

# Strengthening the POSITIVE NARRATIVES in Conservation

by Dr Julia Baum

Visual journey: changing narratives about predators around the world



The Central Apennines is now a true biodiversity hotspot, a wilderness at the very heart of bustling Italy, only 1,5 hours from Rome. For each rewilding landscape, Rewilding Europe developed an inspiring vision that shows their ambition for the next ten years. Together with local partners they work to make this vision a reality.



Read more about the 'Wild heart of Italy': <https://rewildingeurope.com/landscapes/central-apennines/>

Photo © Rewilding Europe



The Italian wolf (*Canis lupus italicus* or *Canis lupus lupus*), also known as the Apennine wolf, is a subspecies of the grey wolf native to the Italian Peninsula.

Photo © Luigi Filice



IUCN Conservation status:  
Vulnerable





“ There are numerous stories of progress and success in the field of conservation that deserve more attention. ”




Dr Julia Baum is a systems thinker and storyteller with a passion for social-ecological research, conservation work, communication and entrepreneurship. She holds a M.Sc. Geoeology (KIT, Germany) and a Ph.D. Conservation Biology (UCT, South Africa) and is the Founder of PLCnetwork of the Southern Hemisphere. Julia has extensive experience and skills in the fields of private and community conservation, strategy and planning, partnership development and conservation enterprise consulting.

**A** positive narrative generally is a story or account of events that reframes challenges and focuses on positive aspects and outcomes. It emphasizes hopeful and constructive elements, it can offer solutions, and it can highlight the possibilities for change – often with the key intention of inspiring, motivating or uplifting the audience.

Positive narratives can take many forms, from personal anecdotes and success stories to larger cultural or historical accounts that demonstrate progress, resilience, growth and the power of humanity’s grit.

In the realm of conservation, the news regarding the status of our environment in recent years has strongly been dominated by alarming issues such as climate-change effects, deforestation and the rapid loss of biodiversity. While these concerns are genuine and very pressing, there are also numerous stories of progress and success in the field of conservation that deserve more attention. This is not about denying the stark realities, but rather about presenting an alternative lens through which we can view our relationship with nature.

 **Highlighting positive achievements is crucial to evoke some optimism and to emphasize the positive impacts of human collaboration and determination, innovative solutions, and the consistent concerted efforts to protect our environment.**




### **CASE STUDY 1: Europe: Landscapes of Tomorrow**

Rewilding Europe is on a transformative journey to re-establish Europe’s wild nature. Instead of merely conserving, they allow landscapes to rewild, emphasizing nature’s ability to regenerate. A prime example of their work shines in Italy’s Central Apennines. Here, not only has the Apennine wolf been given a chance to roam freely, but the local communities also thrive with a revived nature-based tourism sector. Through their actions, Rewilding Europe paints a narrative where nature and humans coexist and flourish together.



Read more about the Return of the Wolf project:  
<https://rewildingeurope.com/rew-project/return-of-the-wolf-to-the-eastern-alps/>



 **WATCH THIS!**  
Scan the QR code or visit <https://youtu.be/khZWxv765D8?si=bjsWCKfgQOwnabUQ> to watch the video: ‘Explore our Rewilding Areas – Central Apennines’.  
Published by Rewilding Europe.

Read Dr Julia’s interview with Frans Schepers, Co-founder and Executive Director of Rewilding Europe on page 50.







**CASE STUDY 2:**  
**Asia: The Snow Leopard Protectors of the Himalayas**

Snow leopards, elusive predators of the Asian high mountains, were often vilified due to livestock losses. However, conservation practitioners in regions like Ladakh, India, began promoting the snow leopard's vital role in preserving the alpine ecosystem. Partnering with local communities, they launched initiatives like ecotourism and insurance schemes for livestock. The narrative shifted from the snow leopard as a threat to a symbol of the Himalayas' rugged beauty and health.




**LEARN MORE!**  
 Scan the QR code or visit <https://snowleopard.org/snow-leopard-facts/>



Snow leopard on the reverse of the old 10,000-Kazakhstani tenge banknote.  
 Photo © The National Bank of Kazakhstan

The snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), commonly known as the ounce, is a species of large cat in the genus *Panthera* of the family *Felidae*. The species is native to the mountain ranges of Central and South Asia.  
 Photo © Abeselom Zerit

 IUCN Conservation status:  
**Vulnerable**

Positive narratives in conservation cover a wide range of topics and activities. One example is the recovery of species that were once on the brink of extinction, such as the American alligator's recovery in the southeastern United States. As apex predator and 'ecosystem engineer', its presence ensures healthy freshwater habitats, influencing prey dynamics and even shaping the very physical characteristics of wetlands.



Another example is the reintroduction of keystone species into habitats, such as wolves in Yellowstone National Park in the USA. Their presence since the 1990s has helped restore the park's natural processes such as predation patterns, leading to healthier wildlife populations that have even aided in the recovery of vegetation.

Community member in Kashmir, India.  
 Photo © Ron Summers








Australian dingo (*Canis familiaris* or *Canis lupus dingo*).

Photo © Witriyani Nurhasanah

 **IUCN Conservation Status:**  
In 2018, the IUCN regarded the dingo as a feral dog and discarded it from the Red List.

 **CASE STUDY 3:**  
**Australia: The Dingo's Role in Ecosystem Balance**

Dingoes, Australia's iconic wild canines, often faced negative perceptions due to livestock predation. Yet, conservation practitioners have increasingly spotlighted the dingo's critical role in maintaining habitat functionality, especially in controlling invasive species like the introduced rabbit and domestic cats. By reframing the dingo not as a menace but as an essential keystone species, the narrative is transitioning to one of interconnectedness and respect.



**LEARN MORE!**

Scan the QR code or visit  
<https://www.bushheritage.org.au/species/dingoes>



Dingo with a tagged ear on Fraser Island.  
Photo © Sam Fraser-Smith

Yet another example is the restoration of specific habitats such as wetlands through pollution reduction or removal of dams; the transition from destructive practices to sustainable ones such as in regenerative agriculture; the implementation of wildlife corridors that re-establish connectivity of spaces for wildlife migration; and more.

These narratives are important for gaining and maintaining public interest and for securing investment in conservation, demonstrating that while challenges are significant, progress is being made through a variety of strategies and interventions.

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More specifically, the narrative around predators, especially large ones, has historically been steeped in fear and animosity. But change is afoot: predators play a pivotal role in maintaining ecological functionality in habitats. They control prey populations, aid in nutrient cycling and shape landscapes through trophic cascades. Their absence can lead to overgrazing, habitat degradation and reduced biodiversity.



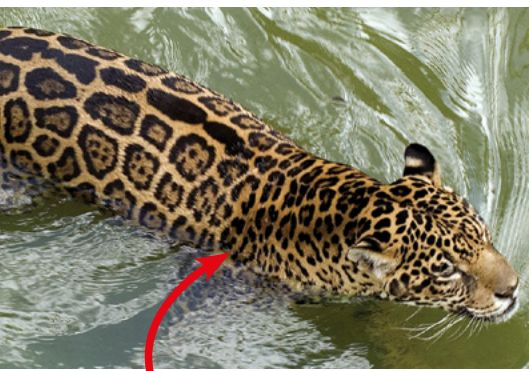
A portion of the Australian dog fence near Coober Pedy.  
Photo © Schutz





Jaguar (*Panthera onca*) hunting a caiman (*Caiman yacare*), Pantana, Brazil. Photo © Gurkan Ozturk.

IUCN Conservation Status: Near Threatened and Least Concern, respectively



Seeing Spots? While leopard (*Panthera pardus*) are covered in more solid spots and rosettes, jaguar (*Panthera onca*) sport blocky rosettes with distinct internal spots. Refer to page 58 to read all about Evo Devo by Dr Pamela Oberem. Photo © Garry Bryant.



**CASE STUDY 4:**  
**Latin America: The Jaguar's Path to Harmony in the Pantanal**

In the Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetland spanning Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, jaguars once faced threats from hunting and habitat loss. However, conservation practitioners and local communities collaborated to transform the narrative. Instead of viewing the jaguar as a livestock threat, they celebrated it as a symbol of wild vitality and ecological health. Through ecotourism initiatives showcasing jaguar-spotting, the narrative underscored the economic and ecological value of a thriving jaguar population.



**LEARN MORE!**  
Scan the QR code or visit <https://panthera.org/cat/jaguar>



A lion monitoring project in the Mpem-Djim National Park, which addresses the lion-herder conflict, Cameroon. Read more on page 100.

Communities worldwide play a crucial role in conservation successes. In central and western Africa, for example, locals are partnering with conservation practitioners to protect lion, recognizing the mutual benefits of wildlife tourism and the ecological role of these majestic cats.

In the arena of technological advancement, innovation emerges as a fresh perspective for conservation and against environmental degradation. A new generation of

entrepreneurs is utilizing cutting-edge technologies: for example apps designed to detect and report instances of wildlife poaching ensure that protective agencies can intervene promptly, safeguarding vulnerable species.

Even the finance sector is developing towards more environmentally conscious decision-making and the design of relevant investments. Sustainable finance opportunities are increasing and as a result, green bonds and other such financial tools are gaining traction.






Leopard (*Panthera pardus*).  
Photo © Clint Ralph

 IUCN Conservation  
Status: Vulnerable

Tracking leopard.

While it's undeniable that serious environmental challenges persist, the mosaic of conservation is not solely composed of bleak patterns.

 **Amplifying positive narratives is more than just an exercise in optimism. It's a call to action, reinforcing the understanding that change is achievable and motivating people to participate in solutions.**

For all of us, yet especially for the youth, these positive narratives are paramount and a much-needed counterpoint to the overwhelming negativity causing despair. They foster our well-being and a sense of collective purpose, strengthening the belief that collaborative efforts can overcome daunting environmental challenges. They equip us with the courage to take a proactive stance and build an enduring commitment to our environment. A greener and wilder future is a tangible reality we can co-create. ■



“ A greener and wilder future is a tangible reality we can co-create. ”



Empowering the future of conservation through environmental education – shaping positive narratives and fostering a new generation of passionate conservationists.  
Photo courtesy of Eco Ranger Academy:  
[www.ecoranger.co.za](http://www.ecoranger.co.za)



**CASE STUDY 5:**  
**South Africa: Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA)**



Individuals who dedicate their efforts to protecting and restoring their properties into conservation areas are demonstrating another positive narrative. They seek alliances, resources and capacities beyond what is readily available in order to proactively engage in solutions – for example, many private landowners come together via the Wildlife Ranching South Africa association to promote and further their work.



**LEARN MORE!**  
Scan the QR code or visit  
<https://wrsa.co.za>



Read more about *Pillars of Sustainable Profitability* by Karel Landman, WRSA Wildlife Rancher of the Year in both 2006 and 2022 on page 76.








**PLCNETWORK OF THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE**

PLCnetwork of the Southern Hemisphere is a unique networking platform and consulting firm with a passion for private land and community conservation across South America, Africa and Asia & Pacific.

Our vision is to achieve a paradigm shift in the conservation sector towards a global conservation economy for inclusive transformation.

Our mission is to apply a *Conservationpreneurship* approach to implement community development and nature-based solutions with conservation actors.



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