

Conservation training: is it working?

By Rachael Gerrie, 21st June 2022

Evaluation is vital in conservation. It enables practitioners to track progress towards their goals and make evidence-based decisions about what works and what doesn't. However, in the case of conservation training, it is also notoriously challenging!



Participants from the Durrell Endangered Species Management course in 2019. Photo: Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

At Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, we have been delivering conservation training for over 40 years and it plays a crucial role in our mission to save species from extinction. Yet, like many training providers in conservation, we have struggled to rigorously evaluate its effectiveness. In 2016, we set out to overcome these challenges and develop a framework that would enable us to systematically monitor and evaluate the difference our training makes to individuals and their work over time. In our article, we detail the process we went through to develop this evaluation framework, present the theory of change and mixed-methods approach used, and share lessons

learned during the first 3 years of implementation.

One of the biggest challenges we faced during the development of this framework was determining the causal link between the training course an individual takes and the results they achieve when they return to work. This is because it can take years for an individual to apply the skills and knowledge they gained during training, and decades for their actions to have an impact on the species and habitats they work with. It is therefore inevitable that results will be shaped by a combination of factors over time, making it extremely difficult to disentangle the effect of one from another.



Left: Durrell trainee Mustafa Hassanali working with local communities in Tanzania. Photo: Mustafa Hassanali.
Right: Durrell trainee Mukhlisin Abdullah rehabilitating orangutans in Sumatra. Photo: Mukhlisin Abdullah

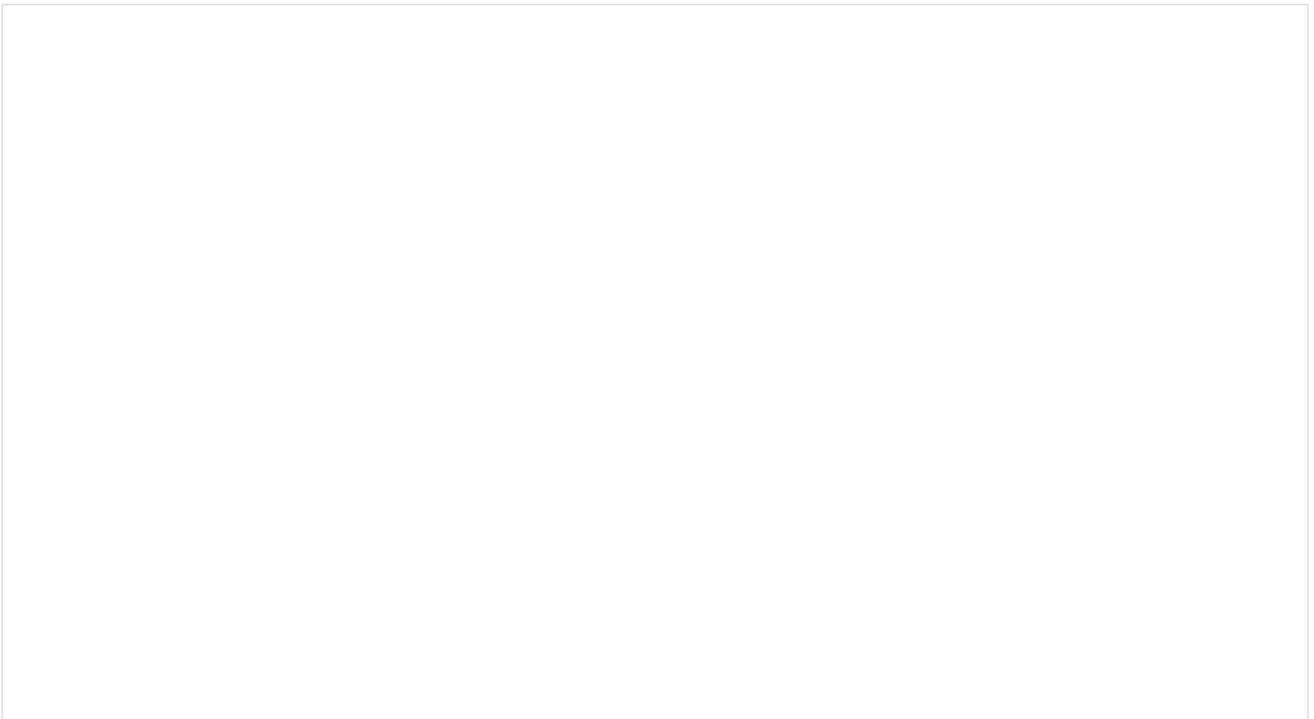
Some of the most significant results we have seen so far demonstrate the measurable difference training makes to an individual's self-confidence and self-efficacy. After completing a course, participants reported feeling more confident in their abilities and more capable of achieving their goals. Encouragingly, our findings also highlighted the role training plays in giving people hope, and evidenced the ways in which trainees are using the skills and knowledge gained to restore species and habitats around the world.

Our experience proves it is possible to find a practical solution to the challenges of training evaluation and generate the information needed to make evidence-based decisions. We hope our article provides a starting point for other practitioners seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of their training efforts and encourages further sharing of experiences.



Participants from the Durrell Endangered Species Management course in 2019. Photo: Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

The article [Using a theory of change to evaluate the impact of a conservation training programme: a practitioners perspective](#) is available in *Oryx—The International Journal of Conservation*.





Rachael Gerrie

Rachael Gerrie is the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. She has a background in the natural and social sciences, and seeks to combine expertise from both to understand better the impact of conservation interventions.