

Main Trainer on Team Management

Jorge Gibbons



Born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Jorge is a biologist who has spent the last two decades training business and nonprofit organizations in the fields of leadership development, conflict management and team effectiveness. Curious and passionate about human behaviour and performance, Jorge has designed and facilitated numerous training projects involving participants at all levels, from senior global leaders to frontline supervisors. As a practitioner of experiential education, his philosophy is that “one cannot think his way into changed behaviour,” but rather one has to “act his way into changed behaviour.” His recent clients include Thomsom Reuters, ExxonMobil, Roche, Biogen, Deutsche Bank, Imerys, Ernst & Young, and Salesforce. Jorge played a key role in a long-term training program to improve the performance of Rewilding Argentina, and has conducted intensive training exercises with conservation organizations in Brazil, Uruguay and Zimbabwe.

Experienced Team Leaders

Astrid Vargas



Astrid brings thirty-five years of experience in biodiversity conservation, community engagement, ecosystem restoration, and Art 4 Action. Her work has made a positive impact on nature restoration initiatives across Europe, North America, South America, and Madagascar. Astrid is a wildlife veterinarian with a Ph.D. in Conservation Biology. She has built and led teams across three continents and spanning multiple countries. Her teams have delivered results through managing the complex, cross-disciplinary relationships between conservation science and research, technical practicalities, local communities and businesses, NGOs and international organisations, as well as local and international political imperatives. Astrid has coordinated International Conservation Action Plans for the recovery of two critically endangered species—the Iberian Lynx in Spain and the black-footed ferret in North America. This involved managing technical teams at the main breeding centres, coordinating efforts among 11 breeding facilities, and implementing National Recovery Plans in the USA, Canada, Spain and Portugal. In Madagascar she helped establish a new protected area in the North of the country. In collaboration with Commonland and local community members, Astrid was key in establishing the ALVELAL initiative—a large scale landscape and community restoration program in Southern Spain. Presently, ALVELAL is considered a beacon initiative in landscape restoration.

Ladis Ndahiriwe



Ladis is the Park Manager for Akagera National Park in Rwanda. He was born and raised in Rwanda, lived in Belgium from 1978 until 1995 and has both Rwandan and Belgian nationality. He is licensed in fuel, diesel and hydraulics engineering and has a Technical Education Diploma. Ladis is one of the most experienced park managers in Central Africa. He gained 28 years of experience in conservation projects as a Field Operation Manager for the European Union in Odzala National Park in Congo, Dja Wildlife Reserve in Cameroon, and Zakouma National Park in Chad, before joining African Parks in 2008 in Garamba National Park in DRC.

He worked in Garamba until 2013, before moving to Akagera National Park as Field Operations Manager, and now Park Manager. While in Akagera, Ladis has helped oversee the reintroduction of lions and Eastern Black rhino, the building of the western perimeter fence, the introduction of high-tech wildlife monitoring systems, and numerous infrastructure projects that have turned Akagera into a world-class conservation and ecotourism destination. Ladis is married and is the father of two sons. His goal is “to continue to build up Akagera as a blueprint for effective conservation management, driving economic benefits locally and nationally”.

Christof Schenck

Executive Director of the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS)



Christof's involvement with FZS began in 1990 as a project manager in Peru's Manú National Park. For research purposes, he lived in the rainforest for several years with his wife Dr. Elke Staib and completed his doctorate on the endangered giant otters. After his doctorate, he became a research associate for FZS in Frankfurt am Main. Later, in 2000 he took over the management of the organization. Christof is convinced that successful conservation cannot happen from a desk. As such, he regularly visits FZS project countries to exchange ideas with international teams and to learn about the developments on the ground. As a biodiversity conservation expert, he developed FZS into an internationally respected conservation organization. Additionally, he significantly increased its international network and professionalized its conservation program. Dr. Schenck also represents FZS in scientific discussions, public events, and the media. As a biologist and conservationist, he is, in his own words, “by nature, an optimist”.

Marisi López



Marisi was born in Corrientes, northern Argentina. She graduated in Public Relations in Buenos Aires and completed postgraduate studies in Environmental Law, Negotiation, and Women Leadership in Conservation at the University of Colorado, USA. In 2005 she joined the Iberá Project team led by The Conservation Land Trust/ Tompkins Conservation (today known as Rewilding Argentina). In this project she played diverse roles over the years that allowed her to gain a comprehensive view of the ecological, social and political territory.

She has led the process of establishing public access and gateways for Iberá and El Impenetrable National Park in the provinces of Corrientes and Chaco. In both processes she has played the main role for Rewilding Argentina regarding Nature Tourism and Institutional Relations, managing relations with the press, NGOs, local groups, and—most important—local, provincial and national authorities. Her role as institutional liaison between Rewilding Argentina and governmental decision-makers has been essential to establish and maintain effective and enduring private-public partnerships.

Marisi is also the Executive Coordinator of the Iberá Committee, an inter-institutional body that designs and implements public policies for the Iberá Park and its ten neighbouring communities, promoting a new restorative economy based on nature tourism. With two decades of continuous work in northern Argentina, Marisi is now dedicated to disseminating the model of Nature Production or *Producción de Naturaleza* created by Rewilding Argentina, using the example of her own province and Iberá Park as inspiration for the rest of Argentina and South America.

Habteyesus Mathewos Tadesse



Habteyesus is an Ethiopian conservationist with 20 years of experience in the field. He comes from a small village near Omo in Ethiopia. Like his father he started to work in the conservation of Omo National Park as a ranger. He worked in organic farming and volunteering on community development project for the pastoralists along the Omo River for 10 years. In 2004 he joined African Parks to work as a ranger before he got his promotion as an assistant field operation and law enforcement manager, when the organization was preparing to manage Omo and Nech Sar national parks in Ethiopia.

During his career development he joined the African Parks Conservation Leadership Programme, which gave him the chance to get practical experience at parks managed by this NGO like Zakouma, Akagera and Majete. In 2007 he got his pilot license and in 2015 he graduated from the Wildlife Management College in South Africa.

He later worked at Gambella National Park in Ethiopia and in Benin in 2017 to act in the position of Infrastructure Manager for Pendjari National Park. From October 2019 he served as Field Operations Manager for W National Park and became the Pendjari National Park Manager since 2022. Habte defines himself as being “fast on communication, understanding the needs, and finding solution”. His vision is “to build the capacity of many young conservationist by sharing his experience to motivate them to look after the last ecosystems in Africa”. For Habte “everything is possible as nothing is impossible to support conservation”.

Mike Phillips

Director of the Turner Endangered Species Fund



Mike has served as the Director of the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) and an advisor to Turner Biodiversity Divisions (TBD) since he established both with Ted Turner and his family in 1997. TESF focuses on endangered species recovery, mostly on land owned by the Turner family, probably the largest private landowners for conservation in the USA.

From 1986–1994, Mike was the Field Coordinator for the Red Wolf Recovery Program. He was also instrumental in the return of gray wolves to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, serving as Project Leader for the wolf restoration effort from its inception until 1997 when he left the National Park Service to establish TESF and TBD. Mike has a B.Sc. in Ecology, Ethology, and Evolution and a M.Sc. in Wildlife Ecology. Mike’s career focuses on imperilled species recovery, integrating private land and conservation, and the socio-political aspects of conservation biology. He’s an experienced public speaker who has also authored or co-authored hundreds of reports and over 65 publications, including peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, government reports, and popular articles.

In parallel to his leadership of TESF and TBD, in 2006 Mike entered the political arena through election to the Montana legislature. During this legislative session, Mike played a critical role in crafting and passing the nation’s most comprehensive law for sequestering CO2 in geological formations. Mike was re-elected to the state House in 2010 and to the state Senate in 2012, where he served until 2020. In the fall of 2009 Mike was recruited by the White House to join a coalition of state legislative leaders to work with the Obama administration and the U.S. Senate in an effort to pass clean energy jobs and climate change legislation.

By design, Mike’s career in conservation biology and politics is an atypical amalgamation of timely innovations based on strategic thinking, risk taking, and decisive and effective action to redress the extinction crisis. By combining work on endangered species recovery, publications that advance the science and policies of restoration ecology, and serving in elected office to advance the usefulness of science and conservation to legislative matters, Mike’s work has responded to the challenge leveled years ago by Dr. E. O. Wilson: *rewave the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us.*

Tim White



Tim is an experienced conservation land manager with almost three decades practicing contemporary land management in Northern Australia. Originating in Far North Queensland, he completed studies in Environmental Science and Environmental Economics and commenced his career working in National Parks. Tim is now leading the national operations and conservation land management programs for AWC as Chief Operations Officer.

Tim's career includes 17 years managing national parks in Far North Queensland and Cape York Peninsula with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. During his time in Cape York in addition to land management programs he implemented a range of significant capital works initiatives that saw the strategic development of remote area housing standards and contemporary use of sustainable power solutions, and the subsequent delivery of housing and operational infrastructure at remote operational bases across the Cape York Region.

Over the last 12 years working for AWC, Tim has coordinated partnerships with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Bullo River Station, and has led key conservation infrastructure projects such as the feral predator-free fence at Mount Zero–Taravale Wildlife Sanctuary which enabled the reintroduction of the endangered Northern Bettong. In 2022, Tim was promoted into the Chief Operations Officer role and joined the Executive Team. One of the key professional and personal focus areas for Tim in his career has been the support and leadership of conservation land management teams in remote areas, and the parallel engagement of communities and other landholders for shared wellbeing of people and conservation endeavours.

Ignacio Jiménez

Course Coordinator and Main Trainer



Ignacio is a Spanish biologist with three decades of experience in conservation. He worked with manatees in Central America, golden-crowned sifakas in Madagascar, and protected areas in El Salvador, Brazil and Uruguay. Between 2005 and 2015 he designed and coordinated the largest reintroduction program in the Americas, with species as the giant anteater, pampas deer, tapir, peccary, green-winged macaw, and jaguar. He spent one year in South Africa in order to learn about how conservation organizations manage and integrate nature reserves, rewilding and ecotourism. Ignacio has designed and coordinated more than 20 training courses on applied and interdisciplinary aspects of biodiversity conservation in 8 countries. He wrote and codirected the 27 minutes "Rewilding Iberá" documentary, and directed and/or wrote dozens of short videos in Argentina, Brazil and Spain. He's also given a TEDx talk and lectures at several universities, including Yale and Duke. His research and conservation efforts have been featured in dozens of scientific journals, books and other publications. In 2022 he organized and coordinated the First Global Meeting for Translocation Practitioners. He's the author of the conservation manual "Effective Conservation: Parks, Rewilding & Local Development" (Island Press), which compiles the ideas taught and learnt in years of intensive courses and actual conservation programs to present within a cohesive framework all major aspects that need to be taken in account in any conservation program. Presently, Ignacio works to establish new protected areas and manages a national communication campaign to promote protected areas in Spain.

