

Assessing the Impact of the BP Conservation Programme

Abstract

The BP Conservation Programme (BPCP) provides multi-disciplinary training and practical experience by supporting student-led priority local conservation projects across the world. In 2005 the Programme set out to make an assessment of the impact that it has had on conservation and capacity development of young conservationists since its formation in 1990. The survey looked at the career paths of BPCP award winners, the proportion of team members still working in a conservation-related field, and considered awardees significant conservation achievements. Results showed that in all teams, the majority of team members have remained working in conservation and that approximately half of those individuals have continued to work in the region or with the species or habitat their project studied. Sustainable conservation activities and achievements, ranging from on-going local monitoring programmes, NGO creation and protected area designation, have been widely realised, thus showing that providing practical opportunities and training develops capacity in individuals over the long-term and leads to conservation benefits.

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Introduction

For the past 15 years the BP Conservation Programme has promoted and supported biodiversity conservation through a sustained innovative partnership between BP and four international conservation organisations: BirdLife International, Fauna and Flora International, Conservation International and the Wildlife Conservation Society. The programme has nurtured the careers of over 2500 young conservationists by providing multi-disciplinary training and supporting practical experience by assisting 278 student-led high-priority local conservation projects in 77 countries around the world with over \$3 million. Past winners have started their own NGOs, influenced policy, protected important sites for biodiversity, discovered species new to science, and influenced the environmental awareness of local communities.

The BPCP was developed in response to the need for additional scientific data on threatened species, and when it was initiated in 1985, the programme focused on sponsoring UK university students to collect biodiversity data overseas during their summer break. Over time, the programme has added new partners and evolved to address changing conservation needs, and has become an international programme supporting teams of undergraduate students, the majority of whom are working in their own countries, to undertake applied biodiversity projects in less developed countries.

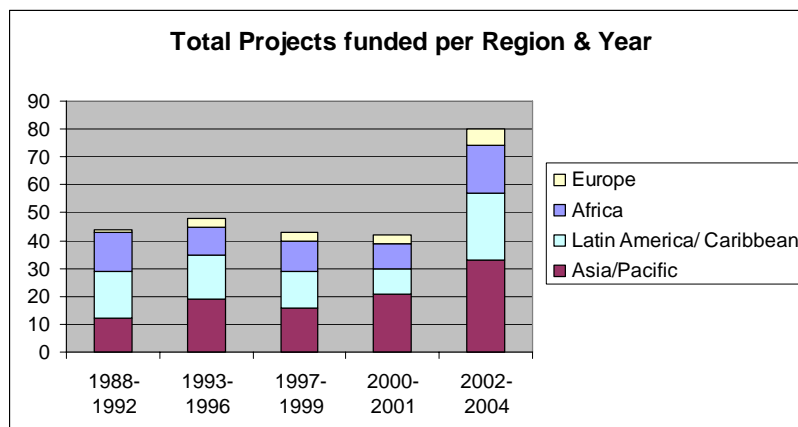
The BPCP has thus come to occupy a unique niche. Research conducted on over 75 well-known conservation grant and fellowship programs around the world indicates that the BPCP is distinctive and unmatched in terms of its scale of support for new conservationists, primarily due to its provision of training, ongoing support, mentoring, and networking opportunities that help awardees take up conservation as a career.

As the Programme prepares to embark on a new 10-year phase of funding, the Programme set out to make an assessment of the impact that it has had on conservation and the capacity development of young conservationists since its formation in 1990 using case studies and survey data from past winners

Background Information on Programme Award Winners

Teams carried out projects focused predominantly on global conservation issues in developing countries in the tropics and subtropics – nations that are important for biodiversity, yet low in capacity. Of the total number of projects supported in the last 15 years, 67% took place in countries where BP is present, and 35% of all winners since 1990 have been specifically in BP focal areas.

Chart 1.



Before 1998, 77% of the projects were by UK-led expeditions; projects led by non-UK teams were made up 14%, while teams working in their own country accounted for the remaining 9%. This UK bias has been reduced dramatically over the past 7 years. Now, projects lead by teams from the project country account for 78% of winners, 11% are led by teams from the

UK, and 11% are led by individuals from other nationalities. All teams had support of local community and government, and had local team members involved in the project.

We are now giving more awards annually than ever before, and the awards are becoming increasingly competitive. Over the past 3 years we've received 1111 applicants from 120 countries; just 8% of those who applied won.

Research Sample

Written questionnaires were sent to past team members from projects carried out between 1990 and 2004. During this period the Programme supported 250 projects in 75 countries. Members (most often the team leader) from 150 of the 250 teams were contacted with questionnaires. Over 50% of team members returned the completed questionnaires, giving us 79 respondents from projects in 37 countries. Information was collected on 535 team members in total. The questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

The survey data provided information on several key areas, including what alumni are working on now, information on ongoing work on the project, conservation impacts, publicity and communications, views on the programme and thoughts on how they could make use of an active alumni network.

The Programme maintains contact with all those past winners for whom we have contact information. Possible sources of error or bias in the results may be accounted for by the fact that the Programme is in contact with past winners who stay in contact with the Programme and continue to be involved. This group may therefore be inclined to report well on the Programme, and have a continued interest in conservation.

Chart 2.

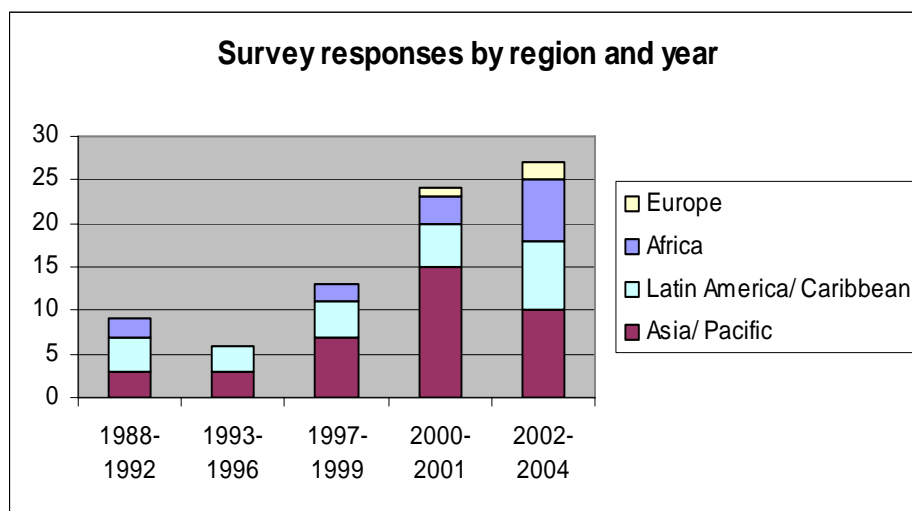


Chart 2 shows the distribution of survey responses. These figures are a fair representation of the proportion of questionnaire respondents to award winners over the 15 year period. The number of surveys returned per year increased noticeably in the last five years as, in these later years, the Programme funded more projects and the more recent teams have stayed in touch.

Team Capacity Development

"The Programme changed my life in a good way. Because of the Sinharaja 97' project I got a chance to get a training at Jersey zoo in channel Islands. Then I was invited to be the master of Ceremony on the 10th BP Conservation ceremony where I met Edward Whitley who directed me to establish ECO-V. Sinharaja 97' also helped me to do mine and Lal's Mphil degrees as the team donated the remaining money for our studies. Therefore I still consider

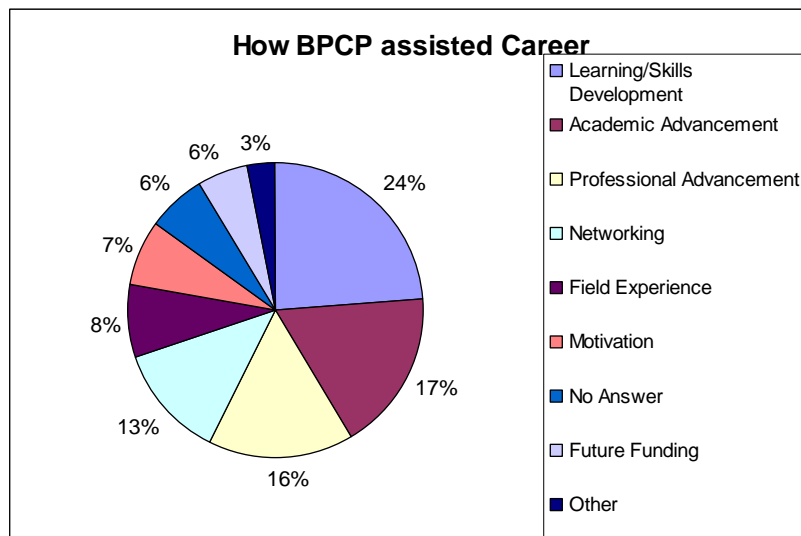
Sinharaja 97' is the turning point in my life where I got many experience in scientific research, leadership training, communicating, report writing etc. " Kanchana Weeracoone Ranasinghe – Sinharaja '97, Sri Lanka

The survey respondents felt the Programme helped them in their careers in a broad variety of ways, as chart 3 (below) shows. Of the eight options offered, skills development, academic and professional advancement were identified as most important, comprising 60% of the total, followed by networking (13%) and fieldwork opportunities (8%).

Alumni now working as professors, NGO directors and coordinators, biologists, researchers and graduate students often credit the BPCP with catalysing their successful careers. Daniel Bennett, now a biologist and publisher, explained: "Ours was a very ambitious project and it was difficult to convince some people we could do it. Winning the BPCP award was a massive boost and we were very grateful for the confidence the Programme had in our ability." Another example is the case of Nora Schulz from Project Andinoherps in Ecuador in 2000, she said; "The programme has given me positive feedback and added confidence and skills for planning large scale projects and seeing them through with determination. I would not be surprised if it also helped me in my applications for subsequent work in science television and my current PhD position."

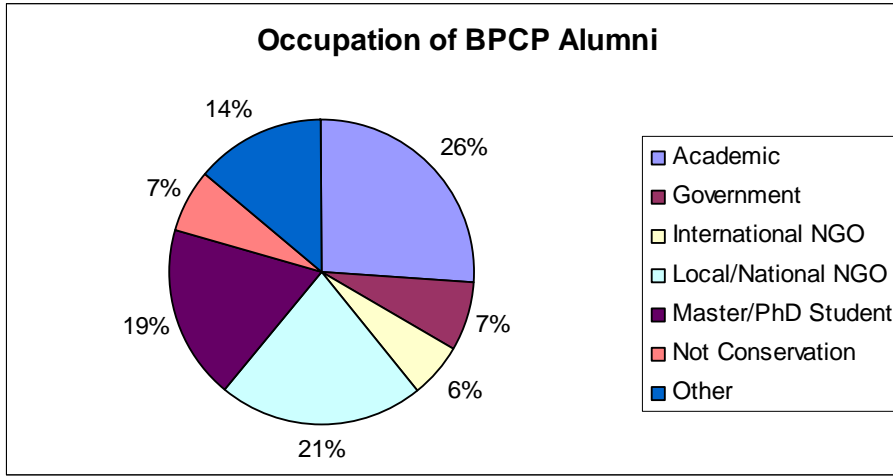
Julia Jones, from Project Sinharajah in Sri Lanka in 1997 and Diadema, New Caledonia 1998 stated that "The BP Conservation Programme has been totally central in my career. It is as simple as that. Everything in my career so far I can trace back to my involvement in two BP award winning projects." It has been a motivational force for many winners and the endorsement of the Programme has, in several cases, contributed towards the securing of further funding for follow-on projects. Ross Macleod, from Proyecto Yungas 2001 in Bolivia said: "It was essential to my successful application for Darwin Initiative funding from the British government which is funding my first post-doctoral position."

Chart 3.



Ninety-three percent of respondents (and their teams) continue to work in the field of conservation and additional analysis showed that 41% of those individuals have continued to work in the project area or with the species or habitat their originally studied by their project. Twelve NGOs have been created over the past 15 years as a direct result of BPCP projects. Chart 4 below shows the different sectors that alumni have moved into. Over 50% of respondents are working in academia (26%) or NGOs (27%).

Chart 4.



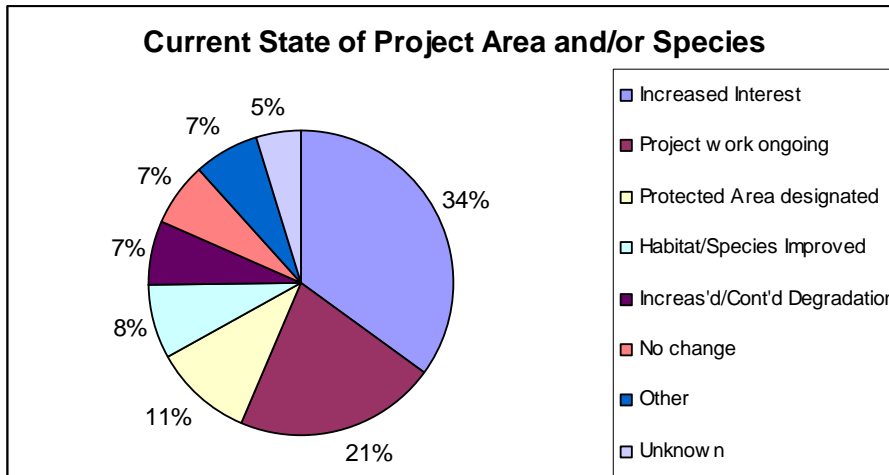
Conservation Impacts

“Twelve years after the project a 2,000-hectare community reserve has been declared and a 73,300-hectare protected forest was established as a result of continuing actions. I am still working in the area and now work with a dedicated group of local biologists from eight NGOs to protect the region.” Rob Williams, Amaluza Project, 1990-1991

According to survey results (Chart 5), in 86% of projects, work has continued in the area where the original project took place – 11% of respondents informed us that a protected area had since been designated in their study site; 8% reported there had been a clear improvement of the status of the species and/or habitat; 34% stated that there had been a definite increase in interest in their work areas as a result of carrying out the BP Conservation project.

Over 90% of all projects managed to complete their project objectives. There have also been a high number of cases where species have been discovered new to science, including more recently several new species of frog from Bolivia and Ecuador, a gecko in New Caledonia and a bat in India. There have also been numerous rediscoveries of species long thought extinct—including the Cerulean Paradise Flycatcher in Indonesia and the Indigo-winged parrot in Colombia. As a result of data that BPCP supported teams have collected, a large number of species have had their global threat status reassessed.

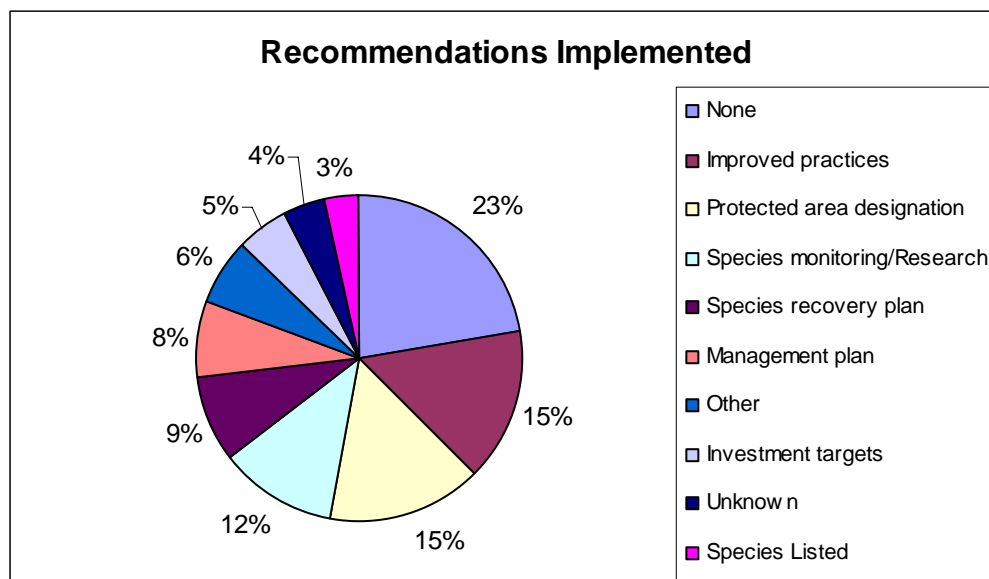
Chart 5.



The most frequently cited achievement of projects supported by the Programme is increased interest in the project area, habitat or species (34%). This category broadly captures various past winner claims that local, national or international actors, both organisational and governmental, have become involved in the project area, habitat or species and that they have done so through a range of investments such as funds, staff and technical support. Ariam Jimenez of Project Rio Maximo (2002) said: "As a result of our project, the area has been designated as the first Cuban Important Bird Area and we support the designation of Río Máximo as one of the six Ramsar sites in Cuba. All these have increased the national and international concern about the area."

Community support and/or involvement in conservation efforts, research and management has also been a significant achievement of many projects. These statements provide an important indicator as to the sustainability of project outcomes. Community actions such as species monitoring programmes and government investment of funds both speak positively of the long term impact and success of projects. One example includes that from Tammy Mildenstein of the BatCount Project in the Philippines (2003). She stated that "Many of the sites we initially visited are now monitored and actively protected by locals that we trained. Additionally, the government department of environment and natural resources has taken our monitoring protocol and added it to their list of objectives, meaning there is now a connected network of bat conservation managers." From all the responses, only two respondents failed to mention community communications or education work they had carried out for their project. Of those continuing work in their project area, 6% stated they were continuing to work to carry out training and environmental education work.

Chart 6.



Following the implementation of projects, teams submitted a final report that included their recommendations for the project area, species or habitat and considerations for future conservation work. In almost a quarter of the cases, no recommendations were applied; however, by far the majority of winners responded that their project findings led to a range of conservation activities being put into practice. The designation of protected areas, adoption of improved practices, creation of species recovery plans and management plans, listing of species and further monitoring, surveying and research activities are evidence of the success and sustainability of many Programme supported projects (See Chart 6 above).

Training

“The training held by the BPCP introduced us to the experts, and this was vital for the post-project work when advice and guidance were needed. Here we had the opportunity to meet and get in touch with other people round the world with similar interests and dreams.” Silvana Burela, Ventania Project, Argentina 2002

Since 1997, one representative from each winning team had the opportunity to attend training workshops either in the UK or USA. The workshop series has developed each year. In 1997 it was a one day event; in 2000 there were five days of workshops and, since 2002 there have been two to three weeks worth of training provided on a range of areas aimed at honing essential skills such as project planning, taxonomic identification and community engagement. Julia Jones (Sinharajah, Sri Lanka 1997; Diadema, New Caledonia 1998) feels that “the opportunity the BPCP opens up for participants is the most important aspect of the programme. This is especially true now that the training workshops bring together so many young conservationists from so many countries leading to life-long friendships and collaborations across national boundaries.”

Chart 7.

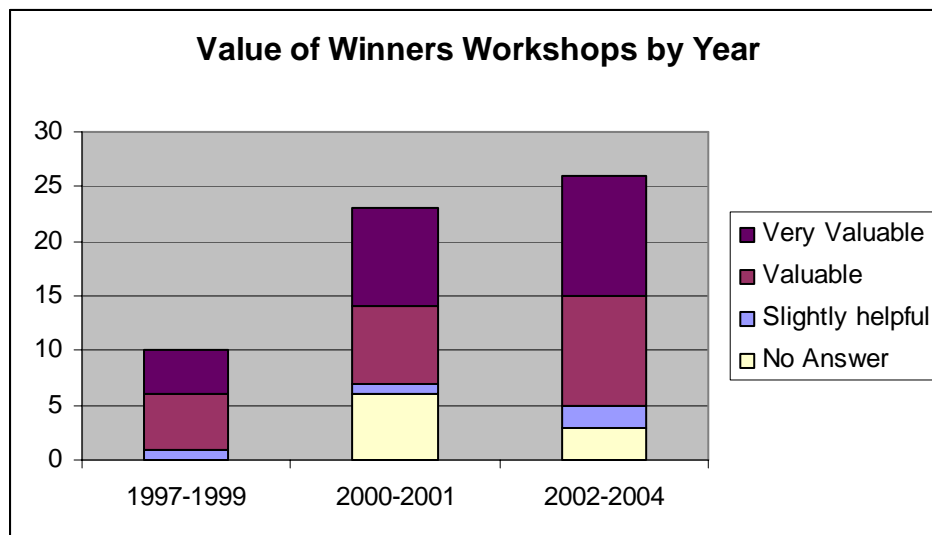


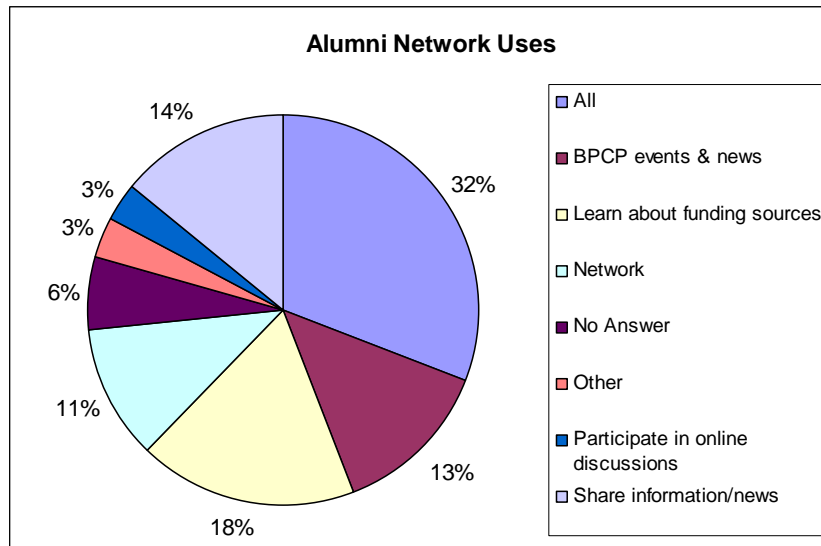
Chart 7 shows that the majority of respondents felt that the training provided was valuable or very valuable. The main reasons stated for this were the opportunities to network with other winners and global experts, as well as skills learnt that could be shared with other team members and used in the projects.

Alumni Network

“The BP Conservation Programme introduced me to a network of scientists and conservationist who later provided the needed literature, technical support and reviewed reports and scientific papers.” Lisa Marie Panguntalan, Project Ixos, Philippines 2001

The “Past Winner’s Network”, created for BP Conservation Programme alumni in 2003, provides increased opportunities both for programme alumni and programme staff. For example, the network allows award winners to stay in touch with one another, share information and news, and learn about funding sources for conservation projects. This network holds huge potential and the aim is to keep previous winners engaged with new opportunities and links in the conservation world. The network will also help programme staff stay on top of current and past projects and monitor ongoing conservation and capacity building impact.

Chart 8.



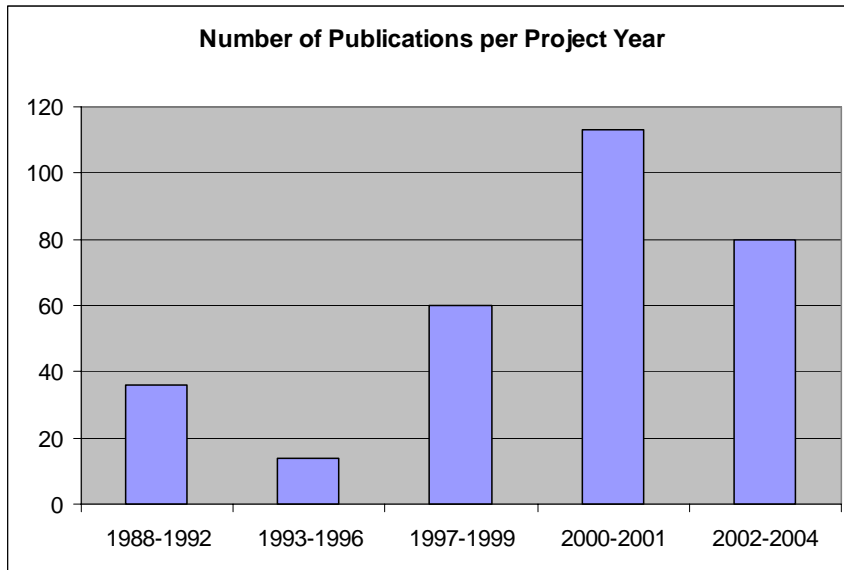
Yu Li Jiang (White-eared Night Heron, China 2002) believes "The Programme offers a good chance to get know other people across the world doing the same kinds of things." The survey asked what past winners would use the network for, and the results are displayed in the Chart 8, above. Many hoped to use it for a broad range of services, including learning about other funding sources, sharing information and news and networking with each other.

Communications

A major way of informing relevant audiences about the BP Conservation Programme has been through winning team's achievements and outreach. The main ways that teams have engaged in communications activities have been through scientific publications, talks given on their projects and through the media. Many of the teams have been very active in this area in order to assist their conservation goals.

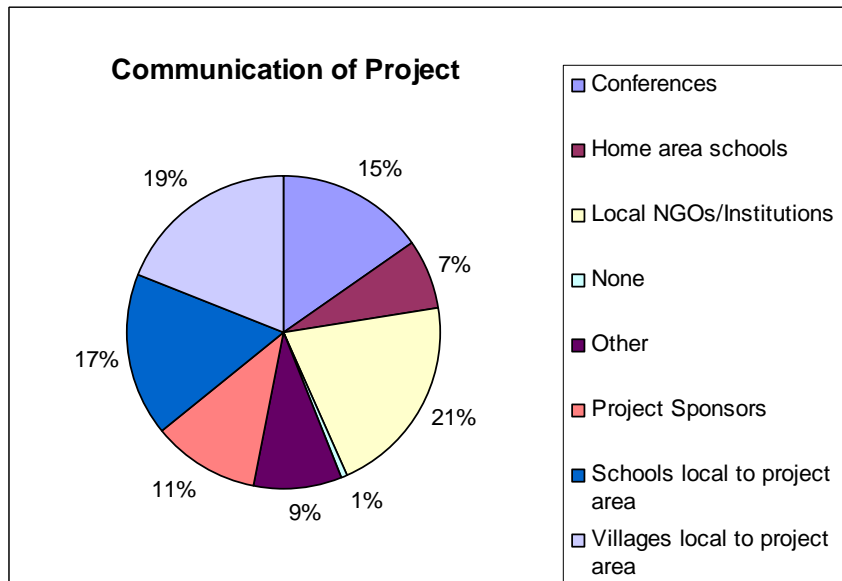
The number of scientific publications related to BPCP supported projects by respondents totalled 303, and 82% of projects responding to the questionnaire have produced at least one publication from their project. This will have increased the credibility of the work the teams completed and enhance the reputation of the authors. It is possible to identify that the scientific credibility of the projects the BPCP supports has been improving over the years through these sorts of publications in peer reviewed journals and more professional final reports where references have been fully consulted and report drafts reviewed. This has also had benefits for the credibility of the Programme itself.

Chart 9.



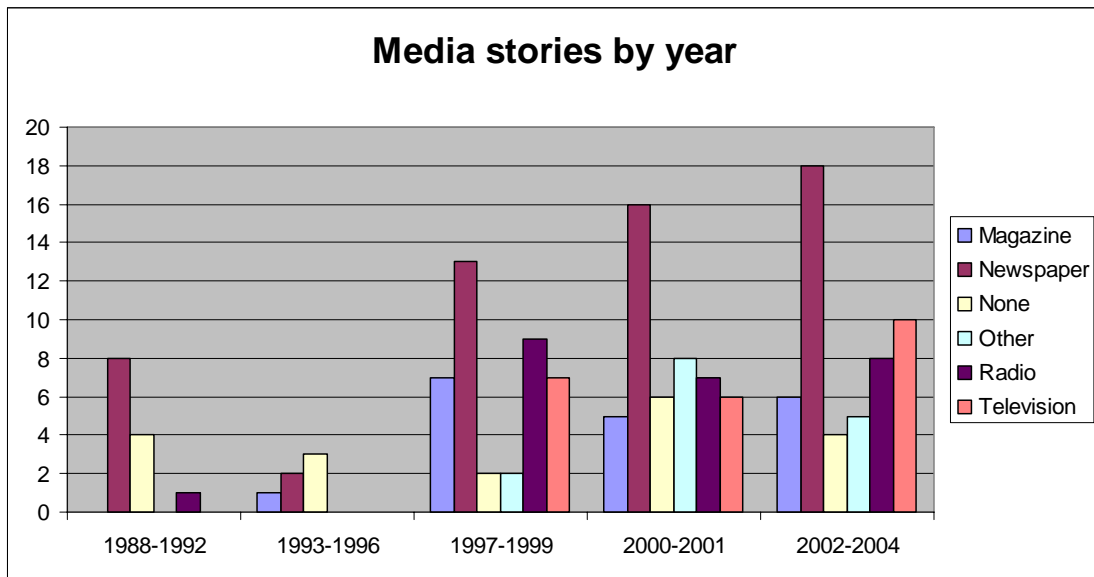
From the sample, 1161 talks have been given by the teams in total on their projects (an average of 10-15 per team) to a range of audiences including to local communities and at conferences (see Chart 10).

Chart 10.



Many teams managed to get media coverage for their projects, as shown in Chart 11 below, and most articles mentioned the BPCP as supporting the project within the text. Much of the newspaper coverage was for stories concerning the discovery or rediscovery of species, or the designation of sites. Past winners felt that the training given to teams on media communications has been very helpful to them in achieving success here.

Chart 11.

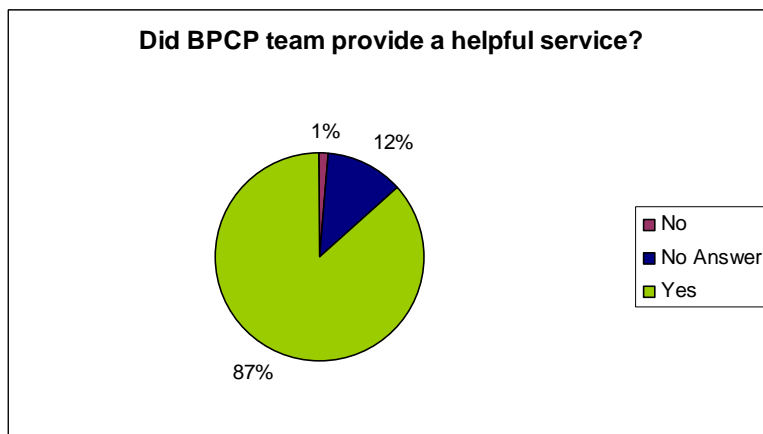


Feedback on the Programme

“The BP Conservation Programme team has been amazingly supportive. In everything from providing notices of other funding opportunities to offering an intensive training workshop to one of our most valuable team members, BP has been there with encouraging support. Sometimes working on these conservation projects in countries where conservation is not generally supported, it can feel like you are up against the world. Having BP’s support and a global network of other BP awardees in contact, it feels like all we are trying to accomplish is not only valued but possible.” Tammy Mildenstein, Batcount 2003.

The Programme as a whole was reported on well by all respondents, and alumni are clearly appreciating the services that the Programme team have to offer. It was clear by responses that as the Programme team has grown and increased its reach that they have been of great support to award winners. There were only three partners and one member of staff working on the programme until 1997, now there are four full time members of staff and five global partners in the programme.

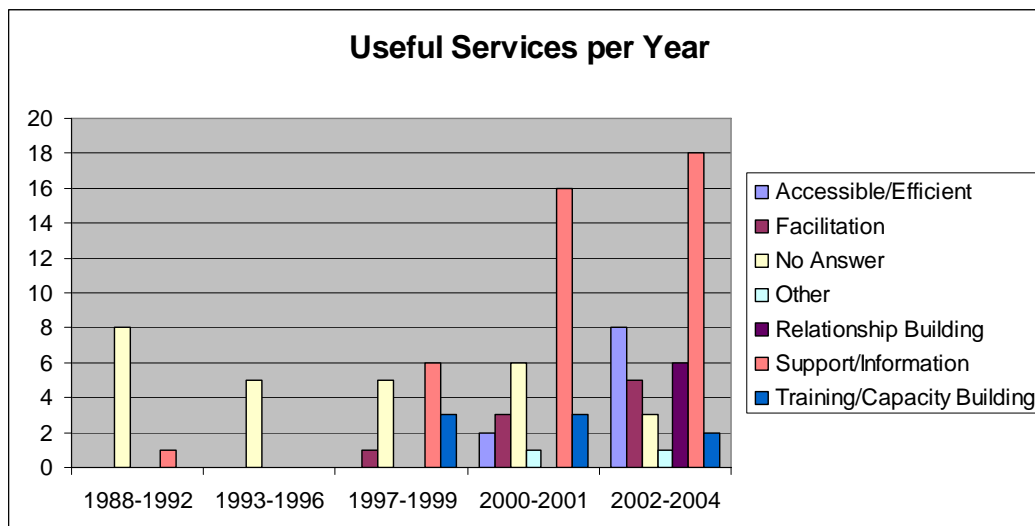
Chart 12.



The overwhelming majority of respondents felt the BPCP team provided a helpful service, and over the years it is clear to see that award winners have recognised an increase in services provided by the team (Chart 13). The main recognised BPCP team services were: providing general support and information, their facilitating role and helping to build useful relationships

for the teams. The majority of respondents commented on how friendly, enthusiastic and willing to help the team was, which made it easier to communicate with them. Several comments and ideas were also included such as ensuring that criteria changes are very clearly communicated, and that because not all team members communicate with the BPCP team (it is invariably the individual who attended the training), many team members may miss out on opportunities that way. We would ensure that all team members' contact details are included certainly on alumni communications etc.

Chart 13.



The following quotes give further general feedback on the programme. They show that being attached to the Programme often gave added credibility to their work, and offered participants a broader long-term understanding of the issues through the opportunity to be involved in a project and develop it from scratch with the support of a network of expertise.

“This was a very ambitious project and it was difficult to convince some people we could do it. Winning the BP award was a massive boost and we were very grateful for the confidence the Programme had in our ability.” Daniel Bennett, Black Volta Project, Ghana 1997

“Experiences like the field work, data analysis, and working within an interdisciplinary group would not have been possible without the opportunity given by BP. These experiences enriched my career. Now I plan to continue studying in this area that we have created from the last two years of work.” Martin Laporta, Karumbe, Uruguay 2002

“We have now managed to get financial support from very different international sources (Foundations, NGOs, Government Departments). None of these had such a impact on our team, especially me, as the BP programme. I had the opportunity to see that things can be done differently.” Zoltan Nagy, Southern & Western Carpathians bat habitats, Romania 2002; Eastern Carpathians & Dobrogea bat habitats, Romania 2003

“The experience and expertise in running and managing a project will look great on my C.V.” Joape Kuruyawa, Fijian Ground Frog, Fiji 2003

“With international support our project was looked at with a very good view, as it increased the credibility of the work being done. The training programs held by the BPCP introduced us to the experts, and this was vital for the post-project work when advice and guidance were needed.” Bandana Aul, Nicobar Bat Project, 2003 & 2004

“It was very useful because it gave us the possibility to begin our career in the conservation arena in a project recognized at national and international levels. It opened doors for us, helped us to find additional funding sources and improved our background through the

conservation course. Additionally, we had the opportunity to gather novel information to be published." *Luis Rivera – Alder Amazon 2003, Argentina*

Conclusion

The questionnaire used the information regarding past winners' current occupation and continued involvement in conservation to assess its impact on capacity development of young conservationists. The majority of team members have remained working in conservation and approximately half of those individuals have continued to work in the region or with the species or habitat their project studied. The highest proportion is in academia, either as lecturers and professors of conservation-related subjects, or as students of Masters and PhD programmes. A third of winners now work for local or international NGO's or within local government. Teams have frequently collected the first essential baseline data in areas overlooked by other scientists, or completed the first action towards significantly reducing a threat to a species or habitat. Recommendations set forward by teams have resulted in sustainable conservation activities and achievements being realised, from on-going local monitoring programmes, NGO creation and protected area designation.

In 15 years of promoting biodiversity conservation, sustaining an innovative partnership, and nurturing the careers of young conservationists all over the world, the BP Conservation Programme can list the creation of NGOs, designation of protected areas, rediscovery of species thought long extinct, discovery of species new to science altogether, and influencing of the environmental awareness of local communities among the conservation successes it has achieved (through support of award winners). The impact it has had on the capacity development of young conservationists is equally significant and shows that the Programme, through its facilitation of practical opportunities and provision of relevant training, has contributed to long-term capacity development and conservation benefits.

Appendix: Questionnaire.

PAST WINNER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please take a few moments to fill out the following survey. This information will be used to evaluate the impacts of the BP Conservation Programme Award. Your insight will be helpful and is appreciated.

Project Information:

Project details

1. Project Title:
Project Dates:
Country:

Personal details

2. Name:
Address:
Current Occupation:
Telephone:
Fax:
Email:
Date of Birth:
3. Are you currently working in the conservation field? Yes No
If no, why?

Team:

4. *Please give details here of the current occupation (if known) of all team members. If any team members have continued to be involved in the environment or development sector (e.g. NGOs, research projects, academic study, etc.) since the project ended, please give details.*

Current Occupation	Further involvement in environment/development (explain)	
1.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
2.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
3.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
4.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
5.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
6.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
7.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
8.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
9.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
10.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
11.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
12.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

13.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
14.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Further work in the project region:

5. What is the current state of the project area and/or species? Do you know of any further developments regarding the habitat and/or species since your project ended?
6. Have any of your project recommendations been acted upon (e.g. management plans, designation of new protected areas, species recovery plans, etc.)? Yes No
If yes, please explain briefly how:
7. Have any of the project members continued their association with the project region/species studied?
Yes No If yes, please provide details:

Publicity:

8. Please provide full citations of any publications resulting from your project. Also, specify and summarise any publications in preparation.
9. Did you give talks/lectures about your project and/or to explain your results to any of the following:

<i>Location</i>	Yes (x)	Number of talks
Schools local to project area	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Villages local to project area	<input type="checkbox"/>	
NGOs/institutions local to project area	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Home area schools (if different—specify here:)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conferences (please specify here:)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Project sponsors (please specify here:)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other (please specify here:)	<input type="checkbox"/>	

10. Did your project receive any other publicity in any of the following:

Location	Please Specify (e.g. newspaper, video, radio etc.)	
Project country:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Home country (if different):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Other country:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

11. Does your project have a website? Yes No If yes, what is the address?

Advice to others:

12. What lessons have you learnt from doing your project and what advice would you give that might be useful to future programme applicants and/or awardees?

BP Conservation Programme:

13. How has the BP Conservation Programme/Award helped you in your career?
(Please describe)
14. If you attended the training workshops before the Award Ceremony, estimate how valuable they were to your project? (Check one) Of no value Slightly helpful Valuable Very valuable
15. Did you find that the BP Conservation Programme team provided a helpful service?
 Yes No Please explain:
16. Do you have any suggestions for improving this service?
17. Would you like to be included on the BP Conservation Programme Alumni Network, meaning your details will be added to the database, you will receive a quarterly newsletter, have the opportunity to be included in online discussions on our forthcoming web forum, and more?
 Yes No
18. How do you see a BPCP alumni network being useful to you? (Check all that apply)
- Stay on top of BPCP events and news
 - Network with other past winners
 - Learn about funding sources for new or continuing projects
 - Participate in online discussions
 - Share information/news about your own projects/regions
 - All of the above
 - Other: (please explain here:)
19. Please list the names and contact details of any other team members who could also be added to the BP alumni network:

Name	Postal address	Email address

Thank you for your help! Please return your completed questionnaire by email, fax or regular mail to:

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