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2024

YOUR  
GRATITUDE  
REPORT

# ONE DAY FOR WILDLIFE

LOCAL ACTION, GLOBAL IMPACT

**Wilder**  
INSTITUTE



This year's Gratitude Report is about one single day at your Wilder Institute. **Everything you read here happened because of you.**

# You are part of something special

Dear friend,

Some days stand out. Not because they're extraordinary on their own, but because they reflect something bigger. At the Wilder Institute, every day is part of a larger story: one of hope, resilience, and the power of collective action to protect wildlife and wild places.

You are a part of something special. As a Wilder Institute supporter, you help drive impactful conservation efforts both locally and around the world. Your commitment fuels real change for species and ecosystems that need it most.

Each year, our Gratitude Report highlights some of the most inspiring examples of your generosity in action—because your support truly makes a world of difference.

In 2024, you supported critical work around the world. You helped train and equip a new generation of Youth Rangers at the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary in Ghana and supported the release of 6,127 northern leopard frog tadpoles in British Columbia. You provided essential tools for field research and monitoring, and

helped set up camera traps in the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary in Nigeria (which captured images of not one but two Critically Endangered Cross River gorilla silverbacks). And you helped protect a newly recognized species—formerly known as the half-moon hairstreak. Now identified as the curiously isolated hairstreak, this ancient butterfly is found only in Alberta and shaped by 40,000 years of evolutionary history.

This year's Gratitude Report is about one single day at your Wilder Institute: Wednesday, July 31, 2024. We invite you to relive this day with us to see the impact you have on wildlife across the world.

Thank you—we couldn't do it without you!

With gratitude,



**Steven Ross,**  
Chief Development &  
External Relations Officer

# Together for wildlife and people.

DATE → JULY 31, 2024  
LOCATION → ACROSS SIX COUNTRIES

**F**or decades, the Wilder Institute has advanced conservation through science, innovation, and collaboration to conserve threatened species and restore balance between wildlife and human life. In 2024, thanks to generous supporters like you, this work spanned 15 conservation programs across six countries. From releasing head-started burrowing owls in Alberta to protecting one of the last remaining hippo populations in Ghana, these efforts reflect a shared belief that conservation works—and that together, we can create lasting change.

**On July 31, 2024, critical work for conservation was happening around the world ...**



LOCATION → STRATHMORE, ALBERTA

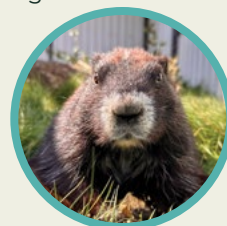
## The ABC's

Conservation breeding and head-starting efforts for burrowing owls, Vancouver Island marmots, northern leopard frogs and whooping cranes take place at the Archibald Biodiversity Centre (ABC), located just outside rural Strathmore, Alberta. The remoteness of the facility minimizes the exposure of these species to people, increasing the chances for them to survive and breed in the wild.

This year's head-started cohort of burrowing owlets is settling into life at the ABC. After receiving full health exams earlier this week—including West Nile vaccines, bloodwork, and coloured leg bands for ID—today they're exploring their overwinter home and adjusting to their new surroundings.



Seventeen Vancouver Island marmot pups were born at the ABC this spring. The pups are now busy learning from their parents, exploring their habitat, and enjoying a diet of greens, branches, and the occasional flower as they grow stronger each day.



The whooping cranes are getting comfortable in their fresh summer digs! This new summer habitat boasts a sloped pool, perfect for their wading and foraging needs. There is also opaque netting along the perimeter fencing to offer some privacy for nesting pairs.



# World Ranger Day on Mt. Kenya

LOCATION → RAGATI-CHEHE FOREST, MT. KENYA AND NAIROBI, KENYA



**T**oday, July 31, is World Ranger Day—a global moment to honour the dedication and bravery of rangers who protect the planet's most vulnerable ecosystems. In Kenya, these guardians of the wild are on the frontlines of conservation, and today, their work is especially visible in the Ragati-Chehe Forest of Mt. Kenya.

Patrols set out early, boots crunching along forest trails. Camera traps are checked, tracks are noted, and signs of illegal activity are recorded. At the heart of this effort is the Mountain Bongo Security Site, officially established earlier this year.

This remote base—equipped with solar power, water storage, and accommodations—has become a vital hub for this work. It allows rangers from the Kenya Forest Service, Kenya Wildlife Service, and community scouts to stay longer in the field, covering

more ground in their mission to protect the Critically Endangered mountain bongo, of which fewer than 80 remain in the wild. The site also plays a key role in preparing for the species' future reintroduction into this historic range.

Just beyond the forest edge, students in 22 schools are part of something special. Through Wildlife Nature Conservation Clubs, they're learning about the mountain bongo and the ecosystems they call home. These clubs, supported by the Kenya Mountain Bongo Partnership, blend science, storytelling, and hands-on conservation, nurturing the next generation of environmental stewards.

As the sun sets over Mt. Kenya, the spotlight shifts to Nairobi. At the Muthaiga Country Club, Donna Sheppard, Conservation Program Manager, takes the stage. Based in Kenya, Donna leads the Kenya Mountain Bongo Partnership's field-



based conservation efforts. Her talk, *Reviving a Forest Flagship Species*, shares stories from the field, insights from traditional ecological knowledge, and the power of community-driven conservation. It's a moment to reflect, to connect, and to inspire.

Today isn't a milestone day—but it's a meaningful one. A day of quiet progress, shared purpose, and unwavering commitment to a wilder future.

*"To reintroduce the mountain bongo to their former ranges in Kenya, we will have to go very slowly. First releasing a few individuals into a likely habitat. If we're able to all come together and have one vision for it, with an understanding of how this can happen gradually, then we can hope to be successful with a reintroduction."*

**Donna Sheppard**, Conservation Program Manager



# Marmot Meadows

LOCATION → VANCOUVER ISLAND,  
BRITISH COLUMBIA



In the stillness of a high alpine meadow, the Vancouver Island marmot field team fans out across the slope, eyes scanning the terrain for signs of life. The morning begins like many others this summer—with boots on rocky trails, gear slung over shoulders, and quiet hope tucked into every step.

Today, the team is searching for evidence of natal burrows—ones that, based on past data and expert knowledge of the colony, may be used again this year for giving birth and raising pups. They look for subtle clues: fresh soil at the entrance, a cleared path, the absence of spider webs. These signs suggest something might be stirring below.

Vancouver Island marmots are Canada's most endangered mammal. Each pup spotted is more than a data point—it's a symbol of progress. So far this season, four litters have been confirmed across the team's seven study sites. The pups are cautious,

secretive, and quick to disappear at the first sign of movement. But that only makes each sighting more rewarding.

At one site, a pup emerges briefly from the burrow, its mother close behind. The team watches quietly, noting the behaviour, the location, the moment. It's a small glimpse into a fragile world, and a reminder of why this work matters.

Each pup helps refine population estimates and informs recovery strategies. It's part of a long-term effort to bring this species back from the brink: one burrow, one pup, one field day at a time.

Alongside marmot monitoring, the team also collects alpine plants for an exciting new collaboration with the Toronto Zoo. Fourteen species known to be part of the marmot's wild diet are being analyzed for their nutritional content—insights that could help improve care for marmots living under human care.

As the sun dips behind the ridgeline, the team begins the hike out. The



meadow is quiet again, but it's not empty. Somewhere beneath the rocks and roots, the next generation of marmots is just beginning to stir.

*“Anyone who has slipped and slogged their way up a mountain slope to survey a marmot meadow would likely agree—the joy of seeing Vancouver Island marmots as they lounge on boulders, munch alpine flowers, or play at the entrance to their burrow is worth every step. That joy is made possible by the dedicated efforts of so many who came together to prevent this species from disappearing. I'm proud to play a part in ensuring their future.”*

**Kelly Swan**, Conservation Research Associate

# A Night on the Prairie

LOCATION → NEAR MEDICINE HAT,  
ALBERTA



As daylight fades, the prairie begins to stir. While most of the world winds down, the burrowing owl field team is just getting started.

Tonight's mission is delicate and deliberate: locate fledgling owlets—both from wild nests and from head-started parents released earlier this spring—and collect the data that will help guide the future of this endangered species. With flashlights in hand and headlamps aglow, the team moves quietly across the grasslands, returning to known burrow sites mapped earlier in the season.

Burrowing owls are small, long-legged grassland birds that nest underground in abandoned burrows. They've been part of Canada's prairie ecosystem for thousands of years, but today, they occupy less than a third of their historical range. In the last four decades, their population in Canada has declined by more than 90%, due to habitat loss, low prey availability, and other pressures.

Through the Wilder Institute's head-starting program, the youngest owlets—those least likely to survive—are brought into human care for the winter, then released the following spring.

This year's head-starting cohort has already been taken into human



care. Tonight, the team is focused on monitoring the remaining fledglings from both wild nests and those raised by head-started parents—tracking their development and collecting data that will inform future conservation strategies. When a fledgling is located, it's gently collected and processed. Under the soft glow of lights, the team records weight, feather length, and body condition. Each owl is fitted with a leg band for future identification.

It's quiet work, done under stars and moonlight. But it's essential. Each measurement contributes to a clearer picture of how burrowing owls are doing in the wild. Each banded fledgling becomes part of a long-term effort to

track survival, movement, and success.

As the night wraps up, the team gathers their equipment and begins the walk back across the prairie. The data collected tonight will help shape decisions in the months ahead—about habitat, head-starting, and how best to support this species on the brink.



*“Every year I look forward to heading out onto the prairie with the field team to start our surveys for wild owls. It's always exciting to see how many nests we find, and to see how many offspring from the previous year's head-started owls have returned.”*

**Graham Dixon-MacCallum**, Conservation Research Population Ecologist

# Laying Groundwork in Sandy Cove

LOCATION → SANDY COVE,  
NEWFOUNDLAND

The wind is steady off the Strait of Belle Isle as Donnell Gasbarrini, Conservation Program Manager (Eastern Canada), steps onto the rocky terrain near Sandy Cove, Newfoundland. She's here with partners from Memorial University of Newfoundland and the Limestone Barrens Species at Risk Recovery Team, on which she serves, to assess a former quarry site—one that will soon become the focus of a major restoration effort.

The limestone barrens are unlike any other ecosystem in Canada. Harsh, exposed, and nutrient-poor, they support a surprising diversity of life, including three endangered plants found nowhere else on Earth: Long's

exploration to biological challenges like invasive species and climate change. Decades of disturbance have left parts of the landscape damaged and overgrown with species that don't belong.

Today's visit is about building partnerships and planning. Donnell and the team walk the site, take notes, and discuss how to re-establish the barren conditions these rare plants need to survive. They talk through logistics: how to remove debris and unusable soil, plans on collecting seeds and clippings to test propagation techniques, and how to prepare the site for future planting.

This is the Wilder Institute's first dedicated priority conservation program for plants—and the first step in a long-term effort to restore one of Canada's most fragile ecosystems. This project is not just about restoring the land but also about reconnecting communities with cultural practices tied to the landscape and building relationships with our new partners who have been working to preserve this incredible ecosystem for more than 20 years. The project hasn't been publicly announced yet, but the groundwork is underway.

Back at the trailhead, Donnell pauses to look out over the limestone flats. The site is quiet now, but the potential is clear. With the right conditions—and the right care—this landscape can support life that exists nowhere else. And that work starts here.

Braya, Fernald's Braya, and the Barrens Willow. Along with these three species, there are seven other plant species-at-risk that have specialized adaptations for life on the limestone barrens. In addition to being globally rare, this ecosystem faces significant threats—from construction, quarrying, and oil



*"I've always been interested in the ability of life to exist under extreme conditions. These plant species are fascinating because of their unique ability to survive in a, by definition, "barren" landscape, where their adaptations enable them to thrive where most species could not even survive. As climate change continues to alter the world, there will be a lot to learn from these species, but first we must ensure that they do not disappear in the meantime."*

**Donnell Gasbarrini, Conservation Program Manager (Eastern Canada)**

## Together for Wildlife

In this year's report, we set out to tell the story of one day at your Wilder Institute: Wednesday, July 31, 2024. Nothing was unusual or different about that day. There were the same species to monitor, data to collect, and relationships to nurture—each one essential to protecting wildlife and wild places.

On any given day, researchers are checking camera trap footage, analyzing field data, and writing scientific papers to inform conservation strategies. Wildlife patrols are out in the field, monitoring habitats and protecting species from threats. Conservationists are working alongside Indigenous knowledge holders and local communities to ensure conservation is inclusive, ethical, and grounded in traditional stewardship.

On any given day, teams at the Archibald Biodiversity Centre are caring for species like burrowing owls, Vancouver Island marmots, and whooping cranes in conservation breeding programs—feeding, monitoring, and preparing them for eventual release into the wild. These efforts help rebuild populations,

support recovery plans, and restore balance to fragile ecosystems.

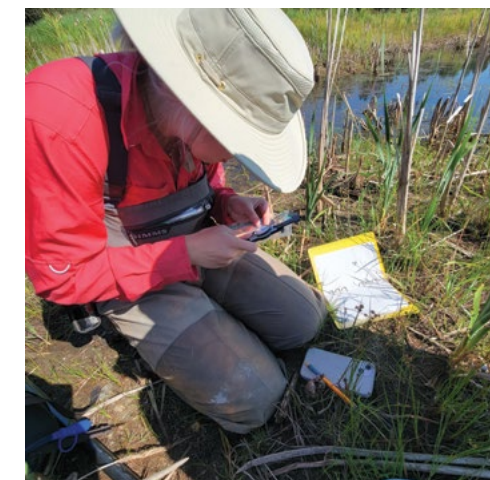
On any given day, women are harvesting shea nuts in Ghana, producing sustainable shea butter that supports both their families and hippo conservation. Beekeepers in Kenya are processing forest honey, creating eco-friendly income while protecting the habitat of the Critically Endangered mountain bongo. In classrooms and community centers, young people are learning about biodiversity and becoming the next generation of conservation leaders.

And on any given day, policies are being shaped, partnerships are being strengthened, and new ideas are taking root—guided by science, driven by collaboration, and made possible by people like you.

While this report focuses on just one moment in time, the impact of your generosity is felt every day. Thank you for making this work possible. Together, a wilder future is within reach.



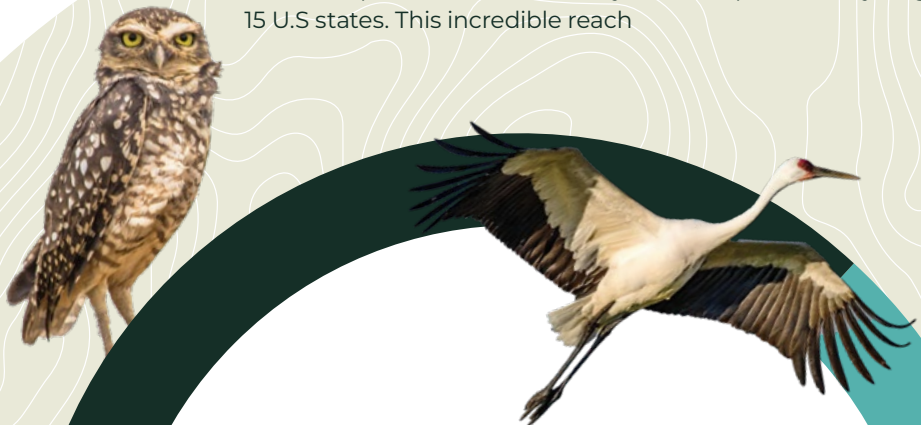
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# Your 2024 Impact

Not only does the work you support span the globe – our supporters do too.

While this report highlights just one ordinary day—July 31—your generosity reflects a much bigger story. In 2024, donors came together from five countries, seven Canadian provinces, one territory, and 15 U.S. states. This incredible reach shows that no matter where you are, your commitment to conservation connects you to a global community working to protect wildlife and wild places every single day.



Together you gave:  
**\$2,424,656**

Conservation Translocations  
**81%**

Greatest Need  
**9%**

Community Conservation  
**5%**

Capital  
**4%**

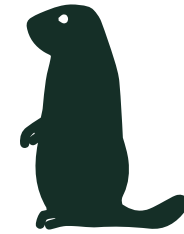
Endowment  
**1%**



Collaborated with partners on  
**15** conservation programs across **6** countries





**17**  
Vancouver Island  
marmot pups born



**6,127**  
Northern leopard frog  
tadpoles released




**2**   
Additional graduate students  
began their studies as part of  
the Cross River Gorilla Initiative

**26**   
Head-started  
burrowing owls  
released

Joined  
conservation  
efforts to support  
the Limestone  
Barrens Ecosystem  
in Newfoundland 

**8**   
Wildlife clubs  
established in forest-  
adjacent primary  
schools at Mt. Kenya

**1,500**   
Seedling nursery established  
for shea production

**190**   
Transects sampled  
for curiously  
isolated hairstreak  
butterflies

**13,457**   
Visitors to the Alberta  
Biodiversity Festival

**600+**   
Staff committed to  
wildlife conservation

**2**   
Cross River gorillas  
spotted on camera traps

**18** Sitatunga spotted during two thermal  
drone biomonitoring sessions



# WAYS TO GIVE

Financial support for the Wilder Institute can be provided in a variety of ways: from annual gifts and WildCare contributions, to donations for special projects and planned gifts. We invite you to review our projects and programs to see what might interest you.

[WILDERINSTITUTE.ORG](https://www.wilderinstitute.org)

For more information, please contact the  
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