

Unlocking potential with the IUCN Academy

Expert-led courses are equipping changemakers with the skills, knowledge and networks to tackle today's most pressing environmental challenges

BY ANDREW CATTANACH

In a world where conservation challenges grow more complex by the day, the need for skilled, adaptable and knowledgeable professionals has never been greater. The IUCN Academy is rising to this challenge, offering a dynamic suite of courses designed to equip Members and transform their work in nature conservation – and beyond.

Launched in September 2021, the Academy builds on IUCN's long history of capacity-building work. Director Valérie D'Hoedt Meyer, who previously served as Deputy Director for Executive Education at the Geneva Graduate Institute, saw an opportunity to bring this wealth of activity under one roof.

"The idea was to create a pool of expertise inside IUCN, which would support colleagues when they build their capacity-building activities," D'Hoedt Meyer explains. "And then there was this

awareness of the need for a multidisciplinary approach around nature and biodiversity – and an opportunity to develop a sustainable model around this."

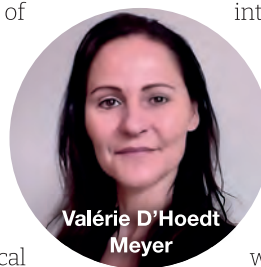
VITAL ROLES

The Academy serves two vital roles: supporting the capacity-building component of IUCN's projects, and developing an evolving portfolio of learning opportunities, ranging from free introductory and specialised courses to comprehensive professional certificates. It collaborates with seven academic partners to ensure courses are informed by the latest research and practical expertise. Beyond serving IUCN Members, the Academy also aims to reach a broader public, sharing knowledge with citizens and decision-makers worldwide.

The selection of courses reflects this ambition, covering topics ranging from emerging areas like nature finance and urban biodiversity to essential skills such as courses on communication, which are about to be released. The structure intentionally blends natural science with economic, social and governance perspectives – a necessity in today's interconnected world.

"Conservation professionals need more than scientific knowledge about nature," D'Hoedt Meyer notes. "They need negotiation skills, an understanding of economics, and the ability to work with diverse stakeholders."

For IUCN Members, the Academy offers more than just education – it's an opportunity to learn from global experts while gaining practical skills applicable to





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ensure voices from smaller NGOs, developing nations and grassroots organisations are part of the learning experience. “Having those perspectives in the room is essential,” D’Hoedt Meyer emphasises. “It keeps the conversation grounded in real-world challenges.”

Capacity building, she believes, is more than an add-on to IUCN’s work – it’s a powerful tool for creating change. Capacity building is not limited to training. The Academy’s introductory courses, for example, serve not only to educate but to help sensitise people to the key issues IUCN engages with, from biodiversity loss to sustainable development.

The Academy’s impact is best understood through the voices of its participants. Genti Kromidha, President of Albania’s Institute for Nature Conservation (INCA), completed the Finance for Nature professional certificate. “It strengthened our capacity to address the nature-finance nexus, helping INCA support businesses in valuing ecosystem services,” he says. “The insights on natural capital and financial drivers of biodiversity loss have been invaluable to our work with local chambers of commerce.” He highlighted

how the course equipped him with practical tools, like the Natural Capital Protocol, that INCA now uses to support businesses in understanding and mitigating their environmental impact.

Ming-chuan Woo, Deputy Director of the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, pursued the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions professional certificate. “It reshaped how we approach our projects,” she explains. “We’re now more focused on balancing ecological goals with economic viability and scalability. The course gave us a clearer framework for designing Nature-based Solutions, and two of my colleagues joined too – creating a real synergy in our team.” This collaborative

approach, enabled by the Academy’s flexible structure, is a recurring theme among participants, with many citing the networking opportunities as equally valuable as the content itself.

Part of what makes the Academy unique is its commitment to fostering a collaborative, diverse learning environment.

D’Hoedt Meyer describes how participants come from all walks of life – from grassroots activists to multinational corporations, and even journalists and economists. This mix helps ensure solutions are practical and reflect a range of perspectives. “When you take one of those professional certificates, we provide half of the knowledge that you gain from the experience,” she says. “The rest comes from the exchanges between participants.”

The Academy’s future is just as ambitious. New, shorter, self-paced courses are in development to meet Member demand for practical, skills-based learning. There’s also an exciting push to incorporate emerging technology. D’Hoedt Meyer mentions the potential of artificial intelligence to personalise learning, adapting content to participants’ styles and cultural contexts. “AI could help make learning more accessible, especially in regions where Western-style training methods aren’t the norm.”

For those seeking to enhance their impact – whether tackling biodiversity loss, developing Nature-based Solutions, or strengthening conservation leadership – the IUCN Academy is an invaluable resource. With flexible learning options, expert-led content, and Member discounts, now is the perfect time to explore what the Academy has to offer.



Genti Kromidha



Ming-chuan Woo

local and international projects. “Each category of Member has the right to a discount on paid courses,” says D’Hoedt Meyer, “with reductions of up to 70% for the category of Indigenous peoples’ organisations.”

FINANCIAL BARRIERS

The Academy’s management also recognises the financial barriers faced by smaller organisations. So, for those unable to commit to long courses, an expanding catalogue of free, self-paced modules covers key topics, from understanding the IUCN Green List of Protected Areas to designing effective ecotourism strategies.

The Academy’s commitment to accessibility extends further through partial scholarships. These are designed to

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