

Green wave of lawsuits to protect biodiversity

Global team launches groundbreaking project to secure justice for nature

Lawyers, conservationists, scientists and economists from around the world begin five precedent-setting cases, as part of a green wave of biodiversity litigation seeking justice for nature

Rydal, UK - 28 September 2023 – A global team meets this week to launch CLAW – Conservation Litigation and Wildlife, an ambitious and innovative project with one key mission: to hold those who harm nature accountable for repairing it.

The dynamic and diverse team is building coordinated legal actions for nature on a strategic scale never before attempted, developing cases against wildlife crime offenders in five countries – Cameroon, India, Indonesia, Italy and Liberia.

The project is led by Conservation-Litigation.org, a multidisciplinary network committed to introducing new, creative legal responses to drivers of the world's biodiversity crisis, initially targeting illegal wildlife trafficking and trade. The network develops easy-to-understand legal analyses that identify how offenders can be held legally accountable for remedying harm to nature. The network also supports governments and NGOs in designing and litigating precedent-setting cases in court.

“The laws to remedy nature already exist in many countries,” explains **Dr Jacob Phelps**, from Lancaster University and co-founder of Conservation-Litigation.org. *“Yet they are rarely used to effectively hold offenders to account for the harm they cause. Our work highlights the potential of our laws not only to punish, but to heal.”*

While current legal approaches focus on punishing offenders through monetary fines or imprisonment, this does little to remedy the damages resulting from their actions. Conservation-Litigation.org is introducing additional legal responses that order offenders to take direct action to repair some of the harm caused, such as restoration, care for injured wildlife, public apologies, and community and cultural programmes.

The network is now developing strategic cases around the world.

While case details remain confidential, **Maribel Valero Rodriguez**, co-founder of Conservation-Litigation.org, is confident that the project will deliver tangible results: *“Our analyses show that our cases are supported by a strong legal foundation, and could enable us to transform the proverbial ‘slap-on-the-wrist’ into genuine restorative action that can help to repair the harm offenders cause.”*

The approach is supported by the on-the-ground experience of its network. *“We have been successfully litigating against wildlife criminals for several years,”* adds **Ofir Drori**, founder of the Last Great Ape Organization in Cameroon. *“By uniting our experience with the strategic coordination of the new network, we hope to generate a rising wave of green litigation that has the power to fundamentally shift the global response to the biodiversity crisis.”*

“Strategic litigation has already delivered benefits in several areas of civil society,” stresses **Jenny Desmond** of Liberia Chimpanzee Rescue & Protection. *“Wildlife is under critical threat. It's time we used our laws to protect it.”*

The CLAW project is funded by the UK Government through the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund.

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