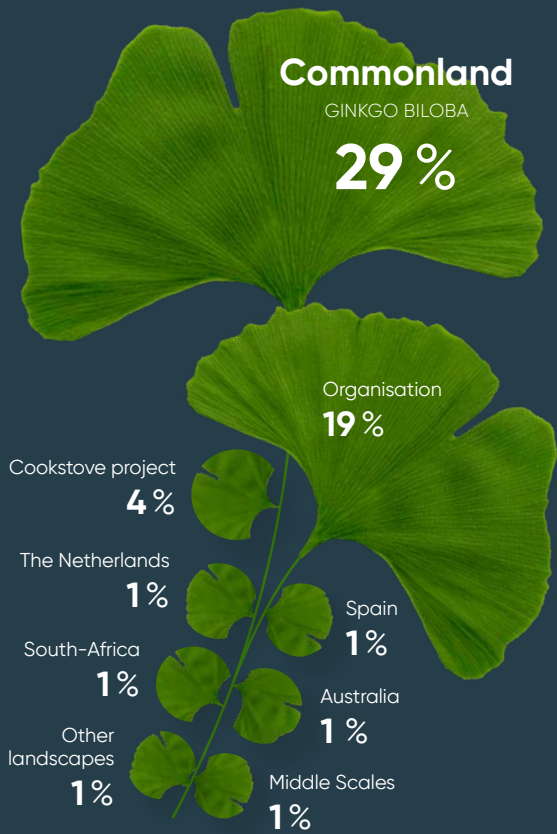
Challenges

The current times bring many challenges for protecting and sustainably managing wetlands.

“Climate change and the rise of more politically conservative governments worldwide are among the most significant changes in the context in which we operate,” Stolk believes. “We must continue to work hard within this new context to draw and maintain attention to the great value of nature and wetlands. More relevant than ever, Wetlands International needs to be flexible and agile to have the most impact. This requires changes in leadership styles, new skills and collective ‘communities of practice’ where our teams share challenges and expertise. And very importantly: in doing so, we need to keep our heads cool and our hearts warm.”

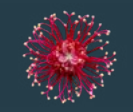


MANGROVE FOREST IN PANAMA



Overview 2024

Projects and funding by organisation



One Acre Fund
GREVILLIA
8 %



Oceans Finance Company
GARRYA ELLIPTICA
8 %



WWF Kopano Ki Maata
FAIDHERBIA ALBIDA
2 %



Small grants
TILIA x EUROPAEA
1 %



TNC Global Mangrove
LAGUNCULARIA RACEMOSA
2 %



WWF Namibia
BURKEA AFRICANA
2 %



SEKEM
CASUARINA
2 %



RockPA



TNC Texas
AVICENNIA GERMINANS
1 %



Kelp Forest Foundation
MACROCYSTIS PYRIFERA
<1 %



UEF CoCoST
ACACIA
<1 %



The Hunger Project

Highlight

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors Thriving Landscapes Collective

To achieve an even greater impact in the world, COmON approached **Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA)** in early 2024 to investigate the possible development of a **Thriving Landscapes Collective**. This ambitious fund should focus on raising both financial and non-financial resources for the restoration of degraded landscapes worldwide.

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) is an American non-profit organisation founded in 2002 that advises broadly on “*bettering the world*”. The services also include developing philanthropic programs in a smart and effective way, which leads to a fairer world. Its mission is to make philanthropy more thoughtful, fair and effective.

Alejandro Álvarez von Gustedt, vice president RPA Europe, explains that RPA does that in several ways. “We provide advice on the strategy to be pursued by a fund. If required, we act as a *private white label fund* for philanthropists who do not want to take on all the infrastructure. And we are building *communities of practice*:



Alejandro Álvarez von Gustedt
VICE PRESIDENT RPA EUROPE

bringing together parties in the sector and encouraging them to work more together to make the sector more effective. In doing so, we operate globally, in more than 70 countries.”

No sticking plasters

According to Álvarez von Gustedt, COmON's mission and approach align well with RPA's philosophy and values. “Among other things, these mean that philanthropy must be ambitious and must strive to really change something in the world. This does not mean treating symptoms, not sticking on plasters, but changing something at the root so that the effects are sustainable. This may sound obvious, but it rarely happens in philanthropy. Usually it comes down to a social investment in which generous giving is made, but the power remains in our own hands. The premise is: I have the money and will tell you how to do it better. This has resulted in many well-intentioned but ultimately failed projects.”

As stated by Álvarez von Gustedt, the key lies in the communities themselves where you want to change something. “They know better than anyone what is going on and what is needed to achieve real, lasting change. Besides, if you don't get the communities on board, the chances of success are nil.”

The power of collaboration

Álvarez von Gustedt did not previously know Commonland, nor the 4 Returns method. He was pleasantly surprised when he heard about it.

“Working bottom-up at the different levels as Commonland envisages and as COMON strives for in the projects it wants to support is exactly what RPA believes in. We talk about a holistic approach, which comes down to the same thing. We strongly believe in the power of collaboration: there are many good initiatives, but only if you do it together and join forces you can achieve something on a larger scale. There is a lot of talk about collaboration, but in practice parties rarely know where to find each other. People don’t want to hand over their power, unfortunately it often comes down to that.”

We strongly believe in the power of collaboration: there are many good initiatives, but only if you do it together and join forces you can achieve something on a larger scale.

Patience and trust

Another difficult aspect, according to him, is that parties are often short-term oriented. “While really having an impact, really changing something in a sustainable way, takes a lot of time. It requires patience and

trust. COMON is also well aware of this. It is great and invaluable that they support projects for at least 20 years.”

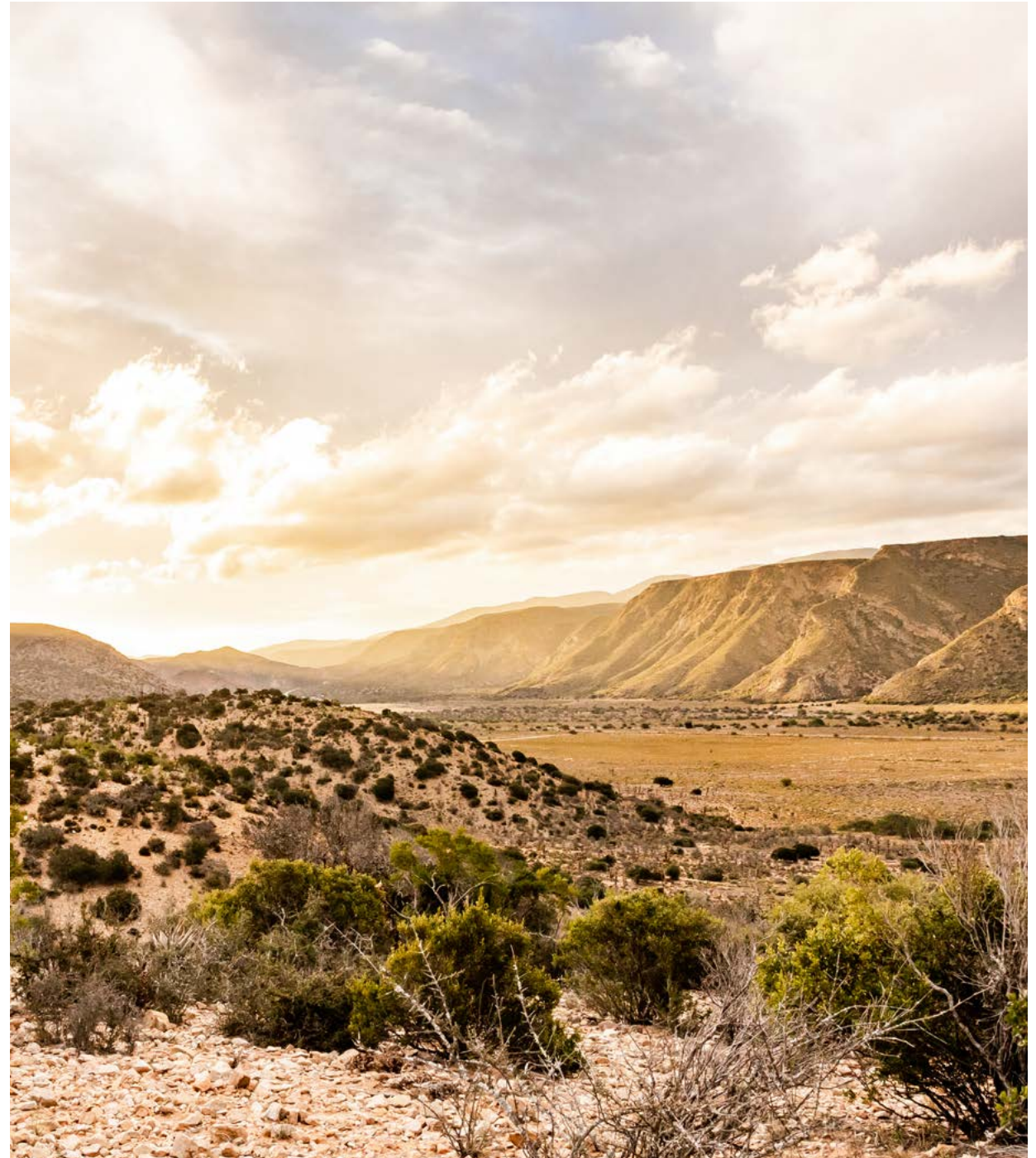
The Thriving Landscapes Collective is an initiative that aims to unite a wide range of landscape restoration stakeholders for the longer term. “Only then can we sustainably increase social and environmental returns. We are talking to many people in the field about this and are working in co-creation with COMON to further develop the strategy for this fund. This is deliberately not fixed; on the contrary, it is important that there is room for input from others. That increases the chances that parties will want to step in and that you will really achieve a collaboration.”

Catalyst

“We are not there yet, but we have a lot of knowledge and a huge network in this area,” he says. “We are therefore convinced that after COMON, a large number of other parties will want to participate. Holistic landscape restoration requires a lot of funding, COMON’s contribution can act as a catalyst: persuading others to join in too”.

For the first half of 2025, Álvarez von Gustedt expects that a core coalition of financiers will come together to further shape the strategy for collaboration, the content and management of the fund.

“We aim for the fund to be introduced and operational during the climate summit in Brazil in November in the second half of 2025. By 2026, it should be operational. I am confident that this is possible.”



SUNSET IN THE BAVIAANSKLOOF – CREDITS: COMMONLAND

Special projects

One Acre Fund (OAF)

Planting 1 billion trees in Rwanda, Malawi, Kenya and Nigeria, among others, OAF realizes the largest agroforestry program in the world. The program was also successful in 2024, with 74 million trees planted by 3.3 million farmers, 18% more than in 2022. A major challenge, however, is to preserve the new trees; only 48% appear to survive. This is a particular issue in the fast-growing tree programmes in Ethiopia and Malawi. All country programmes are therefore investing in education and research to better understand and address this problem. More investment is also being made in training and contact with farmers. The project's carbon storage remains promising, with pilots expanding in Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi and Rwanda.

In June, Wijnand Pon and John Loudon visited OAF in Rwanda. The good work was seen with their own eyes. However, what also stood out was the pressure from intensive agriculture. Every square metre is being utilised. Is the top layer of the soil getting enough rest? In 2025, we will discuss our further collaboration with OAF.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC)

Nature conservation organisation TNC leads a number of large mangrove projects that COMON supports. These include the Global Mangrove Watch (GMW), TNC Texas and TNC Australia.

In 2024, COMON pledged financial support for the follow-up to the Global Mangrove Watch, on condition that other parties also contribute. This has now succeeded and phase two of Global Mangrove Watch is in full swing. This mangrove platform houses all imaginable data from hundreds of scientists needed to make informed decisions around mangroves anywhere in the world.



TNC - TIDAL MARSH IN TEXAS, BY MATT KITCHEN



OAF - CONSOLÉE DUSABIMANA, TREE NURSERY ENTREPRENEUR NYAMAGABE DISTRICT, RWANDA

TNC Texas made progress this year, mainly through the development of a Coastal Conservation and Restoration Action Plan, including the creation of a Texas Wetland Action Mapping Plan to improve the conservation and restoration of coastal wetlands. TNC is further seeking to develop a Blue Carbon offset system for the North

American continent to fund the restoration of several coastal areas in North America. A detailed risk assessment is awaited for the Port Bay pilot area.

TNC Australia also made progress. Australia's national science body completed an assessment of the net emission reduction

potential of Australia's mangroves, seagrass beds and tidal marshes. Australia has 268,000 hectares of potentially suitable areas for the Blue Carbon Tidal Restoration method that COMON co-funded. Over a 25-year period, these areas have the potential to achieve about 60 million metric tonnes of CO₂ of emission reduction and storage. That is almost equivalent to what 3 billion trees absorb in CO₂ in 25 years.

These numbers highlight the important role Australia can play in global Blue Carbon trade.

WWF Namibia

Again this year, COMON supported the Zambezi Integrated Conservation Plan, led by WWF Namibia. Last year, important steps were taken in this regard. The Community Conservation Inspiration Hub has been officially inaugurated at a new location in Windhoek. WWF Namibia employees have now moved into their new assembly building.

Chilli seedlings have been planted in the conservancies as part of a pilot to promote agricultural development.

WEFOREST - LAVUSHIMANDA, ZAMBIA



The annual wildlife census on 220,000 hectares showed a decrease in elephants and kudu but an increase in zebras.

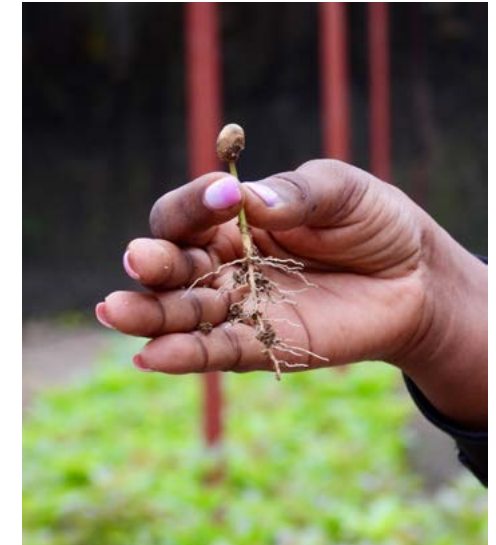
For sustainable nature conservation, WWF Namibia developed educational projects, such as youth workshops to connect policymakers and local communities. After protecting the Zambezi State Forest, the team worked on border markings and organised joint patrols; at one of these, 6,850 kilos of illegal charcoal were seized. Although collaboration with Commonland has not been smooth, WWF Namibia continues to apply the 4Returns approach in the Zambezi State Forest. Meanwhile, WWF KAZA, PPF, and Commonland worked on a major landscape plan for KAZA, for which a handsome sum of money has been reserved by COMON from 2025 to 2029. A project has been started around the Zambezi State Forest to roll out 20,000 cookstoves. WWF Namibia aims to develop the area into a 'thriving landscape' within KAZA.

COMON supports WeForest in Zambia to restore a landscape of 68.000 hectares.

WeForest

WeForest is committed to restoring threatened and degraded tropical forests through locally led reforestation projects.

For three years, COMON has been supporting a project in Zambia aimed at



OAF - COFFEE BEAN SPROUT TESTING

restoring 68,000 hectares of landscape and connecting the Lavushi Manda and South Luangwa parks.

In 2024, a coalition of partners was forged and a clear vision was developed. Due to property rights issues in the Chintumukulu Conservancy, the focus is now on the Community Forest Management Group (CFMG) and the Mpumba Community Resource Board (CRB). Local stakeholders, including government agencies, communities and private landowners, support the project. Good results have been achieved. For instance, a carbon financing model was designed, sustainable sources of income for communities are now being supported, collaboration with the private sector is underway and wildlife cameras are being used for nature conservation. New funding partners for scaling up are also being sought.



SEKEM - THE WAHAT FARM CULTIVATES HIBISCUS PLANTS FOR TEA PRODUCTION

CoCoST

The CoCoST project involves a collaboration between the University of Groningen, local governments and research institutions in Tanzania and Kenya. The project aims to find solutions to the increasing pressure on the nomadic life of the Masai, and the limited availability of land, which is also increasingly degraded. Five students of Professor Han Olff are working on this. Due to the unforeseen departure this year of one of them, COmON provided additional financial support, to ensure the continuity of their important work.

SEKEM

SEKEM, an Egyptian organisation focused on sustainable and social enterprise,

contributes to climate change mitigation, increasing fertile agricultural land and biodiversity, and emancipation, education, and cultural development, among others. COmON launched a support programme in 2023 that allowed SEKEM to plant trees, produce compost and help farmers improve their farming methods over the past year. 1147 farmers in 16 states benefited and managed to become more ecologically and economically resilient.

These continued efforts will not only reduce farmers' ecological footprint, but also contribute to their economic well-being through the sale of carbon credits and other, sustainable agricultural products.

COmON launched a support programme in 2023 that allowed SEKEM to plant trees, produce compost and help farmers improve their farming methods over the past year.

The Hunger Project (THP)

Originally from the US, THP aims to end world hunger permanently. To achieve this, the non-profit organisation has programs in Africa, Asia and Latin America through which rural communities work to improve their health, education, nutrition and family income.

In 2024, COmON made a one-off donation to THP Netherlands to support their 'epicentre' strategy. This approach focuses on strengthening rural communities in and around nature reserves, with self-reliance and local involvement at its core. The donation was used for a learning visit by THP and Peace Parks employees and local community and government representatives of Malawi, Mozambique, and Ethiopia, participation in international conferences, and the integration of *lessons learned* into the Southern Africa Wildlife College curriculum. The aim is to exchange

The Hunger Project aims for self-reliance of local communities around nature reserves.

information, share experiences and integrate new ideas, specifically aimed at involving ownership and self-reliance of local communities around nature reserves.

THP - HAND WASHING EDUCATION WITH THE TIPPY TAP, ZINAVE NATIONAL PARK, MOZAMBIQUE



Our people

Board

Wijnand Pon, Chairman
Maas Jan Heineman
Gerard van Hengstum, Treasurer
Julia de Groot-Hooijmans

Management

John Loudon

Staff

Annemieke Gerritsen-Nouwens
Marthe Jongmans



Our partners

Key partners



Partners





Interview Marthe Jongmans

To strengthen COMON's organisation, Marthe Jongmans recently started as Programme Director. With her years of experience at IDFA and WWF, including in fundraising and external collaboration, she can add a lot to the current team of John Loudon and Annemieke Gerritsen Nouwens.

From an early age, Marthe Jongmans felt a deep connection with nature. "As a child, I was always busy with it," she says. "Several times I started my own nature club and wrote letters to the mayor when I saw something worrying, like oil in a pond or a duck with a broken leg."

She chose to study economics, working mostly on the business side at organisations where her heart lay. Jongmans started in the cultural sector and worked at the International Documentary Film Festival for almost a decade. "Cultural work fascinated me because of the social stories, which give insight into the world," she explains. Her focus here was already mainly on fundraising and working with governments, companies and individuals, work that suited her well and will serve her well in her current role as well.

I would like to make COMON even sharper.

Sharpshooter

After IDFA, Jongmans worked briefly at Toneelgroep Amsterdam, but realised there that her passion was not so much solely for art but primarily for the state of the world and social engagement. "I quickly realised that if I wanted to give money to something, it was not primarily culture, but rather nature conservation. I decided I wanted to work at the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). I am a sharpshooter in that respect, have a clear objective. And I was lucky. There was a vacancy that matched my profile perfectly."

At WWF, Jongmans devoted almost nine years as a fundraiser and collaboration cooperation with major institutional

donors. "I built programmes to get funding for projects that sometimes did not yet exist, which was very inspiring."

Her responsibilities included coordinating the Dream Fund for KAZA and working with various parties, such as Peace Parks Foundation and African Parks, on ambitious nature conservation projects.

"During that period, I also got to know John Loudon," she says. "And I developed a keen view on the importance of collaboration during that time. The world's problems are often too big and complex for one organisation. It is a missed opportunity if different parties on their own little islands and on a relatively small scale, are all doing the same thing. Only by joining forces you can really make a difference."



COMON TRIP TO THE NGONYE FALLS IN ZAMBIA

To COMON

The move to COMON came at an unexpected time. "I had no intention of leaving WWF at all," Jongmans says. "But when John Loudon called me to tell me that COMON wanted to expand and that he had me in mind, I was surprised how much that affected me." After several conversations with Loudon and with Julia de Groot from the COMON board, she started working as *Programme Director*. "In this role, I will, among other things, manage the operational collaboration with existing and new partners and be their



MARTHE OVERLOOKING THE NGONYE FALLS

It is always special to see how much difference can be made for the local population and nature if we work together successfully.

first point of contact. This gives John more leeway to further increase the impact of our collaborations. Together, we will focus on even more partnerships."

Dynamic start

The start at COMON was dynamic: after her appointment, she immediately went on a trip to Zambia in KAZA, where she and Loudon visited projects from the new partnership between Peace Parks, Commonland and WWF and spent time with familiar and new colleagues from her time at WWF. "It was a welcome breath of familiarity," she says, "but I also had to get used to my new role at times."

What Jongmans found most interesting about their visit was seeing the impact of the work on the ground. "It is always special to see how much difference can be made for the local population and nature if we work together successfully. The landscape is beautiful and people are proud and excited to show off their achievements. That's what you do it for! Sometimes I find



VISITING COMMUNITY LIVELIHOODS PROJECTS IN ZAMBIA

that I can be impatient about why projects have not already been rolled out on a much larger scale and I long for Dutch efficiency, but then I remind myself of the African proverb: "Alone you go faster, together you go further."

A new adventure

Jongmans is keen to work at COMON to bring more structure to the way programmes are set up and decisions are made. "I like to work with a 'Theory of Change' approach," she says. "I want to map out what we want to achieve and what is needed for this. More insight into this will help to sharpen the organisation's position and make better choices."

I want to map out what we want to achieve and what is needed for this.

With her broad experience and passion for nature conservation, Jongmans is looking forward to her new role. She sees this as a great adventure and an opportunity for herself and for COMON as an organisation. "If we bring our vision and plans together, we can have an even greater impact on nature and the world."

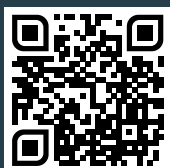
Colophon and Map of Projects →

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