SAFEGUARDING THREATENED SPECIES

2026 Progress Report

As a valued member of WWF's Legacy Circle, thank you for your continued generosity and commitment to creating a lasting impact for generations to come. Your support advances critical scientific research to help recover threatened and endangered species, protect vital wildlife habitats around the world, and address urgent threats posed by illegal wildlife trade.

The following pages highlight some of the species you helped protect in 2025. Thank you for all you do to make this meaningful progress possible.



A wild snow (Panthera uncia) leopard in the mountains of Ladakh in the Indian Himalayas. © Sascha Fonseca

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WWF_Legacy_Report_2026.indd 1 5/7/26 7:58 PM



African elephants (Loxodonta Africana), Chobe National Park, along the Linyanti River, Botswana.
© WWF-US/Alex Rosenberg

AFRICAN ELEPHANTS

Poachers kill more than 20,000 African elephants each year to meet demand for ivory. To help end this devastating practice, WWF launched a consumer awareness campaign in Viet Nam, a major hub for ivory consumption and trafficking, in partnership with government agencies and local organizations. Between January and May 2025, millions of people passing through airports and city centers across the country encountered clear messages about the illegality of buying and trading ivory—and the harm it causes.

The campaign made a real difference. Only 4.3% of travelers who saw the campaign said they would consider buying ivory in the future, compared with 8.1% of those who did not see the campaign.

At the same time, WWF continued working alongside governments and communities in southern Africa to safeguard elephants in the wild. In the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA), WWF supports five countries in managing a connected population of 228,000 African elephants. Ten years of WWF-led research have deepened understanding of how elephants move across this vast landscape—knowledge that helps countries plan land use thoughtfully and keep critical habitats connected.

WWF_Legacy_Report_2026.indd 2 5/7/26 7:58 PM



Mountain Gorilla (Gorilla beringei) silverback in Susa group, Rwanda.
© naturepl.com/Andy Rouse/WWF

MOUNTAIN GORILLAS

In the mist-covered forests of central Africa, mountain gorillas are slowly moving away from the brink of extinction. Over the past 40 years, their numbers have grown from fewer than 650 individuals to more than 1,000, a conservation success made possible through the International Gorilla Conservation Program. As a founding member of the program, WWF has worked alongside partners to protect forest habitats, encourage responsible gorilla tourism, and help communities build a sustainable future for these remarkable animals despite ongoing challenges such as habitat loss, poaching, and climate change.

In May 2025, the program began an important scientific census of mountain gorillas in the Bwindi-Sarambwe ecosystem, one of only two places on Earth where these great apes live in the wild. The census will gather essential information about gorilla numbers, health, and movement patterns. This knowledge will help guide thoughtful, science-based conservation efforts and support the species' continued, fragile recovery for generations to come.

WWF_Legacy_Report_2026.indd 3 5/7/26 7:58 PM



Snow leopard (Panthera uncia). © David Lawson/WWF-UK

SNOW LEOPARDS

Snow leopards are among the world's most elusive animals, and experts estimate that only about 3,400 remain in the wild. For many years, limited information made it difficult to protect them effectively. As climate change and expanding human activity continue to reshape their high-altitude habitats, strong science is essential to addressing threats such as habitat fragmentation, declining prey, and human-wildlife conflict, which can fuel illegal trade.

In 2025, new research strengthened understanding of snow leopard populations and the landscapes they depend on, allowing WWF to work more closely with partners across snow leopard range countries. A major milestone came in Nepal, which released its first robust national population estimate indicating a relatively stable population of 397 animals. This work, including a GPS telemetry study, also improved knowledge of snow leopards' home ranges and cross-border movements.

Building on these findings, WWF has secured commitments from Bhutan, India, and Nepal to advance a shared vision for a 24-million-acre transboundary conservation area that connects critical habitats and supports both wildlife and local communities.

WWF_Legacy_Report_2026.indd 4 5/7/26 7:58 PM



Plains bison in Yellowstone National Park. © Thomas Szajner/WWF-US

BISON

In partnership with Native Nations and local leaders, WWF continued work this year to help restore bison to the Great Plains, supporting a species deeply connected to the land and cultural traditions. Together with eight partner organizations, WWF advanced efforts to reintroduce or expand bison herds by securing and surveying grazing lands, improving infrastructure, and developing science-based management plans.

Among the highlights, WWF supported the removal of 7,000 pounds of barbed wire at Fort Belknap in Montana that posed risks to wildlife, along with the construction of three miles of wildlife-friendly fencing. We also began new partnerships, including work with the Crow Nation Buffalo Program to secure nearly 26,400 acres for year-round grazing of up to 750 bison.

In Colorado, WWF collaborated with the Southern Plains Land Trust to assess a 44,000-acre range and plan for a growing herd of 150 bison. We also marked an important milestone with partners at the Fort Peck Buffalo Program, completing the first transnational transfer of bison from its quarantine program to First Nations in Saskatchewan, Canada, strengthening connections across borders and communities.

WWF_Legacy_Report_2026.indd 5 5/7/26 7:58 PM



Blacktip reef shark (Carcharhinus melanopterus) swimming in reef.
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SHARKS AND RAYS

Across distant oceans, support from WWF donors is helping countries and communities protect sharks and rays, species that play vital roles in healthy marine ecosystems but face growing threats from illegal trade, overfishing, and habitat loss.

In Ecuador, whose waters surround the Galápagos Islands and hold the largest biomass of sharks on the planet, WWF is working to strengthen fisheries management and close pathways for illegal trade. Despite bans on shark fishing, more than 250,000 sharks are taken each year as bycatch and sold through legal loopholes. WWF is supporting practical solutions such as forensic laboratory testing to detect illegal or misreported catch, along with cost-effective tools to improve oversight, including an online shark identification course for inspectors and customs officers. This work contributes to broader collaborations across the Eastern Pacific to protect the "blue corridor," a critical migratory route for ocean wildlife stretching from Chile to Mexico.

WWF_Legacy_Report_2026.indd 6 5/7/26 7:58 PM



Sting ray, nurse shark, and jacks at Hol Chan Marine Reserve in Ambergris caye, Belize.
© Antonio Busiello/WWF-US

In the Western Pacific, WWF is partnering with local communities to ensure enduring futures for marine life. In Fiji's Dreketi River, WWF helped establish a sanctuary in 2023 for endangered shark and ray species such as the scalloped hammerhead. A follow-up study conducted in 2025 is helping the community assess progress and adapt long-term management of this important nursery habitat.



Caribbean Reef Shark (Carcharhinus perezi). Roatan, Bay Islands, Honduras.
© Antonio Busiello/WWF-US

WWF_Legacy_Report_2026.indd 7 5/7/26 7:58 PM



THANK YOU

From the peaks of the Himalayas to the shores of the Pacific, your generosity as a WWF Legacy Circle member makes a truly global impact on wildlife, communities, and our shared future. Your commitment to safeguarding species and habitat has never been more critical—or more deeply appreciated.

Bhutan Mountainside in Paro, Bhutan.
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