



**WORLD
WILDLIFE DAY**
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United Nations World Wildlife Day 2024

Connecting People and Planet: Exploring Digital Innovation in Wildlife Conservation

Concept Note

In 2024, World Wildlife Day will explore digital innovation and seek to highlight how digital technologies and services can drive wildlife conservation and human-wildlife coexistence, now and for future generations in an increasingly connected world.

Under the theme “**Connecting People and Planet: Exploring Digital Innovation in Wildlife Conservation,**” the World Wildlife Day 2024 celebrations will aim to raise awareness on the latest applications of digital technologies in wildlife conservation and trade and the impact on ecosystems and communities around the world of certain digital interventions. The Day promises to feature new tools for enhancing our efforts to safeguard biodiversity and the benefits we derive from wild animals and plants. It will offer a platform to engage in a balanced discussion around inclusive and responsible digital innovation, in line with the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We are in the midst of a global digital revolution that is breaking down barriers to people-centered digital governance and to equal opportunities for all to unleash the power of digital transformation. There is a need to mobilize new commitments to ambitious policy and funding approaches that unite civil society, the technology industry, conservationists and traders toward sustainable adaptation and preservation of our natural world in this digital age (SDG 17).

The ‘digital divide’ is slowly narrowing, with technologies and the Internet becoming increasingly accessible in urban and rural areas around the world. Around 67 per cent of our global population is now online, and better connectivity is helping equip people of all ages, genders and local conditions with job-ready digital skills (SDG 4 and SDG 8). Indigenous and women-led initiatives are finding ways to use technology that suits ecosystems needs, local conditions and their own livelihoods (SDG 5 and SDG 10). Digital financial systems and services are expanding “financial inclusion” – connecting individuals and organisations to sustainable financial means to generate income and accomplish their conservation goals (SDG 1). Meanwhile, by making research and communication more data-driven and efficient, we can identify, monitor, photograph and track aquatic and terrestrial wildlife populations at scale and improve the sustainability of fishing and agricultural practices to benefit people and planet (SDG 14 and SDG 15).

Yet, serious digital gaps remain. Around 2.7 billion people of our global population are still not connected to the Internet. On average, only 36 per cent of the populations in the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries are online – making universal connectivity a distant prospect. Women are still 16 per cent less likely than men to use mobile internet across low-and middle-income countries and still have unequal, uneven access to income-generation opportunities, participation in decision-making processes and control of natural resources. The global COVID-19 pandemic has widened the existing youth skills gap, weakening access to employment opportunities for more than 267 million young people who were already left without employment, education and training pre-pandemic. Manufacturing new technologies and storing large quantities of data are environmentally costly – with the training one machine learning (ML) model producing an estimated carbon footprint of around 300,000 kg of CO₂ emissions¹, and with e-waste polluting the soil, air and water, further disrupting ecosystems and livelihoods. By 2017, nearly 17,000 species (14 per cent) of the more than 120,000 species on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species had a “Data Deficient” status.

The Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), with partners such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Jackson Wild and others, will host the World Wildlife Day 2024 celebration on Monday, 4 March 2024.

Within the theme of digital innovation and conservation technologies, World Wildlife Day 2024 aims to feature meaningful participation, balanced discussions and engaging multimedia demonstrations and performances. Other UN system organizations, Member States, academia, youth networks and civil society will be invited to contribute to a celebration programme that aims to:

- **Provide a platform for intergenerational exchange and youth empowerment.** Dismantling the digital generational divide is fundamentally linked to filling the youth skills and opportunity gap. As future leaders and decision makers, youth play an important role in designing what the future of digital wildlife conservation will look like and how we get there responsibly. WWD 2024 discussions will center on and include youth perspectives and digital journeys, for example through the IFAW Youth Art Contest which will encourage young people to explore the relationships between technological development and biodiversity through art.
- **Offer balanced perspectives and experiences with digital innovation in the field of wildlife conservation and trade.** WWD 2024 partners and participants will have the chance to share their own relevant work and engage in multiregional discussions on the benefits and the complex challenges of digital innovation. For CITES, this may include raising awareness on helpful species identification apps, such as Species+, iFin and FinFinder, and CITESwoodID, digital innovations used by rangers under the CITES Monitoring of the Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme, as well as discussing the infrastructural and financial capacity gaps in certain areas for Electronic CITES Permit System (eCITES) implementation meant to strengthen legal trade and combat illegal trade in wildlife.
- **Inspire forward-looking innovation through captivating multimedia experiences.** The Jackson Wild Film Showcase will no doubt enrich the programme through visual story-telling, demonstrating the value of film equipment advancements. Live demonstrations of digital tools and technologies, such as drones, will bring the theme to life before our eyes at the event and online.

World Wildlife Day should connect people with our natural world and inspire continued learning and action beyond the event. For WWD 2024, we hope to provide a jumping off point for exploring what digital innovations are available now, what discrepancies we are facing and how we want our digital connectivity to evolve for people and planet.

¹ Paul Walsch, *Here Comes the Sun! Why Large Language Models Don't have to Cost the Earth*. LinkedIn Article, 22 March 2023. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/here-comes-sun-why-large-language-models-dont-have-cost-paul-walsh/>