

20 YEARS

i Biosphere Expeditions was founded in 1999 and is a citizen science wildlife conservation non-profit first and foremost. We empower ordinary people to make a positive difference to wildlife conservation and research through our international expeditions, working hands-on with wildlife conservation projects across the globe.

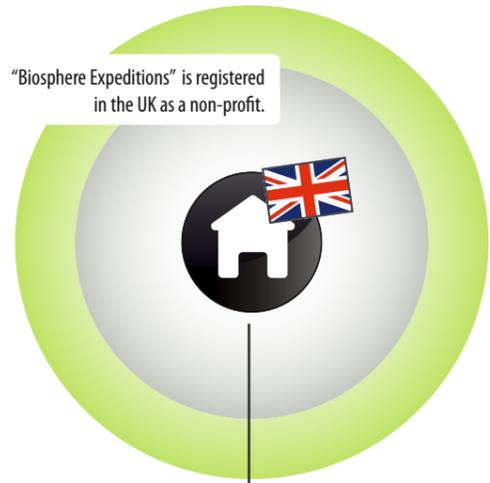
The term 'Biosphere' was coined by Russian scientist Vladimir Vernadsky in 1929 and is defined as 'the part of the Earth's surface and atmosphere occupied by living things'. This encompassing term, we believe, is a fair reflection of our mission. With our citizen science conservation expeditions we hope to make a small but significant difference to our biosphere and at the same time bring enjoyment and fulfilment to our participants. We do not run tours or simple wildlife conservation holidays, but organise real conservation expeditions with genuine conservation aims that produce real results and achievements.

Let's do some travelling, to a period when things were a little different. Imagine the wavy lines as today's scene wobbles away and is replaced by an incomprehensible blur and finally, it's 1999.

Our story begins in the UK, in fact very specifically at the University of Cambridge. In the world of 1999 we called our friends on our phones connected with wires at home and watched presentations that were made on overhead slides. We watched films on VHS cassettes and dialled up the internet (if we had any). The internet was a relatively new invention (1989) and Google had only been launched the year before (it looked useful, but we were not sure quite what for).

Plus people were getting pretty nervous about Y2K or the millennium bug, a computer flaw that was supposed to trigger Armageddon at the turn of the century. We obtained our information from paper newspapers, the TV and magazines. There was mostly decorum in politics and largely decent politicians. And if we wanted to book a flight, we had to ring up or go through a travel agent...

"Biosphere Expeditions" is registered in the UK as a non-profit.



 Expedition to the Peru Amazon starts. Biosphere Expeditions stays involved on and off in the Amazon until 2016. During this time, dams are not built based in part on Biosphere Expeditions' biodiversity studies and impact assessments, local conservationists are trained and find jobs, and a research station is built. Guidelines for boat behaviour at clay licks in the Tambopata Reserve are also incorporated into local management plans.



Partnership with Land Rover starts and lasts for 12 years, supplying cars to expeditions world-wide.



 Umwelt-Online-Award (Environment-Online-Award): German government prize awarded to businesses and organisations with an online presence who have displayed excellence and best practice for the environment.



2001

First-ever expedition to Poland. It lasts two years and plays an active role in saving wolves from being declared legitimate hunting targets in the area. The project also captures and collars the first ever wolf in the Polish Carpathians.



2002

 Expedition to the Ukraine Black Sea coast starts and runs for three years. The expedition studies wolves and birds of the Kinburnska Kosa and leads to the declaration of a national park, protecting an important stop-off point for many migratory birds, as well as a haven for fauna and flora (it boasts amongst other things Europe's biggest orchid field).



Expeditions to Namibia start and run in various locations until 2014. They play a role in the establishment of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, at the time the world's largest wildlife conservation area, spanning five southern African countries. They also play a pivotal role in establishing the country's largest leopard conservation research project, working with local ranchers and resolving human-wildlife conflict, which leads to a significant reduction in big cats killed in the country. A research station is built also.



A very brief history of volunteering

The world of holiday volunteering was in its infancy and free from negative baggage, and nobody had ever heard of citizen science. You could take part in wildlife conservation work with a smallish American charity called Earthwatch for a week or two, but almost all other operations to volunteer abroad were longer-term, designed for students on gap years or people willing to spend a year or two living and working overseas. These opportunities came from the likes of the Peace Corps in the US and Operation Drake and Raleigh in the UK.

What was the thinking behind the development of volunteering abroad? Earlier in the twentieth century, people came together after the two world wars to help repair the damage done – to places and people alike. It was a show of solidarity

amongst and with the people of war-torn areas. As time went on, the Peace Corps in America was set up to demonstrate to people around the world the strength and generosity of the American people (and to fight the spread of the influence of communism). Prince Charles in the UK backed Operation Drake and then Operation Raleigh, both taking younger people abroad to lend helping hands wherever they were thought to be needed.

In the 1990s things were changing and in one room in the University of Cambridge, someone had an idea...

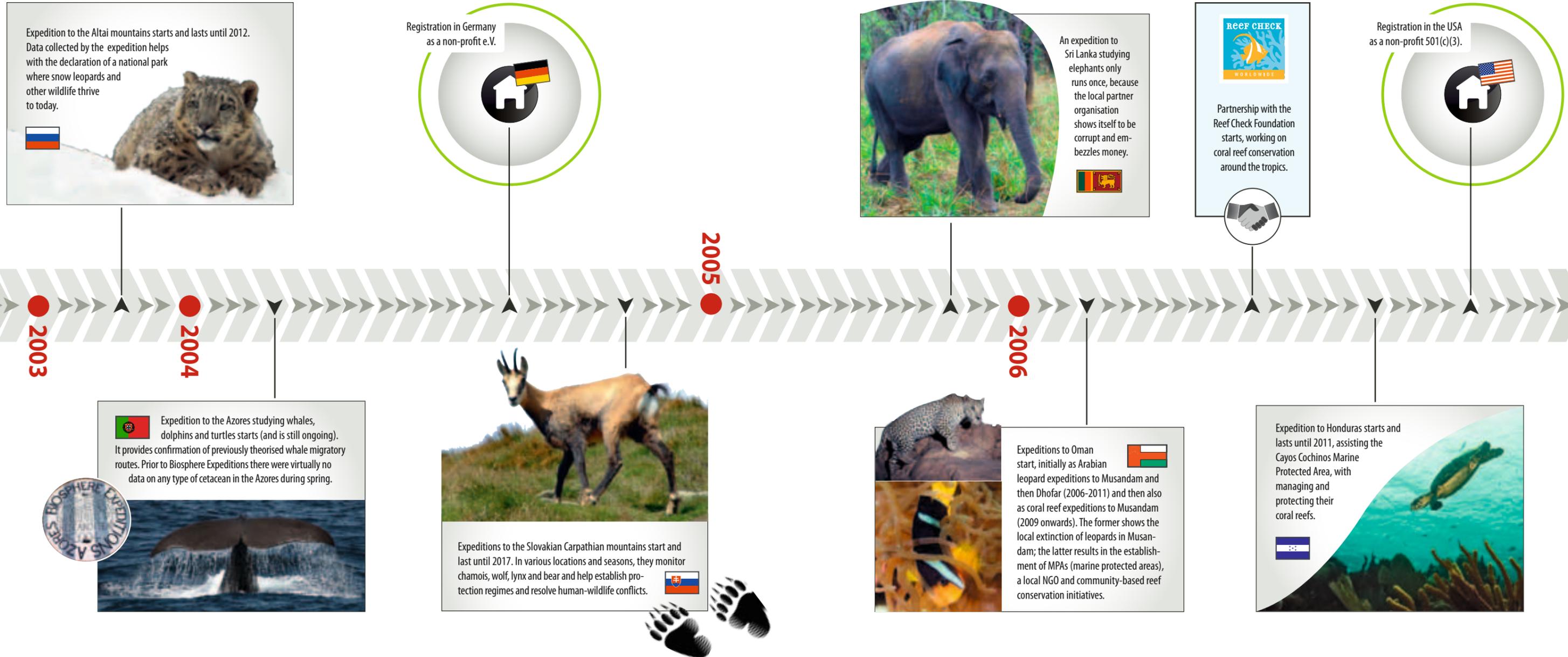
Our creation story and the first expeditions

Biosphere Expeditions started at the turn of the millennium as one of those famous 'in the shower' ideas. Our founder, Matthias Hammer, with a military career behind him, some student expeditions under his belt and disillusioned with the ivory tower mentality of academia, was looking for a way to combine his training as a biologist and military leader, as well as his passion for conservation and the outdoors, with some real-life, hands-on conservation work. Someone suggested 'why don't you take people on expedition with you', an idea that didn't take root until a few days later whilst our founder was in the shower in a particularly contemplative mood – and at that moment the idea of Biosphere Expeditions was born. Actually, he says he pretty much saw it as it is today and that it still gives him goose bumps today to think

about that moment over twenty years ago, his one and only 'eureka' moment.

Matthias was an academic, just finishing his PhD at Cambridge. He brought in Kathy Gill, an economic adviser with a business degree, early whilst setting up Biosphere Expeditions to help with the development of the organisation. It took a year to set up Biosphere Expeditions as a non-profit organisation in the UK and another year to recruit the first expedition team.

The first expedition ran in 2001 to Poland, studying the wolves of the Carpathian Mountains and finding evidence that supported the establishment of a wolf hunting ban. It also captured and collared the first ever wolf of the Carpathian Mountains, so the pattern of real impact and achievements was set



right from the start. With people working on projects like this with direct and demonstrable outcomes, demand was high. Many expeditioners, once bitten by the bug, came back for more, so the expedition portfolio quickly increased to include Peru and the Azores (the latter is still running today) and others quickly followed.

Important partners

In 2005 Biosphere Expeditions extended work and support to projects below the sea surface. The Reef Check Foundation, a California-based worldwide charity, became our first major fellow conservation organisation partner. They had recently published their first five-year report 'Global Coral Reef Crisis – Trends and Solutions' at the World Summit of Sustainable

Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. Based on data collected by thousands of Reef Check volunteer divers in over 80 countries and territories, the report was the first scientific documentation of the dramatic worldwide decline in coral reef health. The report concluded that there was virtually no reef in the world that remained untouched by human impacts, such as overfishing, pollution and climate change. We knew that the Reef Check model was strong and, with a global use for the data, this was the kind of survey work that our citizen scientists would want to get involved with. The partnership continues today with projects in the Maldives, Oman and Malaysia, and was to be the start of partnering with other like-minded conservation organisations.

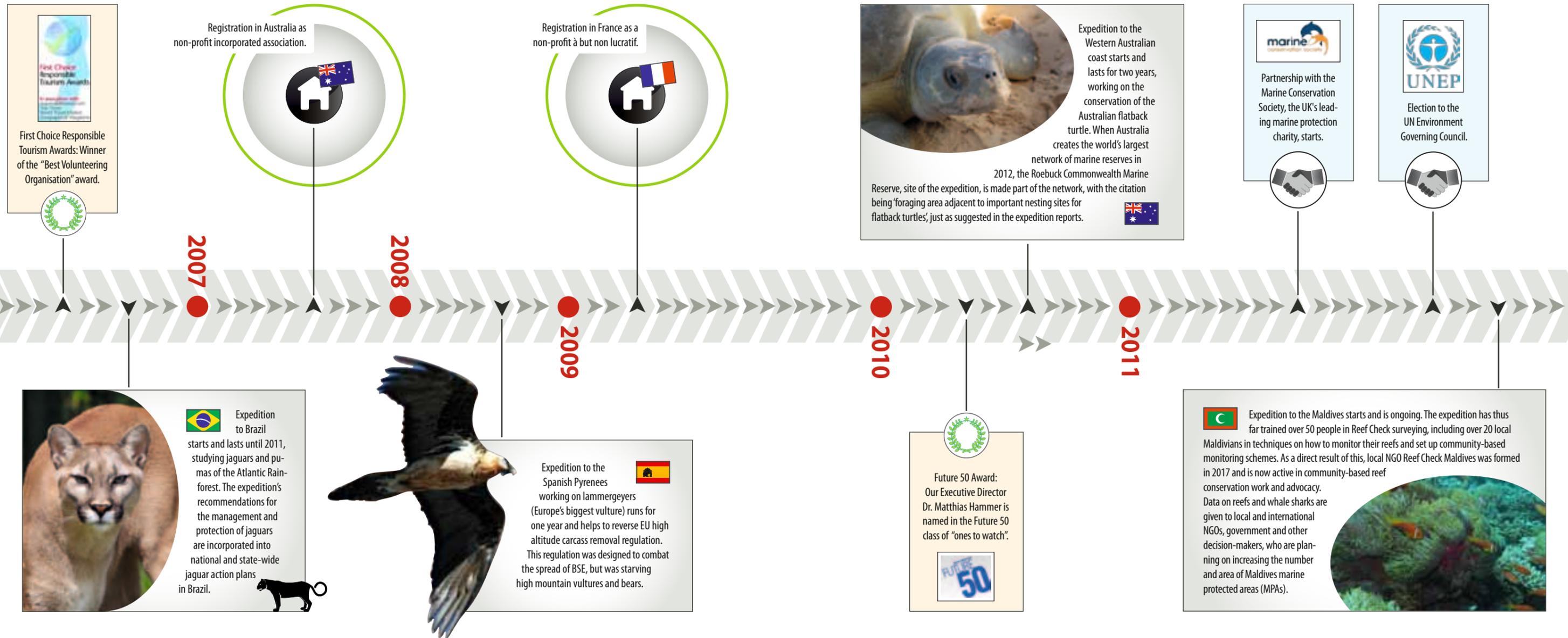
In the wake of our partnership with Reef Check came our next important ally, the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) in 2011.

The MCS is the UK's leading marine charity and one of their key coral experts, Dr. Jean-Luc Solandt, was instrumental in setting up the Maldives expedition and also helped with the reef expedition to Musandam (Oman). Today we work with the MCS on many levels including marine conservation promotion throughout the UK, coral reef surveys and empowering people to become actively engaged in marine conservation.

The NABU (Naturschutzbund = nature conservation alliance) in Germany was next, in 2013. NABU is Germany's biggest conservation organisation, organised along similar lines as the Wildlife Trusts in the UK, with a myriad of projects in Germany, but also some abroad. One of these is a snow leopard project in Kyrgyzstan and when NABU asked Biosphere Expeditions to help with this, another expedition and partnership was born. Nowadays the partnership extends to the wolf pro-

ject in Germany, as well as working on promoting conservation issues in Germany.

A partner of an entirely different nature came early in our history (in 2002) and almost by accident one day on a Royal Geographical Society off-road driving course. A manager from Land Rover, who was sponsoring the course, came over to talk to Matthias and Kathy about a problem that he had. He had a fleet of vehicles that stood idle in Africa for a great part of the year – did we think there was anything that we could do with them? You don't have to ask that sort of question more than once. The Biosphere Expeditions team set about talking to scientists and researchers in Namibia (which is where the vehicles were located) about what use they could make of this resource. One project stood out – a couple of scientists had several big box traps for catching



large cats – cheetahs were their target species – so that the cats could be radio collared for a major research project. The problem that the researchers had was moving the box traps into different positions, something that would require several 4x4s, and they also lacked enough people to do the vital daily checks on the traps once active in the field (so that captured animals would not dehydrate and die in the traps). This was the sort of project that required not only the Land Rovers, but also teams of citizen scientists to check the traps reliably and undertake other crucial parts of the research work. Namibia became the first African project and the beginning of a relationship with Land Rover that lasted over 12 years and led, at its peak, to Biosphere Expeditions running a fleet of over 30 Land Rovers worldwide in support of a myriad of wildlife conservation endeavours.

Accreditations

In 2011 and 2012 Biosphere Expeditions became an officially accredited member of the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Governing Council / Global Ministerial Environment Forum and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). These international bodies are crucial to the future of much of the strategic debate around how to save habitats and species, with a lot of analysis and policy work going on between governments at this level. We are proud to be a part of these key decision-making bodies in the global battle to protect the Earth's natural environments.

Most recently, in 2018, Biosphere Expeditions was elected to the European Citizen Science Association (ECSA). ECSA is a non-profit association with over 200 members set up to encourage

the growth of the citizen science movement in Europe and to enhance the participation of the public in scientific processes. Both ECSA and Biosphere Expeditions believe that framing citizen science as an open and inclusive approach is the way forward in today's interconnected world.

the UK to Ireland in Biosphere Expeditions' very own Brexit in the wake of the fateful and momentous decision taken by the UK electorate on 23 June 2016.

The move to Ireland was reflected in a completely new website in 2018. By now our expeditions portfolio had grown to lucky 13 and the achievements stretched over four continents.

Offices, Brexit, websites and lucky 13

Whilst all this was going on with partners, more expeditions were added, the Friends of Biosphere Expeditions (a society of expedition alumni and other supporters) came into being, awards were won, and the media took a great deal of interest in Biosphere Expeditions. The German office opened in 2002, followed by France in 2004, North America in 2006 and Ireland in 2017. On 1 January 2018 the HQ moved from



Expedition to Arabia starts and is ongoing in partnership with the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (DDCR). Rare Gordon's wildcats and a very rare and elusive sand fox were captured by the expeditions over the years, prompting the reserve to increase research and conservation efforts for these threatened species. Data gathered by the expeditions also showed that the introduction of an apex predator (such as the Arabian wolf or the Arabian leopard) would be beneficial. The UAE government accepted these arguments and the DDCR is now investigating processes and options to make what will be a major showcase conservation success story for Arabia become reality.



Placement programme for local people starts. Since its inception it has hosted over 100 local people (students, local NGO or government employees or committed individuals) on all expeditions across the world. Outcomes are community-based conservation and education programmes, the creation of local conservation NGOs, career changes and employment in conservation jobs gained.



Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards: Highly commended in the category "Best for Protection of Endangered Species".

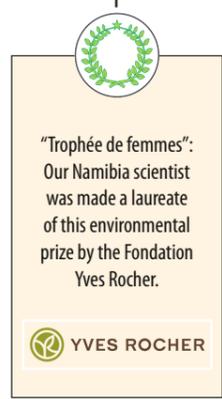


Expedition studying cetaceans on the west coast of Scotland runs for one year. Data gathered are used in local and national Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and to advise the Scottish government on the creation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

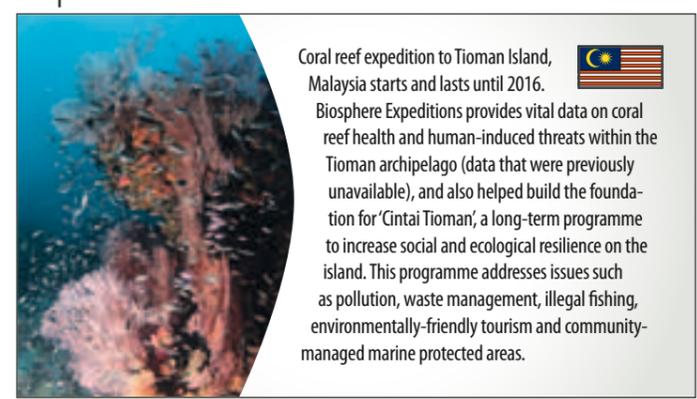


2012

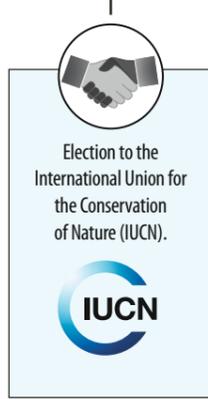
2013



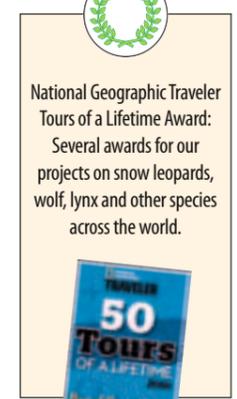
"Trophée de femmes": Our Namibia scientist was made a laureate of this environmental prize by the Fondation Yves Rocher.



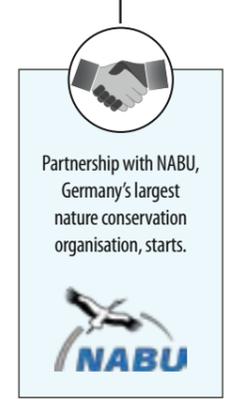
Coral reef expedition to Tioman Island, Malaysia starts and lasts until 2016. Biosphere Expeditions provides vital data on coral reef health and human-induced threats within the Tioman archipelago (data that were previously unavailable), and also helped build the foundation for 'Cintai Tioman', a long-term programme to increase social and ecological resilience on the island. This programme addresses issues such as pollution, waste management, illegal fishing, environmentally-friendly tourism and community-managed marine protected areas.



Election to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



National Geographic Traveler Tours of a Lifetime Award: Several awards for our projects on snow leopards, wolf, lynx and other species across the world.



Partnership with NABU, Germany's largest nature conservation organisation, starts.

Key achievements

So what comes out of all these expeditions and activities in the end? Our achievements pages www.biosphere-expeditions.org/achievements give a detailed overview, but here are just a few key examples:

- Protected area creation on four continents, for example in Southern Africa, Oman, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Australia
- Wildlife and wilderness management and protection success stories in Namibia, Brazil, Honduras, UAE, Spain and Costa Rica
- Prevention of wildlife and wilderness destruction in Peru and Poland
- Over 200,000 hours worked in citizen science wildlife conservation & research

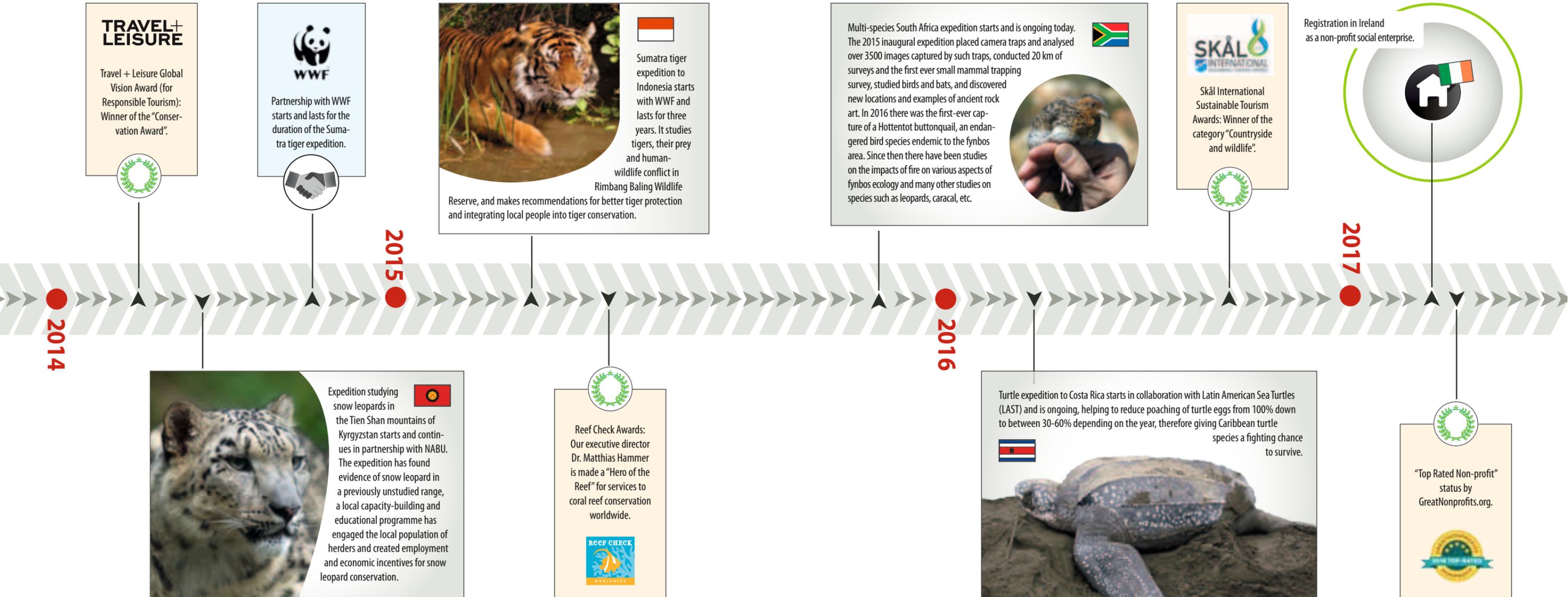
- Over €2.5 million put directly into conservation projects worldwide
- Over €1 million put into local projects and communities as in-kind donations
- Placement programmes set up for local people worldwide
- Through our placement programme for local people and other activities, we have helped build capacity and found local conservation non-governmental organisations (NGOs; for example in Oman and the Maldives)
- We have co-financed field research stations, for example in Namibia and Peru. These research stations are used by research bodies year-round and function as important centres for conservation, providing training and a hub for researchers, as well as employment for the local community.

- We have provided jobs and job training for hundreds of people, some of whom have gone on to careers in conservation. Here is just one example from Peru: *"My name is Aldo Ramirez Mejia. I am 21 years old and from the local community at Lake Sandoval. While I finished my studies in Puerto Maldonado, I worked with the Tambopata Macaw Project studying macaws and claylicks, which is supported by Biosphere Expeditions. Traditionally, my family has fished, farmed and hunted, but thanks to Biosphere Expeditions and its ecotourism and conservation opportunities, I have been able to dedicate my time to my interest with the local wildlife with which I grew up, rather than hunting it. Thank you so much."*



Awards galore; expansion of volunteering and the impact of charlatans

Our conservation work across the globe has won lots of awards such as 'Best Volunteering Organisation' (First Choice Responsible Travel Awards), 'Top Conservation Holiday' (BBC Wildlife, UK), 'Best Holiday for Green-Minded Travellers' (Independent on Sunday, UK), 'Best New Trip' (National Geographic Adventure, USA), 'Top Holiday for Nature' (P.M., Germany), 'Environment Award' (from the German government). The list goes on. These awards have been highly significant in a sector that has ballooned recently. The number of organisations coming into the volunteer holiday arena has been remarkable. Some have developed through a real desire to help do important work around the world, and some have developed purely to make money from the good intentions of travellers. We at Biosphere



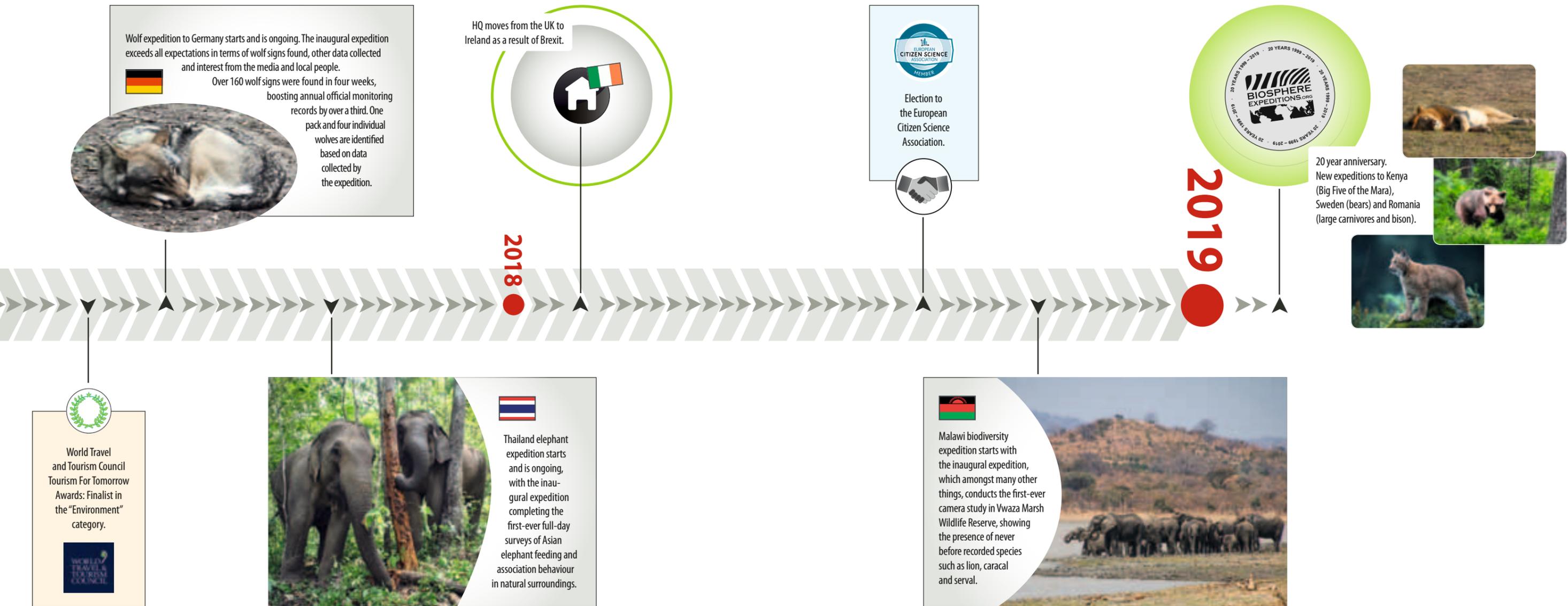
Expeditions have been quite shocked by the number of bad experiences people have had at the hands of businesses who are not trying to do good, but just get rich. These charlatans are not only giving people bad experiences, but they are also removing the chance that these people will do good through their holidays now and also potentially putting them off trying these activities in the future. The general concern about this issue in the industry led a few years ago to attempts by several organisations to create industry standards, codes of conduct, and even quality marks for the volunteer tourism sector. But this is a very diverse area to work in, with many different approaches and different aims. Volunteers go to a multitude of destinations, to help solve problems in so many different ways, from building hospitals, to teaching English, to surveying biodiversity. This huge range of possibilities is dealt with by an equally large range of types of organisations and

ways of running volunteer programmes. Perhaps inevitably, this led to the abandonment of creating 'industry standards' as the task was seen to be impossible. The Biosphere Expeditions response to this was to produce our Top Ten Tips (www.biosphere-expeditions.org/tips), helping potential volunteers to get through the maze of choosing where and how to offer their help by asking the right questions. This has proved a popular approach with considerable media coverage – we hope that this means that we have gone some way to assisting volunteers to help in sound and ethical ways when they go overseas.

Change is upon us – we can be passive or active

In the last few years it has been good to see the environment moving up the agenda, with changing weather systems demonstrating to people how real climate change is. Whilst these weather changes are not good news, we can be hopeful that people around the world are now beginning to understand what the impact could be of doing nothing. Our scientists have been saying each year that the weather is exceptional, breaking normal weather patterns, and now we also hear our participants saying the same thing. We are all, slowly, beginning to feel the problem as it develops – storms and flooding, and hotter, drier summers. It is now more important than ever that we all help to inspire and animate people, support communities, off-set carbon emissions, conserve wildlife and wilderness, and choose goods and services in our daily lives more wisely.

To date Biosphere Expeditions has sent thousands of people into the field and this number continues to grow as the years go by. We are proud to send people from all over the world on expeditions across the globe, making a small but significant contribution to conserving our biosphere. The future is in all of our hands; working with highly committed and motivated expeditioners, scientists and local communities all over the world gives us hope that people can fix the problem that people have created. Together we really can make a difference.



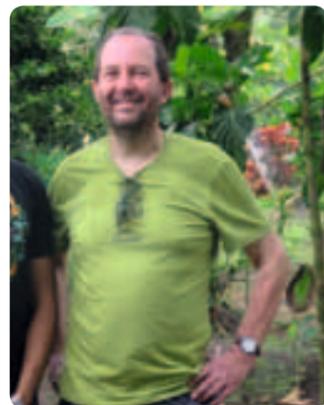
20 YEARS OF ANECDOTES

Biosphere Expeditions is a sum of many parts. It is what it is because of the many people we have met on our 20-year journey. These are partners, scientists, friends, staff and people from around the globe who have joined us in the name of citizen science, and the conservation of wildlife and wilderness. Here are just a few of their stories and memories.



For me, the memories are of people and of hot places. Serious people sitting on verandas, around campfires, on boats, on beaches and in tents – serious people talking and laughing, sharing stories and beliefs, and all of them enjoying their lives while struggling to do good. Passion and humour – a winning formula for life.

Kathy Gill, co-founder and strategy adviser



Greater kudu, springbok, Cape porcupine, lappet-faced vulture (Namibia); Risso's dolphin, common dolphin, Cory's shearwater, blue whale (Azores); hoatzin, pink-footed tarantula, pygmy marmoset, fer-de-lance (Peru); Arabian oryx, sand gazelle, MacQueen's bustard,

Cheesman's gerbil (UAE); Siberian ibex, Menzbie's marmot, large keeled Apollo butterfly, golden eagle (Kyrgyzstan); leatherback turtle, brown-throated three-toed sloth, striped basilisk lizard, bare-throated tiger heron (Costa Rica); leopard tortoise, Cape grysbok, sengi, malachite sunbird (South Africa). Not all spectacular, not all headline-grabbing, but all to be treasured on our fragile planet. I've been fortunate enough to see all of these animals in the wild, thanks to Biosphere Expeditions. I have also had the privilege of working with brilliant, dedicated scientists and met many wonderful local people and fellow citizen scientists from around the world who share my values about the environment and wildlife. I am so grateful to Biosphere Expeditions for providing these opportunities in a safe and satisfying way.

Neil Goodall, citizen scientist



My experience with Biosphere Expeditions started in 2004 in the Peruvian Amazon, where I was doing a PhD on parrots. I had no salary and no big research grant, so Biosphere Expeditions was a godsend: there was a stipend and a legion of assistants, many of whom were older and more qualified than me in terms of wildlife monitoring. Their assistance, insights, help and advice steered me along the path of a successful PhD. More to the point, it was also fun: a shared

adventure. Since 2015 and back in my native South Africa, citizen scientists have been helping me to monitor a range of wildlife on the Blue Hill Nature Reserve. The leopard is one flagship species, but there have been many other highlights from affiliated activities: understanding potential food dynamics of small mammals, capturing the first-ever endangered Hottentot Buttonquail, monitoring bats, honeybush and wildlife in the Karoo. The challenge in South Africa is that nowadays it is extremely difficult to get students who are willing to rough it in the wild to answer biodiversity-related questions. One of the values of Biosphere Expeditions is that we are able to draw on a pool of highly motivated, diverse and talented people that help answer important research questions. I can't thank you all enough for this. Your efforts are critical and much appreciated.

Dr. Alan Lee, expedition scientist Amazonia & South Africa



I came across Biosphere Expeditions in 2004 when joining my first expedition on the Azores. This had such an influence on me that I decided to join many more expeditions afterwards, eventually becoming the President of the Friends of Biosphere Expeditions ...and still have not had enough ;) Well done and all the best to Biosphere Expeditions for the next 20/40/100 years!

Sven Strohschein, President of the Friends of Biosphere Expeditions



I attended the Arabia expedition in 2017. I can clearly remember the day I met the saw-scaled viper. My team mates and I were so excited! I remember the baby oryx that was born the day we arrived, passing by it every day, and trying to detect any change to how it looked. I remember searching for scorpions and star gazing in the heart of the desert while celebrating my birthday. After going home, I longed for the warmth of the campfire and that bunch of people gathered in the middle of nowhere, trying to fix a tiny spot on the planet.

Samar Fahmy, local placement on the Arabia desert expedition 2017



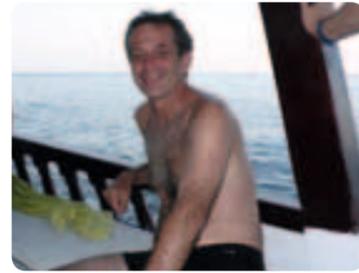
Working as an expedition leader has given me so many magical wildlife experiences. Here's an example: there is nothing quite like being on hatchery duty on the Costa Rica leatherback sea turtle expedition, checking the nests every 20 minutes throughout the night, looking for predators and new hatchlings, fully expecting a stray crab or two and instead seeing the frantic bubbling of the sand, which indicates that a clutch of baby turtles is on its way to the surface. All of a sudden the quiet of the night is filled with excitement as we measure and release a new generation of leatherback sea turtles.

Ida Vincent, expedition leader



Just one of many fabulous memories over many years of attending expeditions is creating a sauna while at base camp on the Altai expedition many moons ago. We made a makeshift sauna by heating up a pile of stones and then borrowing the storage tent. We lifted the tent off the supplies and walked it across to our pile of heated stones; worked like a dream. Next step was to dash to the river and dunk in the nearby pool for the full sauna experience. The water was so cold my breath was stolen from my lungs and I couldn't get out even a squeak! Many congratulations and thank you Biosphere Expeditions. Looking forward to another 20 years.

Georgina Treherne, citizen scientist



Reef Check began collaborating with Biosphere Expeditions in 2006 in Cayos Cochinos, Honduras. Our goals of conservation, research and education were overlapping as was the mechanism of 'immersion learning' and science-based management of ecosystems. We were impressed with the care and detail Biosphere Expeditions staff applied to engaging their participants in the projects. Later, when Dr. Matthias Hammer suggested that we plan an expedition to Oman, I thought he was a crazy big-cat ecologist. I had worked in the Arabian Gulf previously and there was not a lot of exciting reef there. So I was pleasantly surprised to see the good condition of the reefs along the Musandam coast featuring high coverage of living coral, lots of species and interesting fish not found in other parts of the world. Ultimately, this became a three-way partnership with Dr. Jean-Luc Solandt of the Marine Conservation Society who lent his scientific expertise to the expeditions in Oman and the Maldives. Matthias and his staff were able to 'sell' active participation in marine conservation to a niche market of dedicated ecologically-minded individuals. Some of the 'profits' have been used to cover the costs of scholarships for members of the local communities, so that they could participate and also become engaged in a longer-term process of marine conservation. The success of this approach is evident in the establishment of locally managed Reef Check organisations, establishment of Marine Protected Areas and improved conservation in both the Maldives and Oman. So in 2016 we celebrated the 10th year of our collaboration and now the 20th anniversary of Biosphere Expeditions. Congratulations! We look forward to expanding to new coral reef areas and continuing to improve coral reef conservation outcomes.

Dr. Gregor Hodgson,
Reef Check Foundation



I started out as an expedition participant on a couple of expeditions in 2007 and began working for Biosphere Expeditions soon after. There are so many unique experiences gained over the decade since. I remember well one of my early projects: the creation of the 10 year anniversary magazine, which started our annual magazine tradition. And also how nervous I was about leading my first expedition in 2008. Since then, I have been privileged to experience many unique and remote places. I have

worked together with and have met all kinds of interesting people from all over the globe and faced challenges of all sorts. I froze in my steps in the Amazon rainforest at the call of a jaguar nearby, was arrested for a day by the Russian border police during a reconnaissance mission in the Altai mountains, found our Caprivi base camp surrounded by hundreds of buffalo grazing in the morning mist, celebrated a family event in a yurt in the Tien Shan mountains of Kyrgyzstan and was introduced to the shaman of a small village in the Amazon. There are two things all these stories boil down to: people and nature. That's what the most vivid memories are made of. Leading a random bunch of people and seeing them become a true expedition team within days; making friends with local people despite language and other barriers; enjoying the peace and freedom of an early morning out in the desert, the sounds of the rainforest at night or the breathtaking view from my tent pitched in the high mountains. Congratulations Biosphere Expeditions - to a concept and a mission that never fails to inspire me - and so many others too.

Malika Fettak,
Biosphere Expeditions staff member



Standing on one of the ridges of the Alaa-Too range in Kyrgyzstan's Tien Shan mountains gives you goose bumps. Not only because of the stunning views over the shimmering glaciers, but also because this is snow leopard terrain. Accompanying the scientists doing their field work at altitudes of 3500+ metres not just helps you understand why the snow leopard is one of the most endangered cats in the world; it also hammers home why it is so important to protect these beautiful animals. Carry on with your great work, Biosphere Expeditions! And congratulations for your 20th anniversary.

Fabian von Poser, journalist



The Altai expedition was the best thing that happened to me for my career development. I had waited for a long time to get to this part of my country and the expedition gave me the opportunity. Once I saw Chuyskaya Steppe and the great Chikhachova Ridge, I loved them with all my heart, and I became familiar with that place. It set me on a path to start guiding bird-watching tours in that area. I have found the job of my dreams! And I have you to thank Biosphere Expeditions for it!

Elena Shnyder, local placement
on the Altai snow leopard expedition 2012



Many moons ago, in fact it was 2002, I remember a cheetah waking up from sedation in my arms. I was grinning like a Cheshire cat when our scientist let me carry the animal into the shade of a tree for recovery. On the way to the tree, he (I think he was a male) opened his eyes and looked at me somewhat puzzled, too drunk from the sedation to do anything. Our scientist told me not to panic and carry on, so I did, placing him carefully in the shade. I remember him staggering to his feet eventually and attempting a drunken, wavy getaway into the bushes. The memory has stayed with me as one of many.

Matthias Hammer,
executive director and founder



I work at a Biosphere Expeditions research station. My job is to run the station so that citizen scientists from Biosphere Expeditions can concentrate on research work that helps to protect the livestock in our communities and to manage predators. This is my first job and I am very grateful as there is little work in our area. I am also very grateful for the work that the citizen scientists are doing. Since their arrival I haven't lost any cattle to lions and hyenas. My cattle are very important to me and my family. Thank you for your support.

Simon Naha, Biosphere Expeditions staff

I joined the Peru expedition back in 2001 when I was a zoology student at Bristol University. Ever since I can remember, I dreamed of one day visiting the rainforest, so this expedition literally was a dream come true. I remember having to pinch myself as we travelled by boat to our camp on the first day, just to convince myself I really was there! Now, years on from my expedition, I'm working as a researcher and writer for a charity who are at the heart of the wildlife media industry, and I love every minute of it. My expedition with Biosphere Expeditions all those years ago really started everything off, giving me both the inspiration and the experience needed to get into the wonderful and exciting world of wildlife conservation.

Liz Shaw (right), citizen scientist





I wanted take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Biosphere Expeditions for a big contribution to my life. I was recently accepted for a graduate course at Berea College in Kentucky. When writing an essay for the application, I included descriptions of all my social activities on ecology, democracy and human rights. I also mentioned my participation in the Tien Shan expedition and its contribution to the conservation of snow leopards. I was later told that this played a big role in the selection process. So I would like to express my deepest gratitude one more time.

Yrskeldi Emilbekov,
local placement on the Tien Shan
snow leopard expedition 2017



20 years! 20 years of a vision, of involvement and excitement, of creating and implementing projects, of conservation. Congratulations Biosphere Expeditions! And thank you for involving me since 2004. I started as 'Mr. Telemetry' in Namibia, then led expeditions on tracking snow leopards in the Altai; Arabian leopard in Oman; wolf, bear, lynx in Slovakia. Then, starting in 2017, I became the expedition scientist on the Germany wolf project, realising a long-standing dream, proudly supporting official wolf monitoring efforts. My unforgettable moments include the nocturnal sounds of elephants, encounters with wild animals as well as many enthusiastic people. And most enjoyable of all: meeting people again and again on expeditions when they come back – like old friends!

Peter Schuette,
expedition leader and scientist



My first trip (sorry, expedition) was in 2003 to the Altai mountains to survey snow leopards. I returned there ten times and also went to the Tien Shan mountains (for snow leopards again), Scotland (cetaceans), Sumatra (tigers), Slovakia (wolves, bears and lynx), Germany (wolves) and the Azores (whales & dolphins). Every one has had something memorable – ranging from being nearly arrested in the Altai Republic for stall-

ing a Land Rover on a motorway, being stopped by an armed Russian army patrol on a mountain pass in the Altai for possibly smuggling sheep, being searched by another patrol for getting too near the Mongolian border, snowshoeing for the first time in snow a metre deep in Slovakia, wading waist-deep up streams in Sumatra, being on deck for hours in force 8 gales off Skye, winching the expedition leader's 4x4 out of Russian marshes, surveying for wolves on the Luenberg Heath in Saxony with the sound of tank and heavy machine gun fire in the background from a nearby shooting range, to drinking lots of bowls of fermented mare's milk (kumis) in yurts in Kyrgyzstan. I can't say every minute was thoroughly enjoyable (particularly the kumis), but every minute has been worthwhile, for research and for me – truly inspirational. Great stuff Biosphere – keep it up!

Peter Pilbeam, citizen scientist



It was 2006 when I signed up for my Biosphere Expeditions trip. It made me feel ALIVE. So alive in fact that I decided to do a one-year course in Experiential Education and Outdoor Training. Now I organise outdoor summer camps for kids in state care in my native Hungary. It is amazing to see the changes in these children during the time we spend in the forest – how they become more self-confident as they face the challenges provided by nature, and how they become more open as we sit around the evening fire and tell stories under the star-filled sky. I hope I can take many more people – young and adult – to wild places and let them experience their life-changing effects. Just as my first Biosphere Expeditions journey changed my life too.

Laura Balazs, citizen scientist



I first joined Biosphere Expeditions in Musandam (Oman) in 2015 as a local placement and then went to other reef expeditions. This encouraged me to get more involved and help with establishing an NGO (Reef Check Oman) in my country to empower local communities and Omani civil society to protect their own reefs. With the continued support from Biosphere Expeditions I hope that we will soon see Marine Protected Areas established in Oman and the health of our corals and threats to them addressed by our government. Thank you very much for your support Biosphere Expeditions; Reef Check Oman would not exist without it. And congratulations for your 20 year anniversary. I hope there will be many more.

Jenan Anwar Al Asfoor, local placement
and head of Reef Check Oman



Way back in – I think – 2006, I travelled with Matthias and a group of adventurers younger than me into Oman to look for signs of the Arabian leopard. We drove up into a mountainous region where these critically endangered animals were rumoured to live, then started to walk. I say walk, it was more of a scramble as we climbed for what felt like hours up the side of this barren, sun-baked, rock strewn mountain.

I still have nightmares where I hear Matthias' voice calling "Not far now – keep going – you're nearly there!". To my shame after two hours or so, with my leg muscles screaming for mercy, I lay down on a large flat rock and told the rest to carry on and collect me on the way down. After another hour or so the group staggered back to my resting rock – they hadn't seen any signs of the leopards – I on the other hand had discovered a colony of large ants on my rock – which I assumed, given the altitude, were a rare subspecies of Alpine Mountain Ants. In my subsequent nightmares when I wander back to that trip, I'm sure those damned ants were wearing oxygen bottles on their backs. "Keep going Matthias – you're nearly there!"

John Lloyd,
sponsorship manager at Land Rover



I started working with Biosphere Expeditions in 2011 as the expedition scientist for the Maldives expedition to start with and extending to the Musandam project later. During this time we've achieved much: Over 100 divers trained as Reef Check EcoDivers, two community-based NGOs, five Maldivians and two Omanis to the level where they can train others themselves. Some have gone on to start exciting careers in science, consultancies and tourism. We've produced many reports, and offered calls for Marine Protected Areas and other management measures, some of which have been heeded. Perhaps most importantly of all, local people enjoy their training and value our collective contributions to a better understanding of reef health and resilience in the face of multifarious threats. Congratulations to Biosphere Expeditions for all they have achieved in coral reef and other wildlife conservation issues.

Dr. Jean-Luc Solandt,
Marine Conservation Society, UK



I first found out about Biosphere Expeditions while working on a Masters degree and living in Kyrgyzstan. A friend told me that there was a group doing snow leopard research, and that maybe I could jump in and do some of my research on the side. After two seasons of being a placement, I figured I would ask if they had any openings for expedition leaders. Now I have led the Tien Shan expedition two years in a row and have been hired as an assistant professor at a local university here in Kyrgyzstan as a result of the butterfly research I have done in conjunction with the Biosphere Expeditions snow leopard project. So thank you Biosphere Expeditions for having such a big impact on the opportunities I have had since joining as a placement in 2015. Here's to 20 more successful years!

Amadeus De Kastle, local placement
and expedition leader



As I emerged from Windhoek airport one morning in November 2002 to start my first expedition, I could hardly have known that this was going to be one of those moments

in life that would be the start of a significant journey in so many ways. The following 16 years have seen me take part in 14 expeditions encompassing 11 countries and four continents as well as being the first President of the Friends of Biosphere. So many memories crowd in to my mind now, but one stands out particularly. On the very first expedition to the Altai Republic in July 2003 our group discovered a set of fairly fresh snow leopard tracks and I recall staring in awe at them with a feeling of complete exhilaration.

Martyn Roberts, citizen scientist and alumnus President of the Friends of Biosphere Expeditions



So many stories – I could probably write a book! My most unforgettable memory though was jumping into a warm dark Arabian sea, and accidentally stirring up a glistening soup of bioluminescent phytoplankton. Every movement of my limbs, every somersault of my body triggered a spectacular 3D light show of neon-blue iridescence. Below me were shimmering schools of mackerel, their sculptural formations punctured by swift, predatory needle fish creating pure explosions of light. In that moment I was subsumed, existing in another world. Magical!

Catherine Edsell, expedition leader



Although over the years I have been on many expeditions, the one that really sticks in my mind is my first expedition to Slovakia in 2004. I learnt so many new skills in a short space of time, met some amazing people, explored a beautiful part of the world and I never thought I'd enjoy looking for scat so much! I was even given the nickname 'scat girl' as I seemed to have an eagle eye for spotting poo!

Katie Bunting, citizen scientist



A meeting in the middle of somewhere. Or rather in Puerto Maldonado, gateway to the Amazonian rainforest, at a certain date, a

certain time and in a certain hotel. I was excited, because the appointment had a taste of adventure, something like the first meeting between Livingstone and Stanley. It worked and I was on my first project with Biosphere Expeditions, documenting macaws and other rainforest wonders. It was fantastic and persuaded me that theirs was a good concept. Doing serious and important work with enthusiastic volunteers. That was in 2002 and since then I have written many times about various Biosphere Expeditions projects. But I will always remember my first contact.

Peter Laufmann, journalist

More memories and stories at
www.biosphere-expeditions.org/testimonials
www.biosphere-expeditions.org/placements#stories
www.biosphere-expeditions.org/achievements-capacity#jobs