

RUSSELL E. TRAIN EDUCATION FOR NATURE PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT 2024

30 Years of Grants and
Training Opportunities
for Conservation Leaders



EFN THROUGH THE YEARS



Grantees and WWF staff at the 2024 Alumni Summit in Guatemala.



Local conservationist Marleine Aboumgone, EFN scholarship winner.



Program founder Russell E. Train with EFN grantees.



Program founder Russell E. Train with EFN grantees.



Grantees and the EFN director at the 2024 Alumni Summit.



Kateryn Pino during a working group session at the 2024 EFN Alumni Summit.

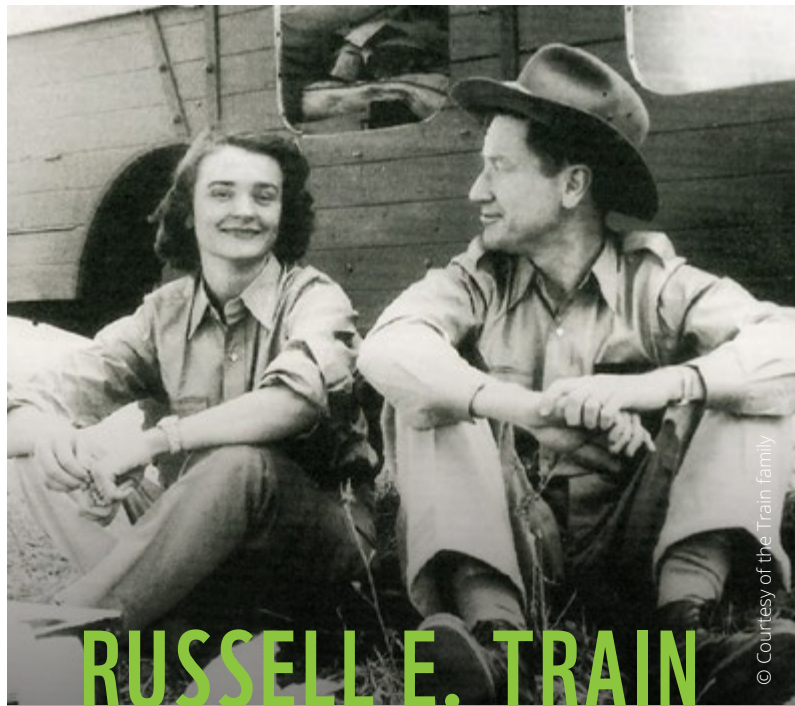
EFN HISTORY

The Russell E. Train Education for Nature Program is World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) longest continuous running program and one of the largest conservation fellowship programs in the world. Since 1994, EFN has delivered conservation gains by ensuring that individuals and organizations working in the most biodiverse places in the world have the skills, knowledge, and networks they need to succeed.

Over 30 years, EFN has deepened our impact and expanded our programming to support conservationists in all stages of their journey by:

- Partnering with universities in biodiversity-rich countries to support early career scientists in obtaining degrees, enhancing their conservation science capacity, and creating a consistent pipeline of capable leaders.
- Providing grants that allow EFN alumni in all stages of their careers to further their education and translate science into practice.
- Supporting community-based organizations in the restoration of biodiversity, enhancing grassroots conservation leadership through advancing knowledge and skills, and improving livelihoods.

Thanks to EFN, the conservation community is more impactful and more diverse than ever before. Many of our EFN alumni are working in conservation and a significant number of them assume leadership roles in local, national and regional agencies, conservation organizations, and academia.



RUSSELL E. TRAIN

Russell E. Train was a conservation champion who played a fundamental role in early international conservation and US environmental policy. Though his role in protecting the planet was immense, Russ always understood that no one person or organization would solve the world's most pressing biodiversity issues. He recognized the significant need for conservation capacity on a global scale and felt that with education and training, promising leaders could achieve their full potential—and the Earth would reap the benefits. WWF established EFN in 1994 in his memory. Thirty years later, Russ's legacy lives on thanks to the generosity of individuals, organizations, and partners who share his vision of a world where local leaders manage their natural resources sustainably and where people and nature coexist.

Caption: Russell E. Train with his wife, Aileen, in Tanzania.

30 YEARS OF EFN

1996

EFN awards the first Train Fellowships.

2006

EFN alumni Valerio Macandza and Cornelio Ntumi establish conservation programs in Mozambique to enhance local leadership of conservation in the country.

2016

Russell E. Train Legacy Scholarship Program launches to provide financial support to conservation-related university programs, in partnership with EFN alumni who are advancing higher education.

2005

EFN expands grants to community-based organizations.

2015

EFN alum Dr. Somchanh Bounphanmy establishes the University of Laos' first graduate program in conservation.

2017

EFN alum Henry Kaniki partners with the Arnavon Community Marine Conservation Area Management Committee, resulting in the declaration of the Solomon Islands' first nationally protected area.

2022

EFN launches two new grant opportunities: the Caroline Cassagnol Fellowship to support outstanding EFN alumni and the Environmental and Social Impact Grant to enhance inclusive conservation and sustainable development.

2024

EFN launches the Gustavo Fonseca Leadership Program, in partnership with the Global Environment Facility, to support researchers and practitioners in Latin America.

EFN hosts an alumni summit in Antigua, Guatemala to celebrate the 30th anniversary and encourage collaboration on capacity development.

2020

WWF appoints EFN alum Nelly Kadagi, funded in 2015 to obtain her PhD at the University of Florida, as EFN's new director.

2023

EFN hosts its third alumni summit in Kigali, Rwanda, bringing together nearly 40 alumni and grantees to help shape the future of EFN's strategy.

OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS, THE EFN PROGRAM HAS...



Supported over **3,600 conservation leaders**, including more than **600 institutions**, in over **60 countries**.

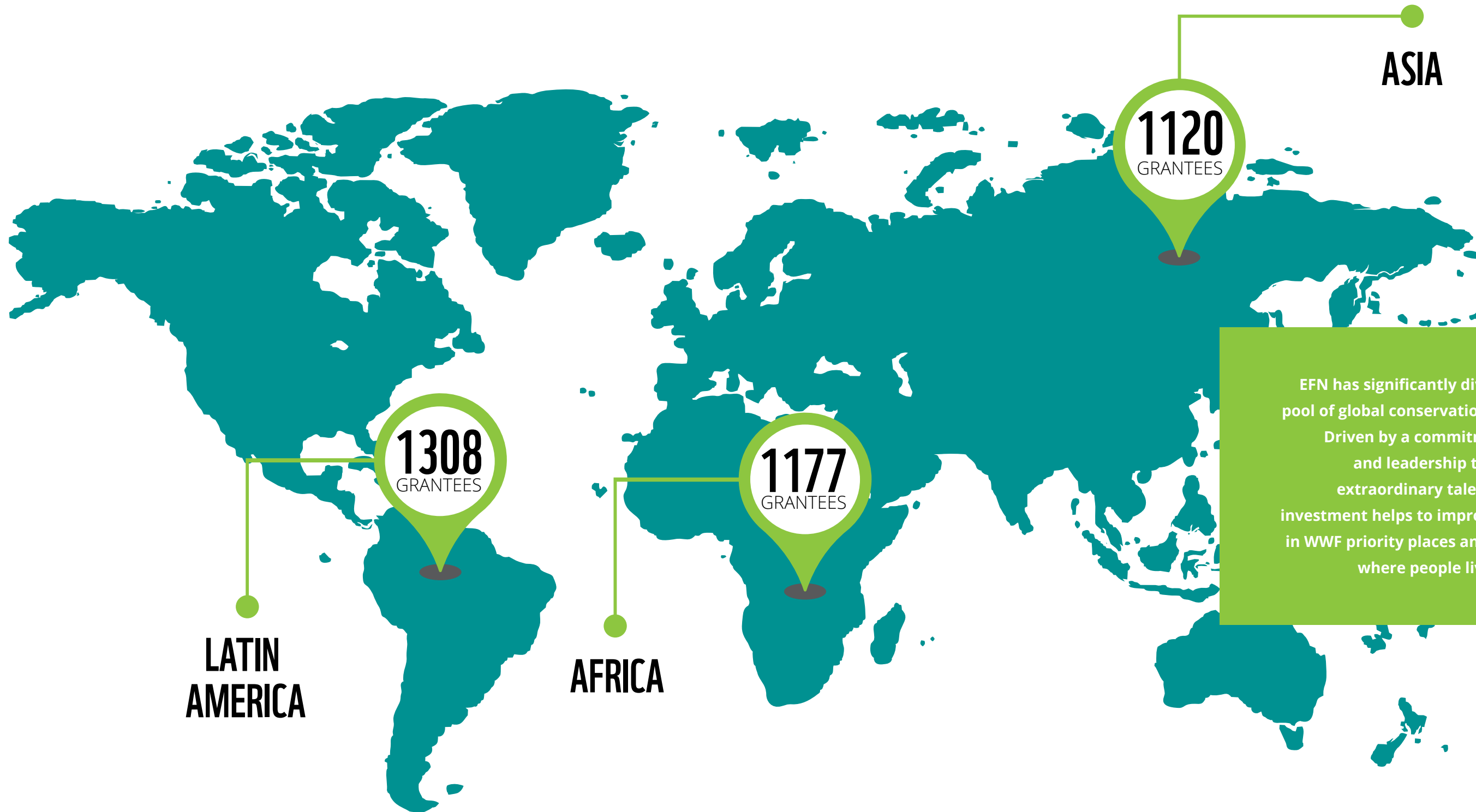


Distributed **\$30 million** in grant funding.



Championed **760 individuals** in their master's and PhD studies, many of whom have assumed leadership roles in government agencies, conservation organizations, and academia.

WHERE WE WORK



EFN has significantly diversified and deepened the pool of global conservation leaders across the world. Driven by a commitment to science, education, and leadership training, EFN has supported extraordinary talent across 60 countries. This investment helps to improve conservation outcomes in WWF priority places and beyond to create a world where people live in harmony with nature.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHTS

FOREST RESTORATION GRANT

The Forest Restoration Grant supports locally-based organizations in conducting restoration projects to improve and maintain tropical forest cover.



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Mario Ardany De Leon, program officer at EcoLogic Development Fund, tends to pine seedlings in the greenhouse.

EcoLogic Development Fund, Guatemala

EcoLogic Development Fund works with rural and Indigenous communities in Central America and Mexico to help them preserve their natural resources. With help from an EFN Forest Restoration Grant, EcoLogic is enhancing a large-scale forest restoration project in Guatemala. Tonicapán is a treasure trove of biodiversity home to Guatemala's largest remaining stand of conifer forest, 127 species of birds, and a diverse array of mammals. Here, EcoLogic is working with the Maya K'iche' people to restore and conserve the biodiversity and forest cover of 11,200 hectares of communal forest. In addition to raising and distributing hundreds of thousands of native plants, EcoLogic aims to reduce pressure on the forest by strengthening the governance of community organizations through ancestral practices and entrepreneurship initiatives. EFN funds have played a vital role in scaling the project to its current level, giving local communities the means to combat seasonal fires, illegal logging, and other threats.

More information can be found [online](#).

2 MILLION

EFN community-based grant recipients have planted over **two million** native trees and restored over **100,000 hectares** of native ecosystems.

TRAIN FACULTY FELLOWSHIP

Russell E. Train Fellowships support current and aspiring faculty members pursuing their doctoral degree in-country, regionally, or globally. The objective of this competitive fellowship is to advance the development of a critical mass of outstanding, well-trained experts and practitioners.

Mundi Nnandi Noukou Onella, Cameroon

As a PhD student at the University of Dschang, Mundi is working with communities to halt population decline of the yellow-casqued hornbill. Found in the rainforests of Cameroon, this species disseminates a large proportion of the fruit trees that comprise 22% of the country's forests. However, poaching, habitat loss, and fragmentation have driven a decline in hornbill populations in Cameroon's Ebo Forest. With support from EFN, Mundi is undertaking research to determine the species' relative abundance, study how they respond to habitat disturbances and human activities, and document local knowledge. Local myths have historically influenced hornbill protection and trade. Mundi aims to better understand how locals perceive hornbills through these myths and ultimately leverage support from communities and authorities to inform conservation measures for these unique birds.

More information on our 2024 fellows can be found [online](#).



Mundi Nnandi Noukou Onella conducts field research in Cameroon.

TRUDY FELLOWSHIP

The Trudy Food Systems Fellowship supports aspiring and experienced researchers, practitioners, and leaders to pursue graduate-level studies geared towards research that cultivates a better understanding of food systems and transformation.



Silas Mulehi Osinde using geospatial tools to help communities in Kenya transition to climate-resilient food systems.

Silas Mulehi Osinde, Kenya

Climate change and habitat fragmentation are putting pressure on southern Kenya's rangelands, which are an important source of food for local communities. Through his Trudy Fellowship, Silas researches methods to help communities transition to more resilient, sustainable practices to protect their livelihoods in the future. As part of this work, Silas will facilitate wider awareness of agroecology and low carbon food production systems among smallholder farmers in Amboseli, Kenya. Silas plans to establish baseline information that will inform climate-smart rangeland management, improve food security, and safeguard people and wildlife.

More information on our Trudy Fellows can be found [online](#).

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Thinley Choden, Bhutan | 2021 Russell E. Train Faculty Fellow

“By investigating the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, Thinley Choden’s research will help ensure Bhutan’s protected areas make positive conservation and social contributions.” – Nelly Kadagi

“Bhutan has made significant progress in understanding crucial factors such as the ecology, distribution, population trends, and genetic diversity of keystone species for both flora and fauna within protected areas. While these are considered conservation triumphs, Bhutan, unlike other places, has not directly addressed the complex challenges and issues that humanity has brought to this area.

It is crucial to understand how stakeholders perceive protected areas and view positive conservation outcomes. In the Bhutanese context, stakeholders include local communities, park managers, park rangers, and national policymakers. This strategy has never been used in Bhutan, and knowledge gained from this perspective will help guide current policies and develop management plans.” — Thinley Choden



Thinley Choden at her research site in Chelela Pass, Bhutan.

Elise Nghalipo, Namibia | 2022
Russell E. Train Faculty Fellow

“Elise Nghalipo’s research in Namibia has been instrumental in building knowledge of the vulnerability of soil microbes to climate change.” – Nelly Kadagi

“Although soil microbes are vital for key ecological processes, this below-ground world is often overlooked. Namibia’s charismatic wildlife has led to strong domestic and international conservation programs. In contrast, as is characteristic in dryland systems such as Namibia, soils have been largely dismissed as barren and devoid of life. As a result, we know very little about microbial diversity, particularly in hyper-arid deserts—making these some of the final frontiers of biological exploration on Earth.

My research focuses on the role of soil microbiomes in drylands, particularly in the hyper-arid region of the Namib Desert. Plant hummocks in this region exhibit unique microbial taxa and greater functional diversity, suggesting that vegetation influences soil microbiomes. Soil microbes contribute significantly to positive conservation outcomes by contributing to critical ecosystem processes needed to maintain ecosystem functioning and soil quality and to regulate climate.”

— Elise Nghalipo



Elise Nghalipo studying soil microbes in the Namib Desert.

LOOKING AHEAD

The complexity of today's conservation challenges requires an inclusive and collaborative approach. Strong relationships are essential for sustaining and increasing access to conservation leadership through advanced education and research. Relationships are also integral to the success of one of WWF's most valuable assets: our extensive network of global conservation leaders.

Building upon three decades of success, EFN's five-year strategic framework (available [online](#)) centers on growing the EFN community and expanding fellowships and grants. By activating our alumni community in a coordinated network, we can, at the local and regional levels, identify priorities for science capacity development, co-create programs that effectively address biodiversity and climate priorities, and provide targeted opportunities that more effectively meet communities' needs—all while delivering conservation results in WWF priority places.

We invite you to join us as we look ahead to the next 30 years of EFN with an ambitious plan to scale up efforts to create a more resilient future for people and nature. Together, we will continue to uphold Russell E. Train's vision of a world where local leaders manage their own natural resources, resulting in enduring conservation outcomes and a brighter future for our planet.

WITH GRATITUDE

We are truly grateful for your invaluable role in EFN's 30-year legacy. With your support, we are building a resilient future of conservation leaders working to safeguard people and nature locally, regionally, and globally. *Thank you.*



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Krystal Bedregal Flores studying cacao production in Bolivia.