

11th World Wilderness Congress

By Heeta Lakhani



ABOVE The Wilderness Leadership School trail, run by the WILD Foundation and on which this African elephant was spotted, is attended by over 70,000 people from all walks of life. The School was founded in 1957 by legendary conservationist Ian Player and Magqubu Ntombela.

FACING PAGE Vance Martin speaks on the Opening Day of WILD10, which culminated in Salamanca, Spain in October 2013, where some 1,500 or more delegates from several countries converged, joined by many thousands more on-line.

on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services report in 2019 suggests that humans are driving one million species to extinction, many within a few short decades. Clearly, we need unprecedented global action to ensure that we leave behind a liveable planet not just for humans, but for all life forms. Unlike most other global policy-driven negotiations and conferences, this collective is organised and run by civil society. It seeks and generates practical policy solutions for current environmental issues.

The 11th World Wilderness Congress has a sharp focus on the tri-junction of biodiversity, economics and climate change, themed around Nature-based Solutions for Life, Livelihoods and Love. Life, because that is what differentiates Earth from all the other planets. Livelihoods, because nature-based solutions can generate dignified right-livelihoods for millions of people across the world. And love, because love is what nurtures relationships... those between a mother and child, between friends and between us and the biosphere that supports us. Love will probably prove to be the strongest short- and long-term motivation to sustain a strong, healthy relationship worth fighting for.

WILD11 will convene between March 19 and 26, 2020 at Jaipur, India, in the colourful land of Rajasthan, a state rich with culture, heritage, tradition and customs. Here, nature is worshipped, water is conserved and humans and animals live in harmony with each other. India has an inherent culture of conserving biodiversity, with practical solutions for harvesting water and a deep-rooted respect for all life forms. WILD11 being convened in India offers the world the opportunity to absorb from this great nation some of the past and present traditions and customs that could well be a roadmap for a future replete with sustainable lifestyle options.

WILD11 is expected to attract between 1,500 and 2,000 delegates from India and overseas. We will all gather at Jaipur's iconic, sprawling B.M. Birla auditorium. This timely global gathering will include youth, women, traditional communities, business heads, as well as policy makers and leading politicians. A Young Environmentalists Programme for 5000+ school children will run concurrently, a first for any WWC. This will enable school children from Rajasthan to mix and match with their counterparts from around India and the world in a true global gathering.

Another important theme will be the focus on Wild Cities. With megalopolises showcasing their astonishing wildness, and more than half the global population now living in cities, learning the value of wilding our urban spaces is likely to be a survival strategy, not a curiosity. There are more special events planned at Jaipur's huge Central Park, adjacent to the Birla Auditorium. This will be open to the public and will exude a festive atmosphere where learning and fun will go hand in hand.

How can YOU be a part of this unique global gathering? It's easy! Visit www.wild11.org/register. Anyone, and we mean anyone, interested in being a part of global solutions to the multi-pronged challenges that lie ahead are welcome to register. Join us! Be a part of the solutions that will reboot human ambitions and place us back on track to survival. 🐾



Heeta is the Executive Director (India) for the 11th World Wilderness Congress. She is a youth climate ambassador, having participated and represented the Indian youth at various United Nations conferences on climate change. She is a firm believer in the power of young people in grassroots as well as international processes and policies.

Bushfires in Australia, floods in Venice, thousands of migratory birds dying in Rajasthan. News that can pull your spirits down on a good day. As a young person, it makes you wonder, am I really going to have a liveable future? Are the kids of today doomed to a dystopian future for no fault of theirs?

What can give us hope in times of despair?

Action, not talk, is what we want. We want to see concrete steps being taken to protect the Earth's biosphere across our planet. It is solutions we seek, not endless manifestations of problems.

The World Wilderness Congress is one such gathering where solutions are born. Magqubu Ntombela, a Zulu Chief, and the great conservationist Ian Player spent years together

in the wilderness of South Africa during the apartheid era. They led the team that saved the white rhino from extinction, but they knew that they needed to do more. Ntombela realised that they needed, in Zulu terms, a great *Indaba* (a gathering of the nation), which Player translated as a World Wilderness Congress, capable of coming up with global solutions. This led to the birth of the 1st World Wilderness Congress in 1977, hosted by South Africa.

The World Wilderness Congress (the longest running, international, public conservation congress), evolved from protecting species to involving the well-being of people and communities, to conserving wilderness across the globe, all designed to guarantee and restore the health of all life on our planet. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform