The partnership

In 2016, the MAVA Foundation began to consider how it could ensure its conservation partners might continue to thrive once its funding came to an end in 2022. Amongst the many challenges facing partners, MAVA identified a number of specific needs relating to leadership development, including:

- empower young professionals working in conservation through the provision of leadership development opportunities that unleash potential and enable progression into leadership roles
- strengthen personal and organizational resilience by creating networks for young talent, and enhancing the abilities of senior managers to enable young professionals to grow personally and professionally
- support leaders in conservation to bridge sectoral, generational, geographic, cultural and professional divides, and engage and collaborate effectively with others, whether they be colleagues, funders, companies, citizens, or political leaders, in achieving their goals
- reinforce connections between partners to enable them to support one another after MAVA’s closure
- expose partners to learning techniques like mentoring and coaching to support their leadership development

MAVA launched a competitive process to find the leadership development organizations that could help realize its vision for an intergenerational leadership development programme. The result is a partnership between MAVA, Common Purpose and Mowgli Mentoring, creating a powerful combination of sectoral knowledge, leadership development, and mentoring expertise.

“...To prepare for our closing and to amplify the impact of our work, we decided to invest in leadership development for our partners. We wanted to help build a cadre of conservation leaders equipped to meet the challenges humanity faces now and in the future. We chose to work with Common Purpose and Mowgli Mentoring as leaders in their respective fields.” - Lynda Mansson, Director General, MAVA, Fondation pour la Nature

The need for leadership development

In pursuit of creating a lasting legacy, and securing impact and sustainability for our partners and the wider conservation community, investment in leadership development was clearly critical. With life on Earth itself at risk, the demands and pressures on today’s conservation professionals are huge, and personal resilience and the ability to support others, paramount. That is why we created the MAVA Leaders for Nature Academy. Many people start off in conservation with expert knowledge and a passion for the natural world but as their careers unfold, they often lack access to high-quality leadership development. Through the Academy, we sought to complement our partners’ passion with leadership know-how and emotional intelligence, and, through offering a unique blend of coaching, mentoring, and self-development, to balance a focus on results with recognition of the value of investing in people and relationships.

And responding to the need for intergenerational collaboration highlighted by young professionals from the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, the Academy developed a unique approach through which participants drawn from across our partners learnt from each other in dynamic ‘duos’ of professionals from different generations.

I cannot stress how profound participants of all generations found their experience in the Academy – its impact went well beyond the individual level, transforming whole organizations and boosting conservation impact on the ground. We could not have hoped for more.

Leaders in the conservation and sustainability sectors are at the vanguard of tackling today’s most pressing social and environmental challenges. The need for leadership development that helps them pioneer and deliver the solutions we need is only growing.

It is my sincere hope that whether as a donor, a business, or a conservation organization, you will recognize this need and build on the Academy’s legacy by investing in and nurturing leaders of the future that the world so badly needs.

André Hoffmann, President
MAVA, Fondation pour la Nature

At the heart of the MAVA Foundation’s approach to conservation is a philosophy of collaboration – with and between everyone with a stake in a living planet. When my father, Luc Hoffmann, created the Foundation in 1994, he did so knowing that nothing lasting could be achieved by any single individual or organization acting alone. The challenges then were already too complex.

Critical to effective collaboration, of course, are people. Investing in them, especially in the development of talented, courageous, visionary leaders, is vital for success. Nowhere is this truer than in the conservation and sustainability sectors.

Recent work by the National Geographic Society, the Smithsonian Institution, and Global Wildlife Conservation highlights the need to foster diverse, skilful leaders who are self-aware, adaptable, and innovative, and who are systems thinkers able to deal with uncertainty and rapid change.

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Foreword

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At a glance

The MAVA Leaders for Nature Academy is an intergenerational leadership programme that strengthens the ability of experienced and emerging leaders to collaborate across generations, sectors and cultural divides to find and deliver solutions to environmental challenges. The programme empowers leaders at all levels, enabling them to take ownership of decisions and processes.

- **6** face-to-face and online Academies, in English and French
- **176** leaders (88 ‘duos’ of senior and young professionals)
- **26** countries in West Africa, Switzerland, and the Mediterranean region
- **74%** of young professionals are more confident in approaching senior professionals with their own projects and initiatives
- **82%** of senior professionals are better able to support young professionals in achieving their individual goals
- **86%** are more willing to explore opportunities for collaboration outside their sector

**SPYROS KOTOMATAS**, Senior Marine Conservation Officer, WWF Greece

“The overall experience has been very unique for me. I was very pleasantly surprised by the great ease and naturalness of connecting despite the fact that all meetings were remote. If this happened so easily under such difficult conditions, I think that the potential to connect with and help others in our daily routine life is immense, and this can have a huge impact in bringing change for sustainability.”

**JAMAL HAMZEH**, MAVA “Cultural Landscape” Project Manager, Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL)

“Throughout my Academy year, I have learned to look at the situation from different perspectives and take my time before responding and making decisions, which created diversity in my ideas and further understanding of my colleagues’ points of view. This resulted in better communication and collaboration among us, which was translated into different success stories.”
The Academy brings together conservation professionals from across MAVA’s focal regions – West Africa, the Mediterranean, and Switzerland – in a leadership development programme. Having launched in 2018, its sixth and final cohort will graduate in July 2022. Its unique feature is its intergenerational approach.

Participants apply in pairs, each comprising one younger and one more senior professional from the same organization but with no line management relationship. Each participant is then matched with a fellow participant from another organization in an intergenerational duo, younger with older, and older with younger. Duos then work together through the Academy programme while also engaging individually in separate generation-specific peer groups that provide for their particular support and development needs.

The Academy's year-long leadership development programme combines:

- Online platform for learning resources, and face-to-face gathering preparation
- Opening and closing 360-degree assessments to develop self-awareness
- Leading Beyond Authority module to develop cross-boundary leadership and mentor matching
- Individually coaching for senior professionals to explore individual challenges
- Mentoring between senior and young professionals to achieve their full potential
- Innoventure module to explore rapid innovation approaches and practice intergenerational collaboration

What is Leading Beyond Authority (LBA)?

Many successful leaders learn to lead in roles or circumstances where they have clear authority, budget, and accountability. When they move beyond this – leading peers, partners, and stakeholders – the skills that brought them success may not be sufficient. To operate effectively, they need a different approach to leadership – the ability to Lead Beyond Authority. This means that a leader can adapt to different contexts, seeing the wider picture, taking greater responsibility for the whole rather than just their individual part, and breaking down silos to work across boundaries.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a long-term trust-based relationship between two people where the agenda and direction is set by the mentee. Mentors who are trained act as a sounding board but also as a guide who shares their knowledge and wisdom with no vested interest in their mentees other than to see them grow professionally and personally as individuals. When paired with other leadership development activities, effective mentoring creates a space for deeper exploration, reflection, analysis, and translation of theory into practice, amplifying the effects of learning.
Objectives

For participants & organizations:
• Improve self-awareness and personal resilience to meet the challenges ahead
• Strengthen cross-boundary leadership skills to enable work across sectors, geographies, cultures, generations, and professional disciplines
• Develop mentoring and coaching skills to support effective leadership
• Enable young professionals to develop, grow, and progress in the sector, and encourage senior professionals to create the space for and nurture the next generation of leaders
• Explore generational differences to foster new ideas that take the conservation sector forward

For the sector:
• Build a community in which leaders from different organizations support one another and reinforce each other’s efforts
• Develop a cohort of leaders equipped and inspired to take the conservation sector forward

Outcomes

Compared to other sectors, people working in conservation have relatively little access to high quality leadership development. They have often come into the field because of their expert knowledge and passion for biodiversity and sustainability. Building on their technical skills and academic training by strengthening their leadership, management, and organizational skills can only increase their impact in the sector.

The Academy experience led to profound change for both participants and their organizations that in many cases went beyond initial expectations. It has also created a community across MAVA partners in which alumni support one another and reinforce each other’s efforts.

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Outcomes

83% of young professionals feel better able to contribute to their organization
86% of senior professionals demonstrate good mentoring skills
87% of participants are better able to lead or operate beyond their circle of authority
93% of mentoring relationships continued beyond the Academy year

“The only word I can use to describe it is inspirational.” - Adam Ceesay, Programme Manager, Wetlands International Afrique

“We often say, ‘Alone we go faster but together we go further.’ In my opinion, this quote expresses well the value of mentoring and of the experience of the Academy in general. The meetings and discussions I had with all my young professional comrades are a source of inspiration that can only be capitalized through the positive spirit of a group. Ours fully played its part. Some experiences cannot be told but rather have to be lived. Thank you for everything.” - Djibril Ly, Monitoring Agent, Parc National du Banc d’Arguin

Key outcomes:

- Greater personal impact
- Stronger relationships and more effective teams
- Shifts in organizational strategy and culture
- Cross-sector partnerships
Greater personal impact

Both senior and young professionals who took part in the Academy have reported greater self-confidence and resilience. We anticipated this would be the impact on young professionals but were surprised to see a similar effect on senior professionals too. The powerful combination of mentoring, coaching, and self-reflection, as well as exposure to inspiring speakers, and the thought leadership of ‘Leading Beyond Authority’, encouraged participants to be more ambitious and believe in their ability to bring about positive change.

Felipe Fuentelsaz, Agriculture & Water Coordinator, WWF España

“I improved some of my skills and now I feel more secure in my work and my abilities to negotiate projects and funds. For example, I negotiated a new ten-year project with an important partner so now I have the security of my own project, budget, and team.”

Manel Ben Ismail, Association Director, Notre Grand Bleu

“First, on the personal front, and even with people outside my day-to-day circle of colleagues, I noticed improved abilities to communicate and interact with others in different situations. I achieved work that I am really proud of. With Ahmed, my colleague on the Academy, we came up with a project that won first place at COP 25.”

CASE STUDY: Herculano de Andrade Dinis, Director, Associação Projecto Vitó

Participation in the MAVA Academy came as Herculano’s organization entered a period of rapid growth. This meant he was able to put into practice the mentoring, listening, and influencing skills he had begun to develop at the Academy to build an organization of committed, empowered individuals. Inspired by the stories and struggles of those he met through the Academy, he resolved to seize the many opportunities that came his way, and to try to replicate the successes of others in his new network. This led to many new international partnerships that helped to further Projecto Vitó’s conservation efforts.

Herculano’s success in engaging more widely with many local communities in Cabo Verde has brought economic benefits for some struggling communities, and for greater engagement in Projecto Vitó’s vital conservation work.

His efforts have been recognized by the Cabo Verde Government which conferred the status of Public Utility on Projecto Vitó, and also by the Presidency of the Republic of Cabo Verde, which in October 2021 awarded Projecto Vitó a First Class Merit award for services to conservation over the last three years – the highest recognition an organization can get for its work in Cabo Verde.

“The MAVA Academy gave me these: the capacity to motivate and to empower young professionals; to lead partners beyond authority; to be an influencer and to influence by decision-makers.”

-Herculano de Andrade Dinis, Director, Associação Projecto Vitó

CASE STUDY: Zeljka Rajkovic, Executive Director, and Ivana Selanec, Programme Manager, Biom Association

At the start of the Academy, Biom Association was a growing organization with a number of its management team new to their roles. On joining the Academy, Zeljka recognized that tackling the increasingly complex challenges faced by conservation professionals, and nurturing and supporting staff such as Ivana in new management roles, would require new skills.

During the year-long programme, Zeljka and Ivana developed the skills, behaviours and networks to lead more effectively within their organization. As a result, they have both adapted their own leadership styles. Biom Association’s senior leaders have prioritized leadership development, and new organizational initiatives have emerged, paving the way for a more trusting, open, and collaborative working culture.

Biom Association is now seeking to make mentoring a central part of organizational culture, as well as fundraising to support staff coaching. Zeljka and Ivana’s newfound confidence, awareness, and skills are also having knock-on effects on the wider working culture of Biom Association, and have enabled staff to better navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I now recognize that previously we primarily had an emphasis on the task and outcome of our work, and not on the human and emotional aspects. This renewed focus leads to better results.”

-Zeljka Rajkovic, Executive Director, Biom Association

Stronger relationships and more effective teams

One of the changes that we have seen amongst Academy participants is a recognition of the need to develop the people in their teams rather than simply to focus on the task at hand. By doing this, they have built teams that are both more effective and more resilient. The Academy continued running through the COVID-19 pandemic and many of the participants have reported that its more human-centred approach enabled them to come through this very challenging time more easily.

Daphne Maurogiorgos, Director, ARCHELON

“I’m a biologist, an environmental scientist. I wasn’t educated to manage people or organizations… for me, becoming a better manager, working more effectively with my staff, my volunteers, my trustees, developing as a person, as a human being, this was the most important part.”

Houda El Alaoui, Programme Officer, North Africa, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

“The biggest impact is in team relations, how we are interacting… I am more empathic…and it helps me a lot to interact and understand…it’s been a lot of constructive projects interaction…it’s now becoming a tool for me. It’s very powerful. And it’s great these strong relations that can build great partnership and cooperation.”

As one of the leading nature conservation and civil society organizations in Croatia, Biom Association aims to study and protect the living world, and to raise public understanding of the importance of biodiversity, endangered species and habitats, and sustainable development.
Shifts in organizational strategy and culture

The Academy provided the space for participants to reflect on and rethink their organizational strategy and culture. The insights gained from colleagues and speakers, and the support of coaches and mentors produced real shifts in the way some of their organizations now operate.

Case study: Clive Poulton, Chief Executive Officer, Environmental Sustainability Agency, and Sboniso Phakathi, Programme Manager – Rural Initiatives for a Sustainable Environment, SAWC

Sboniso and Clive found the MAVA Academy transformative on a number of different levels, both personally, in their own leadership, and in how they were able to collaborate in making changes to the culture and priorities of SAWC.

They returned to SAWC with a strong belief that to be more effective within the conservation space, and deliver their projects with greater impact, leadership development needed to be at the heart of the organization. The diverse range of people they met at the Academy, and the opportunity to learn from their broad experience, led them to realize that SAWC needed to change in order to respond to the changing conservation sector.

On their return, they worked closely with their CEO to revise the strategic development plan for the college and make leadership development one of its key pillars. As a result of the changes they were able to implement, SAWC’s business plan has a leadership line item… (and) leadership is embedded in what we do.

They are unequivocal that without their shared experience of the MAVA Academy, they would not have been able to make such an important culture shift at SAWC. Leadership development is now a valuable component of the college’s development strategy, ensuring far greater sustainability in all the projects they deliver across the continent.

Case Study: Gabriel Schwaderer, Executive Director, EuroNatur Foundation and Stefan Ferger, Deputy Head of Conservation, EuroNatur Foundation

Taking part in the MAVA Academy exposed a need that Gabriel and Stefan didn’t know they had when they joined – improving their understanding of different generations. Increased opportunity to develop meaningful relationships and to understand colleagues from different generations has transformed their attitudes and leadership styles. This has helped create a more inclusive culture within EuroNatur, which has, in turn, had a positive impact on their work.

“I see a clear connection between my self-confidence and ability to listen to others, and the realization that leaders don’t need to know all the answers… I realized the need for processes that allow different people to contribute with their own ideas. At the end of the day, the result is better.”

- Gabriel Schwaderer, Executive Director, EuroNatur Foundation

The intergenerational nature of the Academy is unique. By bringing together young and senior professionals in the same programme, it was possible to create a dialogue between the generations. This produced positive changes – new initiatives and strategy, and shifts in organizational culture. Young professionals took more initiative, and senior professionals made space for younger colleagues to participate in decision-making. Senior colleagues dedicated more time to the development of their younger colleagues.

Yassine Ramzi Sghaier, Project Manager, SPA-RAC

“The MAVA Academy has given me more confidence to take action and also encourage young people to develop initiatives. During the Covid pandemic, I launched “TunSea” on social media with 14 young sea enthusiasts. TunSea is a Tunisian participatory and citizen science platform that aims to promote education, information exchange and cooperation between youth movements, sector professionals and citizens on marine science. Since its launch, more than 25,000 members have joined. TunSea has become the reference for participatory marine science in Tunisia and will soon become an association in order to better develop and participate in actions on the ground.”

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In 2020, Stefan was promoted to Deputy Head of Conservation, a senior leadership position that involves representing the organization with senior external stakeholders, building partnerships and collaborating with other organizations. Stefan believes the tools, skills and confidence he acquired during the Academy made it possible for him to take on this new role.

The Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) is founded in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, South Africa. SAWC delivers conservation training to help conserve and secure Africa’s wildlife and ecosystems in partnership with local communities.
Cross-sector partnerships

The Academy gave the participants the opportunity to hear the perspectives of leaders from many different backgrounds and sectors. This, along with their increased understanding of ‘Leading Beyond Authority’, led to changes in their approach to cross sector partnerships.

They reported greater confidence, and ability, to work effectively with leaders from other sectors to bring about positive changes. This shift in approach has produced partnerships with tangible benefits for nature.

ALEKSANDER TRAJCE, Executive Director, PPNEA

“The Academy has helped me to put more trust in other collaborators from outside the organization and engage with parties that we did not commonly consider before. One example is a successful relationship with a private company organizing nature tours in Albania. We have started to organize tours together with the agreement that part of their profit will be used by us for nature conservation work in the country.”

Case study: Teresa Gil, Head, Freshwater Programme, WWF España

Teresa’s participation in the Academy has had a very positive impact for her personal style of leadership, the strength and resilience of her team, and the reach and opportunities for her programme and projects.

By developing and refining her collaborative skills, Teresa has built a reputation that has opened multiple doors outside the conservation sector, diversifying funding streams for the Freshwater Programme, and building wider engagement in her conservation projects.

Teresa had real success in her attempts to restore a wetland which was on land owned by a private company. First, Teresa had to lobby internally to get the marketing department to collaborate with her, and working together, they then approached the company which is in the process of donating the land to a local government for conservation. Teresa used this as a springboard for building a relationship with the private company, regularly informing them of progress and making them feel part of the project. This led to further opportunities that Teresa was keen to grasp, including being invited to speak at a conference for the private company’s employees on the Balearic Islands.

This marked a shift for Teresa’s Freshwater Programme. Corporate teams, who had previously engaged with WWF only on tree-planting and forestry projects, began to take an interest in aquatic conservation projects. Recently, for example, a large supermarket participated in its first conservation activity – removing exotic alien plant species from wetlands.

Case study: Jovan Andevski, Programmes Manager, Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF)

Jovan’s journey of personal growth and insight within the MAVA Academy has led to better and more effective collaboration. VCF established the Wildlife Crime Academy, a capacity building programme to tackle the urgent need to prioritize and prosecute wildlife crime in 9 European countries, as part of the BalkanDetox LIFE project, alongside the Spanish Government and Junta de Andalucía.

The first and second trainings took place in parallel to the MAVA Academy during which time VCF’s approach to the event shifted from educating participants to motivating and engaging people from governmental institutions in conservation efforts. As a result, the government officials were highly engaged and left motivated to act to ensure wildlife crime is investigated and prosecuted, some for the first time ever. Jovan was inspired by the people-centred approach modelled by the Academy to shape the training programme.

As a result of the impact of the Wildlife Crime Academy, Jovan believes that VCF will see immediate and unprecedented changes in the participating countries in government.

WWF’s Freshwater Programme’s objectives relate to biodiversity and ecosystems conservation and water policy improvement.
MAVA, Fondation pour la Nature is a family-led, Swiss-based philanthropic foundation with an exclusive focus on the conservation of biodiversity. MAVA has four programmes covering the Mediterranean Basin, Coastal West Africa, Switzerland, and Sustainable Economy. With these programmes, it supports around 200 partners for a total average annual budget of 70 million. MAVA is implementing its last strategic cycle (2016-2022) and will end its funding to all partners by 2022.

Mowgli Mentoring is a specialist mentoring organization aiming to drive economic progress and social change by making effective mentoring available and accessible for entrepreneurs and leaders so that they are better able to solve local and global challenges. Through our accredited curricula, we design and run bespoke mentoring programmes, train others to run effective mentoring initiatives, prepare mentors and mentees for high-impact mentoring, and build mentoring cultures within ecosystems. Since 2008, we have delivered multi-language in-person, online and blended programmes in emerging and established markets across the Middle East, Africa, UK, Europe, Southeast Asia, Caribbean and Latin America. If you want to know more about our capability, programmes and impact contact us at www.mowgli.org.uk/contact

Common Purpose is a leadership development organization that specializes in cross-boundary leadership. A not-for-profit, we run programmes in over 100 cities worldwide. Founded in 1989, we have over 100,000 alumni globally. Our leadership development programmes inspire and equip people to work across boundaries. This enables them to solve complex problems in organizations and in society.

Get involved
Support the future of leadership development in conservation

While MAVA is closing its doors at the end of 2022, and the Academy’s final cohort is graduating in July, the need for leadership development in the conservation and sustainability sectors is only growing. Leaders in these sectors are at the forefront of dealing with today’s most pressing social and environmental challenges, and investing in their personal and leadership development can make a real difference in helping them deliver the solutions and impact we need.

Based on our experience, we would like to encourage donor, business and conservation organizations to support and invest in leadership development in the conservation sector, particularly for those working in the field and at the sharp end of conservation. If you would like to find out more about the work described in this report, please get in touch to discuss how leadership development can benefit your work and help you deliver greater impact.

Please contact:
Samantha Zouankouan
Projects Manager
samantha.zouankouan@commonpurpose.org

JOVAN ANDEVSKI, Programmes Manager, Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF)
"The MAVA Academy gave us a new mindset and tools to work more effectively. This is MAVA’s most important project for the future of conservation. The results of the MAVA Academy will be seen in 10 to 30 years...It is creating a movement and changing the generation who are, and will be, leading conservation efforts. If only 5% of conservation professionals have the same experience that I had in the Academy, the world will be a better place."

PANAGIOTA THEODOROU, Conservation Coordinator, ARCHELON
"I realized that a more human approach doesn’t take away from being a good leader, a good conservation leader. I realized that I am a good professional but now also a good colleague."
The Academy participants

Adam Ceesay, Wetlands International Africa (WIA)
Adlison Leno dos Passos, MAIO Biodiversity Foundation
Ahmed Ghedira, Notre Grand Bleu
Ahmed Senhoury, PRCM
Aleksander Trapec, Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA)
Aleksandra Nikolovnic, IUCN
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The Academy participants (End)

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