

CONNECT WITH NATURE

2022 Review



FOUNDING PARTNERS



HIGHLIGHTS OF 2022

In 2022, we were delighted to resume in-person activities after two years of connecting virtually. Our youth leaders and participants contributed high levels of energy and positivity across the multiple events held this year.

Their dynamic optimism and passion for creating a better tomorrow continues to drive us forward in achieving our mission – to inspire youth in the UAE to connect with nature and to equip them with knowledge, experience and a platform to emerge as future leaders of sustainability.



500+ YOUTH
have participated in
Connect with Nature events



2,900 HOURS
for nature – learning about the
issues, experiencing wild places
and being part of the solution



**46 EVENTS
AND FIELD TRIPS**
in 2022 around nature,
conservation and citizen science






**LAUNCH OF NEW
CWN MOBILE APP**
completing our digital transformation and
introducing new features in 2022

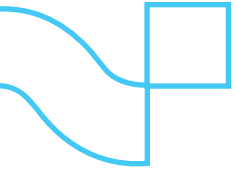


**YOUTH DATABASE
+ 10,000**
building a community of youth members

FOR YOUTH BY YOUTH: A STORY OF SUCCESS

Connect with Nature has come a long way since its launch in 2019. We are delighted to have surpassed the objectives and KPIs that were set for the programme and look forward to charting the next chapter of the youth movement.

Pillar	Connect with Nature KPIs	Results to date	Percentage of KPI met as of 2022
REACH 	By 2022, reach 500,000 UAE youth with conservation messaging and calls to action through marketing and communications.	2,510,000 MILLION YOUTH REACHED	500%
EXPLORE 	By 2022, influence the values, attitudes and behaviour of 10,000 UAE youth through experiential learning, bespoke outreach experiences, engaging digital activities, dialogue and citizen science opportunities.	20,950 YOUTH MEMBERS	210%
IMPACT 	By 2022, develop the skills and capacity of 300 of our highly engaged members to enable them to become influential conservation role models in their communities through leadership development.	500 ELITE YOUTH LEADERS UPSKILLED	167%



FOREWORD

**H.E. Dr Shaikha Salem Al Dhaheri, Secretary General,
Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD)**

Through Connect with Nature, we have grown closer to the UAE’s youth, recognising even more clearly their capability for creativity, innovation and their remarkable skills with technology. This is while appreciating their maturity as they accept and embrace the responsibility of building a more sustainable and environmentally friendly world.

Since the launch of the Connect with Nature youth programme four years ago, we have had the privilege of speeding up the incredible transformation of our youth – from their initial interactions with nature in the UAE through our activities, to their valuable contributions at Connect with Nature majlis discussions, virtual summits, workshops and bootcamps, and even international conferences.

I am proud to share that Connect with Nature has successfully achieved the KPIs set during its launch of reaching more than 2 million youth in the UAE. This is in addition to building a community of youth members, encouraging the majority of our community to prioritise and value nature in their lives and developing the skills and capacity of 500 of the most highly engaged youth leaders.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to Connect with Nature, our partners, staff and the wonderful youth who have participated in the movement over the past four years.

We have seen first-hand that our young people are well aware of the environmental challenges the planet faces and are eager to participate in more nature-based activities. They are determined to make a positive impact in the UAE, placing nature at the centre of decision making in all aspects of their lives and across their diverse careers and further professions.



Our first UAE Youth Ambassadors of Nature group have gone on to organise their own clean ups, volunteer for nature, join policy think tanks, blend nature into their academic research and choose careers through which they can pursue climate action. Their spirit, behaviour and choices are a very positive sign for humanity.

This is the generation that will lead a revolutionary change for humanity and nature. They are the ones who will continue the legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed and contribute to local and global sustainable goals.

We are delighted by their transformation into change makers and sustainability leaders, and are committed to preparing more youth to take collective action for the preservation of the environment, especially in the Year of Sustainability and COP 28 where they will play an integral role and organise a series of inspiring events.

**SPOTLIGHT:
ABU DHABI**



**29 EVENTS AND
ACTIVITIES**



**350+ YOUTH
PARTICIPANTS**



**1,800 HOURS
FOR NATURE**

FOREWORD

Arabella Willing, Associate Head of Conservation Outreach & Citizen Science, Emirates Nature-WWF



2023 will be a pivotal year for nature in the UAE.

UAE President Sheikh Mohamed declared 2023 the Year of Sustainability. It is also the year of COP28 – with world leaders convening in the UAE at the end of 2023 to accelerate the global response to climate change.

Connect with Nature will continue to build on its success of inspiring and empowering youth to shape a planet-friendly society in the UAE, with a special focus on encouraging youth to volunteer as citizen scientists and make meaningful contributions to scientific research and environmental conservation in the UAE.

Through these initiatives, we hope to drive a new era of citizen science, volunteerism, science-based solutions and sustainability amongst tomorrow's leaders.

Youth makes up a significant portion of the world's population. It is estimated that half of the human population is under 30 years old. In the UAE, roughly 75 percent of the population of three million is under the age of 35 years, and 25 percent of the population between the ages 20 and 35 years.

They are inheriting a world in crisis, and it is our responsibility to equip them with the knowledge, skills and platform to drive positive change for a sustainable future.



“With a packed calendar of unique and inspiring nature experiences for youth, Connect with Nature has enhanced the opportunities for young people in the UAE to participate in conservation and the sustainable development of the nation. It is crucial to upskill the next generation with leadership skills and environmental education, so that they can harness their innate aptitude for creativity, innovation, social networking and optimism to shape a positive future for people and planet.”

**- Laila Mostafa Abdullatif,
Director General, Emirates Nature-WWF**



“In 2022, we finally had a chance to reengage with our youth community face-to-face, after almost 2 years of social distancing and predominantly online sessions. The enthusiasm to connect again and restore nature, was tangible amongst the youth as well as the Connect with Nature team. With strong participation across all our activities including the intense summer bootcamp, 2022 gave us a renewed hope about the potential we can achieve when we come together for nature.”

**- Monica Cooney,
Head of Strategy & Impact, Emirates Nature-WWF**



OVERVIEW OF 2022 PROJECTS

Empowering Future Leaders of Sustainability

In 2022, we introduced new milestones for our youth to unlock on their leadership journey. **Our focus was on equipping youth with transformative skills such as leadership, communications, critical thinking, project planning and working as a team**, which will be invaluable in their future roles and careers.

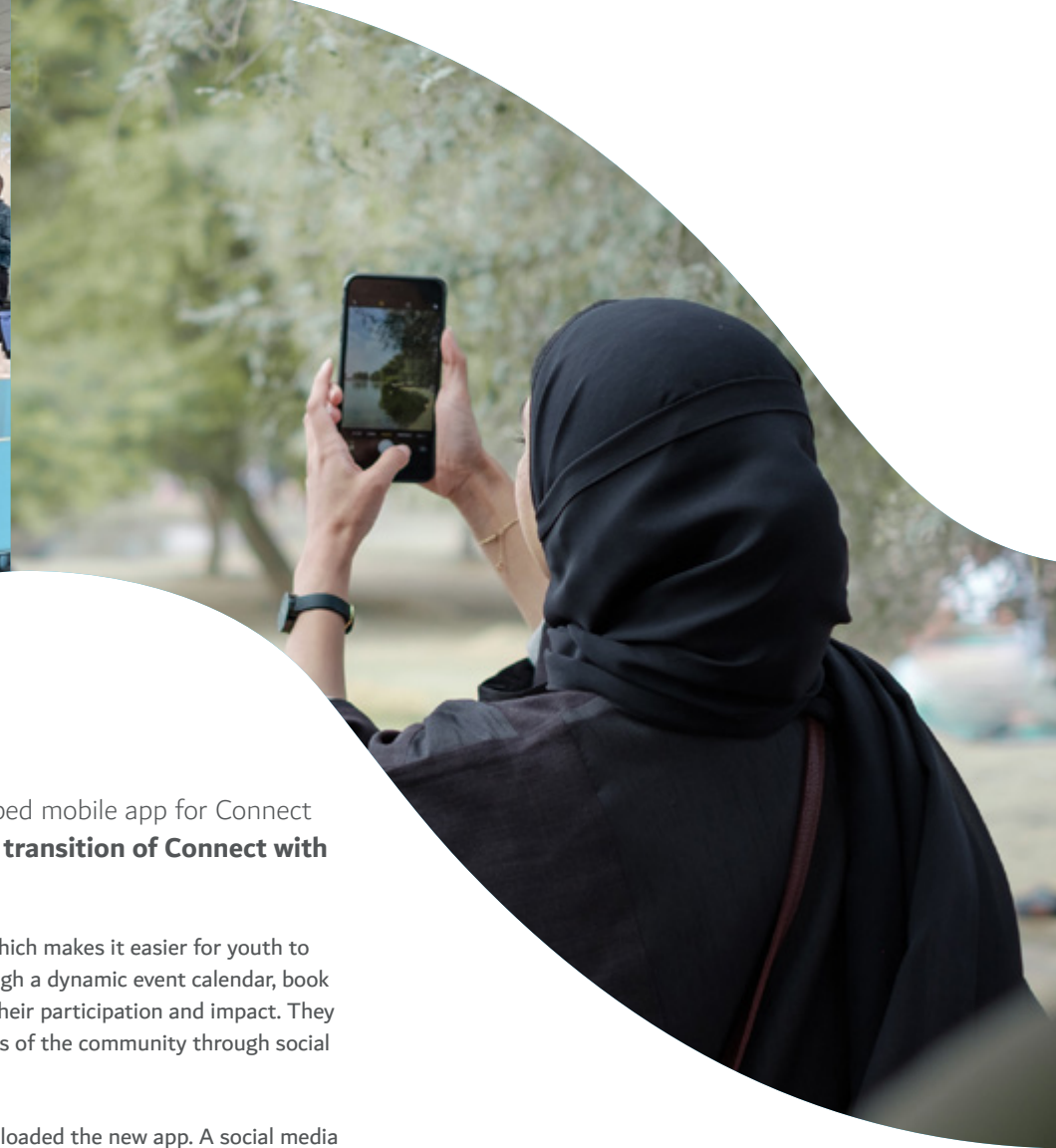
At the heart of our skill development efforts was the **first ever Connect with Nature Youth Leadership Summer Bootcamp** – a three week programme that trained a select number of elite youth aged 18-24 in biodiversity, UAE's natural heritage, climate change and the role of leadership and civil society in effecting meaningful change. Youth participating in the bootcamp engaged in field trips to a pearl farm, a recycling plant, a Kayak 4 Conservation trip and attended workshops around recycling and air quality. They also worked on individual microprojects around sustainability.

The bootcamp was a great success and proved that, with education and the skill development, our youth are capable of leading their communities towards a more sustainable future.

ELITE YOUTH

(70% of these are from Abu Dhabi emirate)

successfully completed the Youth leadership Summer Bootcamp



Digital Transformation for a Greener Future

We are proud to have launched a completely revamped mobile app for Connect with Nature this year, **successfully completing the transition of Connect with Nature to a mobile app-focused programme.**

The new app provides an **improved, smooth user experience** which makes it easier for youth to participate with Connect with Nature. Youth can browse through a dynamic event calendar, book and register for activities directly through the app, and track their participation and impact. They can also interact with Connect with Nature and other members of the community through social media platforms.

In the first few weeks of launch itself, hundreds of youth downloaded the new app. A social media campaign is currently underway to promote the new app and expand the growing movement.

 **SPOTLIGHT: ABU DHABI**
25% sign ups from Abu Dhabi

Shining the Global Spotlight on UAE Youth

In 2022, we had the opportunity to share Connect with Nature's excellence with the world.

OUR YOUTH MEMBERS PARTICIPATED IN A NUMBER OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONFERENCES:



The Earth Prize: Two of our Youth Ambassadors for Nature – Hoor Al Rais and Lara Rudar – were selected as finalists in this global youth competition for 13 – 19 year olds, which seeks solutions to our most pressing environmental challenges. They were selected out of 650 submissions from 114 countries, and were the only team from the Middle East and the only not affiliated with a school to advance to the final phase.

Their concept of creating a digital platform to increase awareness, investment opportunities and volunteerism for climate action has already caught the attention of prospective investors.



A HUGE SUCCESS FOR THE CONNECT WITH NATURE TEAM'S FIRST YEAR PARTICIPATING IN THE EARTH PRIZE!



Food for Future: As the knowledge partner of this international summit, Connect with Nature participated in youth engagement activities, and joined the judging panel for the youth competition. Our Youth Ambassador for Nature Lara Rudar conducted a food security workshop for participating students in which youth participants estimated their food footprint and learned about the impact of their food habits and choices.



International Conference on Sustainability and Education: We supported the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi's participation in this conference by presenting an overview of Connect with Nature – the programme goals, objectives, success stories, Youth Ambassadors for Nature initiative and the future plans that continue to support the transformation of UAE youth into future sustainability leaders.



UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15): Our Youth Ambassador for Nature Denice Henson was accredited by the Global Youth Biodiversity Network and held three roles at the COP15 conference in Montreal. She was as a Global Youth Biodiversity Network delegate, part of the Youth Task Force and a member of the COP15 Youth Policy Team.



Stockholm+50: Youth Ambassador for Nature Lara Rudar represented Connect with Nature at this international meeting convened by the UN to catalyse action for a healthy environment.



COP27: Youth Ambassador for Nature Hoor Al Rais was selected as the first youth climate delegate and presented the youth delegate programme on behalf of the UAE at the COP27 climate change conference in Egypt.



REFLECTIONS OF OUR YOUTH AMBASSADORS FOR NATURE

“Being a past Ambassador for Nature makes me feel connected to the environmental efforts and leaders in the UAE. Having the opportunity to present the White Paper to UAE ministers deepened my interest in working with government leaders to advance climate policies.”

Hannah Melville-Rea



“I was able to continue my environmental journey through my own path as an aspiring microbiologist. Connect with Nature helped me establish an idea of what kind of research I am aiming to do and for what purpose.”

Christine Joyce N. Francisco



“I reduced plastic consumption and started a community group called Meet N Heal Nature organizing local clean-ups.”

Judy Mahfouz



Expanding the Youth Movement for Nature and Environmental Sustainability

We began the year with a **Recognition Ceremony** to celebrate our **Youth Ambassadors for Nature**, marking the conclusion of their journey with the ambassador programme and the **beginning of their new journeys in life**. 12 ambassadors enjoyed exclusive access to the Wadi Wurayah National Park in Fujairah – the first protected mountain area in UAE.

Throughout 2022, we continued to **expand our youth movement** with a busy calendar of in-person events designed to connect even more youth to nature and to **spark new journeys of transformational growth**. Youth participated in **clean ups** in a variety of natural habitats, from the mountains of Jebel Hafeet, to the beaches of Saadiyat Island and the mangroves of UAE. They **collected information** about plants and habitats; and **surveyed**, geo-tagged and **removed litter** from these vulnerable ecosystems **to inform national policies on single-use plastic**.

Youth also participated as **citizen scientists** and **contributed to scientific research** by reviewing never-seen-before **camera trap footage** of wildlife in the UAE. They participated in **workshops** on air pollution, the circular economy and recycling; visited the **Al Wathba Reserve** to learn about preserving wetlands; assisted scientists in **planting mangroves** and **monitoring biodiversity** in the area; and helped experts **restore a traditional falaj** irrigation system at Al Bithnah Village.

- Connect with Nature youth participants also engaged in the **Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi’s educational and outreach events** throughout the year, participating in the **Environmental Youth Talk, Mission to Zero, Sawalef Be’eyah, Ecosystem Restoration Youth Circle, Youth Climate Change Survey** and **clean ups at Khalifa City, Al Shawamekh and Mussafah Beach**.
- On **World Environment Day**, three youth were given a platform to share their success stories and journeys in different areas of sustainability: **Biomimicry, Zero Waste and Climate Action**. Six of our former UAE Youth Ambassadors for Nature joined us in attending a Unilever Event on the **circular economy**, and impressed business and government leaders with their knowledge and interest in advancing sustainable processes.
- During **Earth Hour**, youth participated in a **parade for the environment** at Expo 2020, during which 60 pavilions turned off their lights for one minute each as the parade proceeded throughout the site.



THE ROAD AHEAD

2023: The Year of Sustainability and COP28



Building on our success in the past few years, we look forward to continuing our activities that encourage youth to discover the natural wonders of the UAE while also building the leadership skills necessary to uphold the legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed.

In 2023, we will also [grow opportunities for youth in the UAE](#) to act for nature as citizen scientists under the umbrella of [Sahim](#) – the Public Participation in Scientific Research (PSSR) initiative.

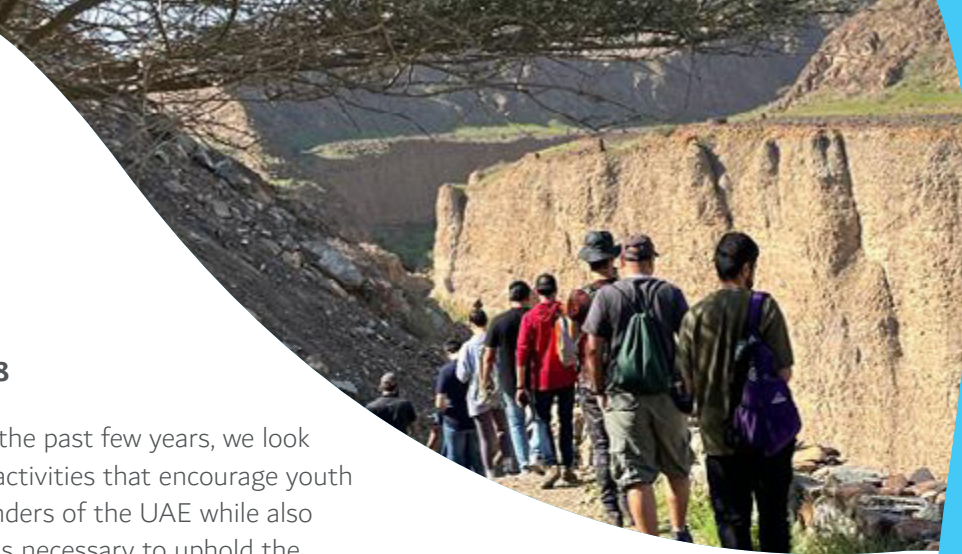
Citizen science enables members of the public to contribute to scientific research, thus involving more people in the collection and analysis of data and accelerating the speed with which scientists and environmentalists can address real-world issues that affect us all.

This initiative will give youth the opportunity to participate in a diverse range of environmental projects and learn new things from experts as they collaborate with scientists. **Youth** will have the platform to make [meaningful contributions to scientific research](#) in the UAE and support decision-making around environmental conservation and sustainability.

[Sahim](#) also [encourages a spirit of volunteerism](#) amongst youth in the UAE, which is critical to supporting their character development and developing a larger sense of purpose and responsibility towards the community.

[Sahim](#) launches at a critical time as the [UAE gears up to host the important COP28](#) climate conference and welcome global heads of state, climate experts and delegates towards the end of 2023. This crucial event is already generating keen interest in sustainability and climate action across the UAE. We look forward to engaging with youth on the pressing issue of climate change and exploring opportunities for our future leaders to get involved in national and international climate conversations.

We are excited to continue growing the [Connect with Nature youth movement in 2023, by helping more youth spend time in nature; transforming youth into advocates for the environment; and helping them reach their potential as future leaders of sustainability.](#)



ABOUT CONNECT WITH NATURE

Connect with Nature was developed through a founding partnership between Emirates Nature-WWF and The Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD). The programme aims to reconnect youth with nature through experiences and activities, equip them with knowledge and skills to make informed decisions, and to become leaders of the community in creating a sustainable future.

For more information, visit www.connectwithnature.ae

ABOUT ENVIRONMENT AGENCY – ABU DHABI (EAD)

The Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) was established in 1996 to preserve Abu Dhabi's natural heritage, protect our future, and raise awareness about environmental issues. EAD is Abu Dhabi's environmental regulator and advises the government on environmental policy. It works to create sustainable communities and protect and conserve wildlife and natural resources. EAD also works to ensure integrated and sustainable water resources management, to ensure clean air and minimise climate change and its impacts.

ABOUT EMIRATES NATURE-WWF

Emirates Nature-WWF is an environmental NGO charity established to conserve the United Arab Emirates' natural heritage and build a future where people and nature thrive. The organisation was founded in 2001 under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Ruler's Representative in the Al Dhafra Region and Chairman of the Governing Board of the Environment Agency–Abu Dhabi, as a legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed's vision for the United Arab Emirates.

For two decades, Emirates Nature–WWF has been a prominent and active partner in environmental conservation in the MENA region. We work in association with WWF, one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organisations.