



**connect  
with  
nature**



# **ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

**2 YEARS OF CONNECTING  
WITH NATURE**





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## TESTIMONIALS



“

I'm having such a great experience with Connect with Nature! I am enjoying every little bit of it and I'm involving my friends and family as well! We enjoy going to the landmarks of the UAE and discovering new locations full of nature.

- Diana, 25-30 years old

”

## TESTIMONIALS

“

I loved nature before joining Connect with Nature, but I did not take any action towards it. The virtual youth circles have inspired me to reuse the plastic shopping bags, but I still did not feel that this was enough, so week by week I purchased one jute bag and slowly I increased my commitment. After three to four months, I had around 10 to 12 jute bags which I now use for my weekly shopping.

- Sadiq Mohammad, 15-18 years old

”





## TESTIMONIALS



“

From the Reimagine Youth Majlis Series to the simple movie nights or quiz nights, the different events all cumulatively built on my existing knowledge and have broadened my spectrum to think out of my own box and challenge my beliefs. The need to act now rather than waiting for tomorrow, has brought more meaning for me.

- Himani Kothari, 19-22 years old

”

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020 was a year like no other. There is no doubt that it may have been the most challenging year in modern history, however it has also been the most insightful, amplifying the critical link between nature and our own health.

According to the World Health Organization's recent investigation into the origins of the pandemic, Covid-19 is most likely a result of the viral, zoonotic spillover caused by pathogens found naturally in animals. Ebola, HIV, bird flu and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) all made the leap from wildlife to humans, and unless more is done to break the chain of zoonotic transmission, we may yet see a pandemic, far deadlier and impactful than Covid-19. Beyond the concerns of disease transmission, there are the continuing challenges of resource exploitation, climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse.

## **We can do better. We must do better.**

Now more than ever we need to stand together to safeguard our family, community and nature in order to thrive. We must work to address the root cause of the crisis, and not only the symptoms.

Our innovative and successful youth mobilisation programme does just that. Connect with Nature (CwN) builds a movement of diverse individuals to protect and conserve nature through experiential, nature-based learning and adventures. Our motto "For Youth, By Youth", inspires youth who are our environmental stewards of tomorrow to become real changemakers.

In 2018, we set an ambitious goal, that by 2022 we would reach a critical mass of 500,000 UAE youth through conservation messaging and engage a further 10,000 in impactful opportunities to influence the way youth value and prioritise nature and shape them into future leaders of sustainability. We achieved all of that by 2020!

We are exceptionally proud to be the catalyst that brings youth together, leaving a long-lasting impact on youth and motivating them to deepen and accelerate impact together. 87% of our youth community told us that CwN dramatically increased their commitment to the environment.

## **Finding new ways to connect with nature.**

With the onset of Covid-19 and lockdown in March 2020, our approach for community engagement and outreach had to adapt swiftly to a virtual environment to continue to inspire and motivate youth who were now stuck indoors, through the magic of technology.

There are two distinct highlights that we achieved this year that really put Connect with Nature on the map as a credible, reputable youth programme and movement- (1) the UAE Ambassadors for Nature leadership programme that trained 20 youth to shape the UAE's future conservation and sustainability agenda in alignment with the vision of the next 50 years, and (2) our innovative Re-Imagine Youth Majlis Series with incredible support from Ministers, thought leaders, and the Federal Youth Authority in a virtual forum to reimagine and define the future of the UAE together with the youth.

We were nationally and globally recognised for our initiatives, including awards for our innovative activations as well as rolling out the programme within the wider WWF global network.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us the need to protect Nature and our mere existence is dependent on the health of our planet and wildlife and never has there been a more urgent time to connect with nature, and to set an example for future generations.

A huge thank you to our co-founding partner, the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi (EAD) and our strategic partner, the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC) for their unyielding support in making this movement a reality. We look forward to discussing any future partnership opportunities with other key stakeholders to ensure that this youth movement of change continues beyond 2021, as we strive to be the preferred programme and platform to build the next cohort of sustainable leaders for the future.

Yours sincerely,

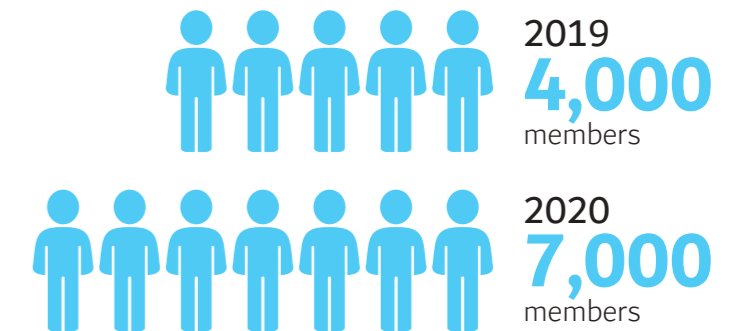
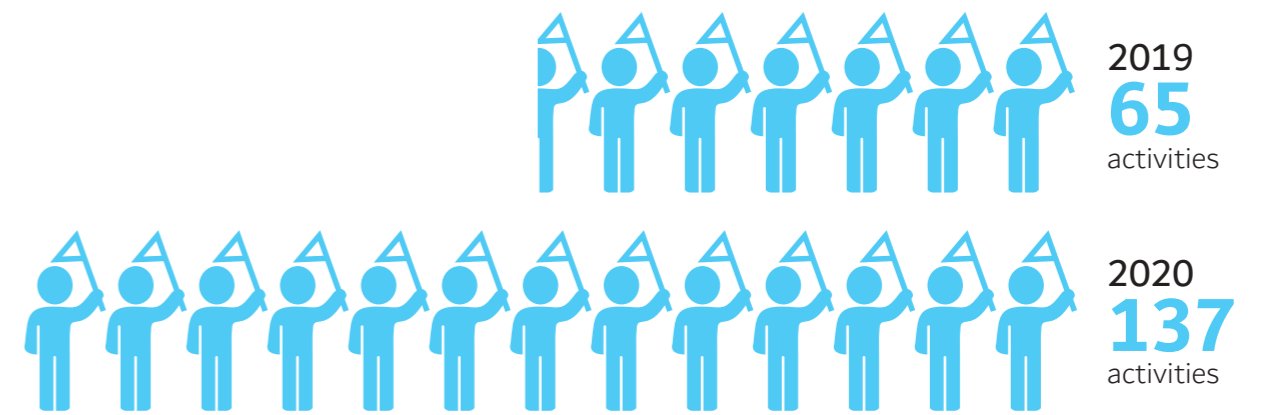
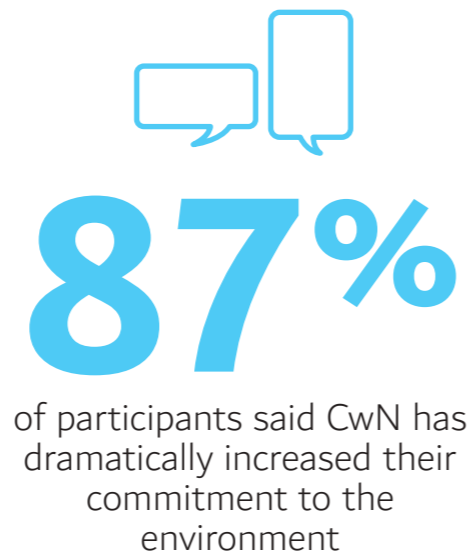
Jennifer Croes  
Conservation Scientist  
Associate Director, Conservation Education & Leadership



# MISSION

Co-founded in 2018 by Emirates Nature-WWF and Environment Agency Abu Dhabi (EAD), with the strategic partnership of the International Fund for Houbara Conservation, Connect with Nature (CwN) aims to reconnect youth (aged 15-30) with nature through experiences and activities. Our mission is to equip and inspire UAE youth to join the movement towards shaping an optimistic future for the planet and naturally connect with nature to engage in meaningful action as future leaders of sustainability.

We have created a movement comprised of diverse individuals, who are friendly, compassionate, and deeply connected to nature, and who work together to create adventurous, safe, and inspirational nature-based experiences.



Experiences are designed with an innovative approach for empowering youth, achieved by removing barriers, and providing opportunities. Joining the movement provides youth with the opportunity to explore their passion and curiosity, strengthen their knowledge and critical thinking skills to collaboratively influence local and global action to work towards the common goals of preventing biodiversity collapse, addressing the climate crisis, and contributing to the green recovery.



# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite unprecedented circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we adapted CwN innovatively to evolve with the situation, and experimented with new and exciting ways to engage with youth. This new and agile approach generated exposure for CWN movement and its key partners -



**10,000,0000**  
impressions reached  
through media publications



**100+**  
stories across  
digital and print media



**10+**  
TV and radio interviews  
with our spokespeople



The idea of a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic resonated deeply with our youth community as reflected in our achievements below.

**674,052**  
young people reached across the  
UAE through media

**7,000** youth engaged  
with us totalling 12,000+  
participation hours from  
the community

**130+** events and  
activities (virtual from March  
onwards) created to ensure  
that the community continued  
to connect with nature through-  
out the pandemic

Successful launch of the  
Ambassadors for Nature pro-  
gramme generated hundreds  
of applications from youth and  
resulted in **20** hand-picked  
Ambassadors

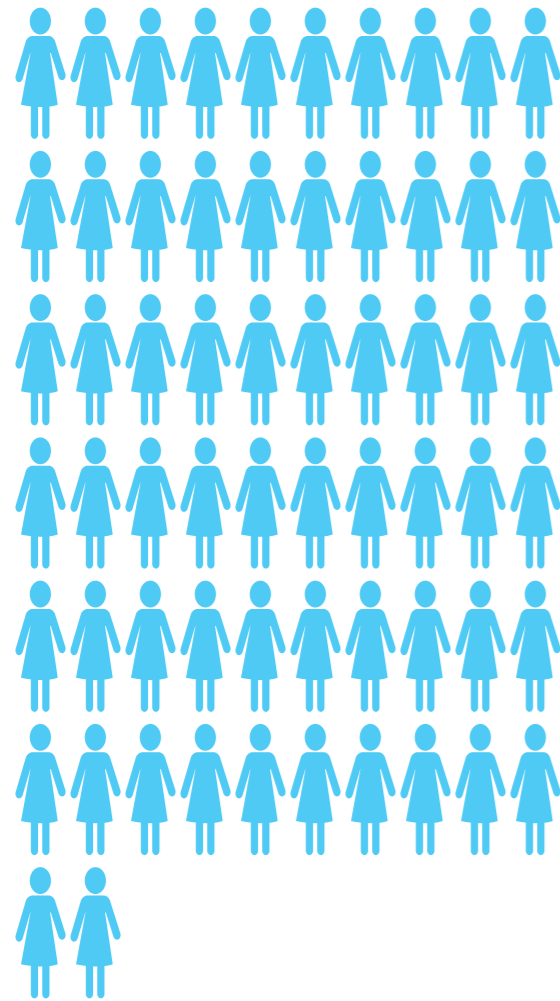
**10** Successful Re-Imagine Youth Circles with more than  
**2,000** youth participants and  
**20+** UAE Ministers and Decision Makers, which resulted in the  
launch of the white paper report "Is Nature a Priority for UAE Youth in  
the Covid-19 Recovery?"

Launch of the  
**Nature  
Champions  
programme**  
to grow the movement saw 30  
youth champions come on board

**500+** youth participated  
in the Ghaf Youth Majlis series,  
inspired by the UAE's tribal  
culture of storytelling, opening  
up discussions between younger  
and older generations

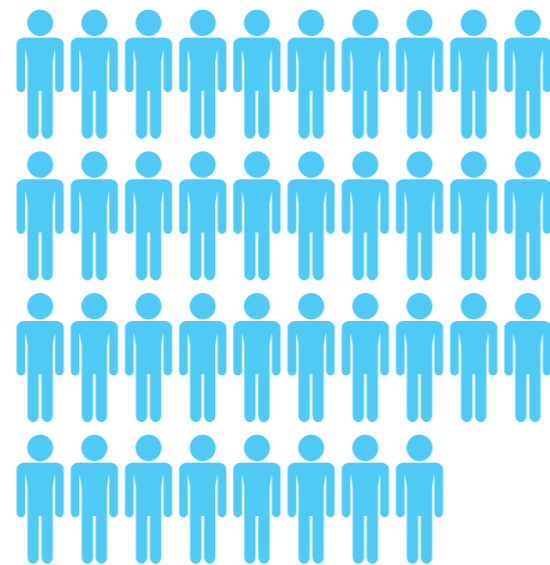


# DEMOGRAPHICS



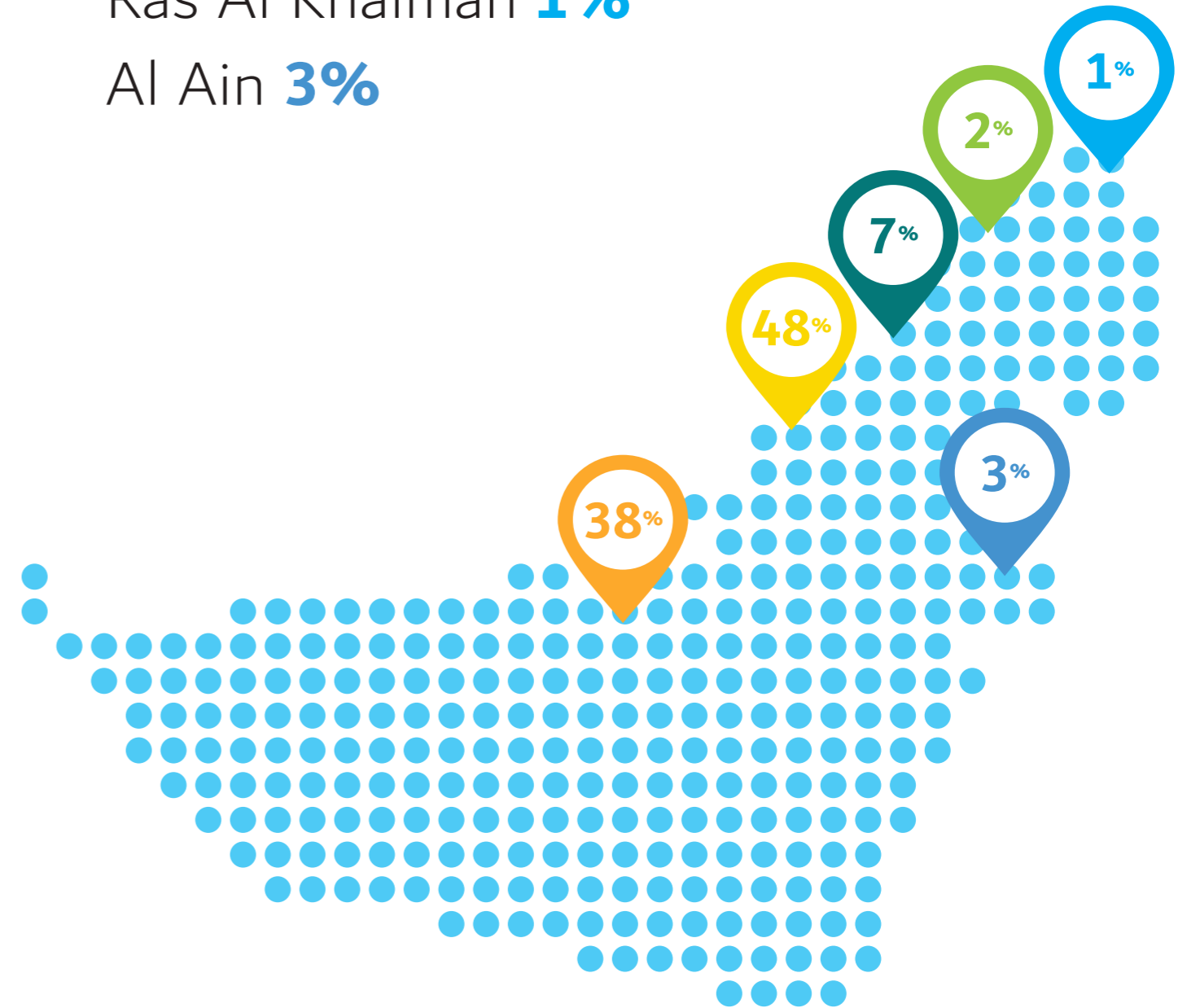
**62%**  
FEMALE

**38%**  
MALE



Distribution across cities:

- Abu Dhabi **38%**
- Dubai **48%**
- Sharjah **7%**
- Ajman **2%**
- Ras Al Khaimah **1%**
- Al Ain **3%**



# THE CONNECT WITH NATURE JOURNEY

The Connect with Nature strategy is based on four pillars that take UAE youth through a dedicated journey that shapes and influences the way they value and prioritise nature.

## FOUR

## PILLARS



### REACH

Reaching as many youth as possible to promote and raise awareness of the Connect with Nature programme, and how they can get involved.

- Digital Platform awareness
- A brand that gives youth a voice that is authentically heard and implemented
- Creating UAE Nature Ambassadors and Nature Champions programmes
- Focus on experiences



### EXPLORE

UAE youth are “re-wilding” – getting out and experiencing nature first-hand, developing their emotional and intellectual connections with nature and fostering a sense of adventure.

- Information and knowledge
- Peer to Peer learning
- Self-Reflection
- Engaging the senses and mindfulness



### IMPACT

Conservation learning creates awareness of the consequences of our actions and youth feel optimistic about how they can influence the future of the planet. They take personal and collective action to be part of the solution.

- Pro-environmental behaviours and responsible choices
- Citizen science
- Use their voice and their social media presence to spread the message



### LEAD

Outstanding youth develop their leadership skills and knowledge to lead the community with the motto of “For youth by youth.”

- Development of a dedicated CwN Leadership programme: UAE Ambassadors for Nature
- Nature Champions
- Learning from experts
- Creating events & public speaking



# THE CONNECT WITH NATURE TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY

The programme introduces participants to a transformational journey framework to help youth understand and strengthen their relationship with nature.



## HEART

### OUR EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Explore how nature makes you feel and take time to enjoy it.



## HEAD

### OUR INTELLECTUAL CONNECTION

Discover the complexity of nature. Re-think your perspective and how nature aligns with your values.



## HANDS

### OUR BEHAVIOUR AND HABITS

What decisions and sustainable choices could we make for nature.



## VOICE

### ENCOURAGING OTHERS

Inspire and make caring for nature the norm. Contribute to collective action for nature.

Figure 1. Framework to shape awareness

# THE CONNECT WITH NATURE OBJECTIVES

By **2022**, our goal is to reach a critical mass of **500,000** UAE youth through conservation messaging and engage a further **10,000** in impactful opportunities to influence the way young people value and prioritise nature and to shape them into future leaders of sustainability. This was a **successful year for CwN**, as all of our programme targets have been achieved.



# OBJECTIVES & KPIs: 2019 vs 2020 PROGRESS





PILLAR	OBJECTIVE	RESULTS TO DATE	PERCENTAGE OF KPI ACHIEVED BY END OF 2019	PERCENTAGE OF KPI ACHIEVED BY END OF 2020
 <b>REACH</b>	By 2022, reach <b>500,000</b> UAE youth with conservation messaging and calls to action through marketing and communications	<b>2.5 million</b> reached exceeding the targets from last year	<b>240%</b>	<b>500%</b>
 <b>EXPLORE</b>	By 2022, influence the values, attitudes and behaviour of <b>10,000</b> UAE youth through experiential learning, bespoke outreach experiences, engaging digital activities, dialogue and citizen science opportunities	<b>10,295</b> total engagements with 6,949 individuals aged 15 to 30	<b>40%</b>	<b>103%</b>
 <b>IMPACT</b>	By 2022, <b>70%</b> percent of individuals report that Connect with Nature has positively influenced the way they prioritize and value nature in their lives	<b>86%</b>	<b>122%</b>	<b>126%</b>
 <b>LEAD</b>	By 2022, develop the skills and capacity of <b>300</b> of our highly engaged members to enable them to become influential conservation role models in their communities through leadership development	<b>50</b>	-----	<b>17%</b>

Table 1. Objectives and KPIs



# KEY INSIGHTS FROM 2020

**The need for nature.** So much time spent indoors during the pandemic lockdown magnified the positive impact nature has on health and mental wellbeing. Despite high engagement in virtual activities and the success of youth majlises, the pandemic has left the majority of youth missing their time in nature and being outdoors. Roughly 70% of our community reported that spending time in nature is extremely important to them.



**Youth are committed to take action.** Our Ambassadors, as well as our highly engaged community members, are eager to not only take action for the environment, but also desire for more impact focused activities, such as being citizen scientist, creating and delivering their own workshops, launching campaigns and events in their communities and schools.

**The youth want to be part of the conversation.** It was clear throughout the Re-Imagine and Ghaf Youth Majlis series that youth are eager to have a voice and be part of the solution to conserve nature and wildlife, and address local and global sustainability issues.



**Authenticity & Storytelling.** It became more evident in the virtual activities that through authenticity and storytelling, we received a higher engagement, as youth better relate to authentic and inspirational storytelling.

**We can change.** The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to youth that we are all capable of immense change. Youth are worried about the lack of widespread understanding of the risks associated with the exploitation of nature and its resources, especially now that the pandemic has shown how connected our health is to the health of the planet. Despite this, our community remains optimistic that collectively, we can disrupt the status quo and design a sustainable UAE.



**Adaptability is key.** The fast response of the CwN team in modifying the program strategy and shifting the activities in a virtual format allowed the youth to continue engaging, learning, having fun, and connecting with nature in new ways. Having the ability to adapt and evolve kept the program from losing its momentum and engagement during the pandemic.

# 2020 IN REVIEW

- ▣ Selecting the 20 Ambassadors for Nature
- ▣ Nature Champions
- ▣ Re-Imagine Youth Circle Series
- ▣ Ghaf Youth Majlises
- ▣ Virtual Escape Room

- ▣ Future Leaders in Sustainability
- ▣ Volunteering Opportunities

## Pandemic Adaptation

## Looking ahead – 2021 and beyond

## Pre-Pandemic

- ▣ Growing CwN's Community
- ▣ The Search for the UAE's Ambassadors for Nature

## Challenges faced towards the end of 2020

- ▣ Scavenger Hunts
- ▣ Discover UAE
- ▣ Mission Blue
- ▣ Just Wing It



# 2020 IN REVIEW

Overall, the year 2020 was a successful one for Connect with Nature. A strong commitment from the team and the wider community resulted in CwN achieving its programme targets based on a strong strategy and creative adaptations to the global pandemic.

## Pre-Pandemic

The CwN community and team began the year with great energy and optimism, building upon a successful 2019.

### Growing CwN's Community

At the start of 2020, Connect with Nature gained momentum with weekly nature-based events and activities that offered youth a variety of options for exploration, education, and wellbeing. Some of the most engaging experiences included hiking, exploring wetlands and nature reserves, visiting organic and sustainable farms, and discovering hidden lakes and oasis. Participation also gained traction through new Reach strategies, diversifying our “in-nature” experiences and having personal communications with the community members, which resulted in strong organic growth.

### The search for the UAE's Ambassadors for Nature

The beginning of the year saw the launch of the very successful UAE Ambassadors for Nature programme that offered UAE youth an opportunity to develop their leadership abilities and expand their knowledge and skills about nature and conservation. A nation-wide campaign was launched at Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week in January 2020 to find our 20 youth Ambassadors for Nature. The effort saw a dramatic spike in participation and interest from youth, and provided an opportunity for CwN to engage with educational institutions and businesses to raise greater awareness and interest about the programme. Youth were inspired and motivated to gain badges on the Connect with Nature Mobile app by exploring the beauty that the UAE's nature offers, engaging in online debates, youth circles and workshops. They also communicated the programme to their own communities and aimed to complete their requirement to have a chance to be one of 20 UAE ambassadors.



Media announcing the campaign generated **US\$ 89,208** in advertising value including front page print coverage in The National and broadcast reach.



# 2020 IN REVIEW

## Pandemic Adaptation

With the outbreak of COVID-19, all outdoor nature experiences came to a halt, with our last outdoor experience taking place at the end of February 2020. Connect with Nature reinvented its approach to interactive conservation education by embracing innovative virtual learning experiences to showcase all of the ways to connect with nature without being outdoors. These experiences allowed youth to unleash their curiosity, explore their passion for nature, and earn a range of virtual badges whilst developing new skills with the objective of driving positive change for people and planet.

A media announcement launching **CwN #stayhome-activities** was featured extensively across mainstream and lifestyle media publications - reaching **5,923,297 people** across the region. Several partners supported the new initiative, with Abu Dhabi media office and Dubai Calendar endorsing the calendar of events with their youth communities.



Implementing “Rewilding” through the explore pillar was challenging during the lockdown as this element largely depends on getting out and experiencing nature first-hand. However, Peer to Peer learning, reflection and engaging in mindfulness remained present in the virtual activities, such as the Notice Nature challenge, quiz nights, live debates, wild workouts, sketching workshop, live cooking sessions and much more, where more than **1,000 youth** participated in these activities.



# 2020 IN REVIEW

CwN became the **“Go to Platform”**, where youth came together to find new ways to connect with nature from their home through their actions, virtual challenges and noticing the little nature that exists all around them.



“  
Connect with Nature has made big changes in my life especially with **knowledge about nature and conservation**, I have learned so much from them!

”

- Alaa,  
25-30 years old

“  
Especially during COVID-19 lock-down, **joining nature-based activities** around cooking, drawing and exercise lit up my days!

”

- Hannah Melville Rae,  
22-25 years old





# 2020 IN REVIEW

## Selecting the 20 Ambassadors for Nature

On the 4th of June 2020, and in conjunction with World Environment Day, the official UAE Ambassadors for Nature were announced. Influential sustainability leaders across the UAE were engaged to assess and handpick top candidates from over a hundred high-quality applications received. The selected Ambassadors include a group of 20 homegrown heroes, committed to championing nature and solving the planet's most pressing environmental challenges.

## 20 become 'UAE Envoys for Nature'

ABU DHABI In conjunction with World Environment Day and following on from a nationwide search, Connect with Nature has announced the selection of its official "UAE Ambassadors for Nature".

The ambassadors include a group of 20 homegrown heroes committed to championing nature and solving the planet's most pressing environmental challenges. The carefully chosen ambassadors have shown eagerness to embrace their country, explore their passion, and unlock the opportunity to develop new skills to drive positive change in the UAE.

The 20 ambassadors were selected out of hundreds of the UAE's youth, all of whom have been active participants in the Connect with Nature movement which enables youth across the country to connect, explore and take action for nature through a series of impactful environmental activities and events.

A prestigious selection committee was involved in the rigorous selection of the 20 ambassadors, comprising top sustainability leaders and youth representatives from across Emirates Nature - WWF, Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, Ministry of Climate Change and Environment and Hajj & Fatwa Group.

Connect with Nature, an initiative founded by Emirates Nature - WWF and Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi with the International Fund for Monarchs Conservation as a strategic partner, aims to shape the leaders of tomorrow by providing youth with the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge, equipping them with skills such as leadership, communication, public speaking, campaigning, motivation and activism. The programme inspires youth to pioneer revolutionary technology and radical innovations and to lead a new wave of green careers.



The carefully chosen ambassadors have shown eagerness to embrace their country and unlock opportunities to develop new skills to drive positive change in the UAE. Nature need for sustainable progress.

It is our role to equip young people with the required skills and knowledge, which is critical to achieving the vision of the UAE's leadership for a sustainable UAE.

Lama Mostafa Abdulaziz, Director-General of Emirates Nature - WWF said, "We are looking forward to working with the selected ambassadors to incorporate new and innovative ways to solve current environmental challenges."

Dr. Shalwa Salem Al-Dinawi, Secretary-General of Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, said, "Strengthening and protecting the UAE's rich and diverse flora and fauna is a core facet of the UAE's National Agenda. The 20 selected Ambassadors for Nature will play a vital role in this regard."

passion for a healthy, sustainable future for all, which is only possible on a planet where nature thrives and mangroves, oceans and our forests and freshwater lakes, rivers and streams flourish.



## Media announcing our UAE Ambassadors for Nature reached

# 2,348,992

through coverage and interviews on World Environment Day.





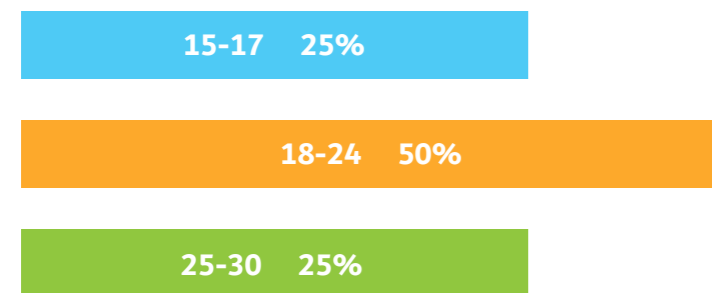
# 2020 IN REVIEW

## Demographics of the Ambassadors

The demographics of the Ambassadors showcases the diversity of the Connect with Nature community and how the program acts as platform where local youth from different backgrounds unite together for nature.

### Age Range of Ambassadors

15-17	25%
18-24	50%
25-30	25%



### Nationality of Ambassadors

Emirati	25%
Filipino	10%
Indian	10%
Lebanese	10%
Jordanian	5%
Kazakhstan	5%
British	5%
Irish	5%
New Zealand	5%

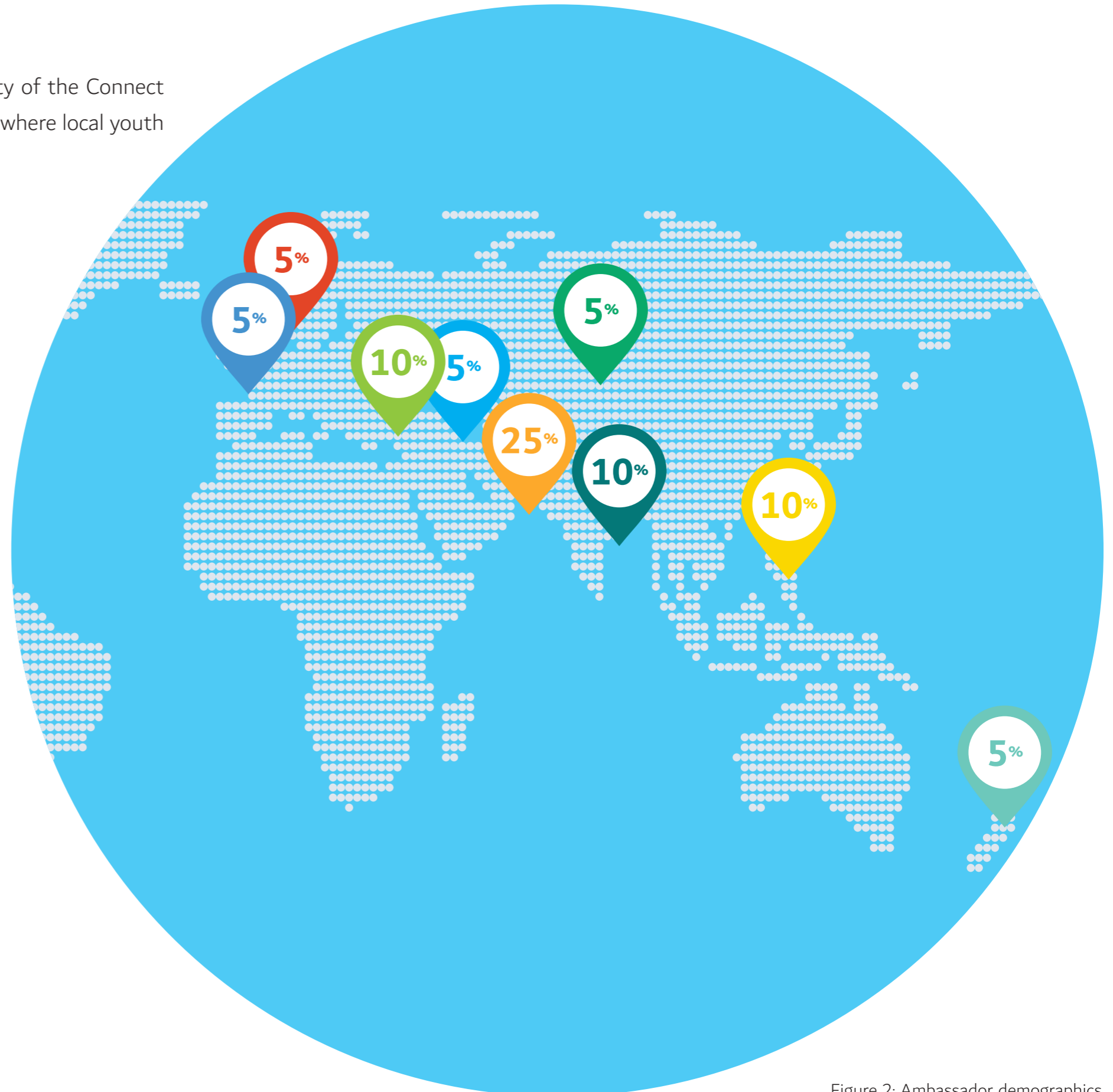


Figure 2: Ambassador demographics  
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# 2020 IN REVIEW

## Stages of the Ambassador's Programme

The Ambassadors' 12-month journey passes through three different stages: Learn, Act, Inspire.



### LEARN

June - August 2020

Youth learned about three key topics:

- Biodiversity
- Climate Change
- Market Transformation and Innovation as well as develop capacity building.



### ACT

September - December 2020

During this stage youth collected 20 volunteer hours gained from contributing to activities and events that engage youth with nature.



### INSPIRE

January - June 2021

In the final stage youth will design and deliver two projects:

1. Plan an event / campaign to influence change in their community
2. Ambassadors will design and delivery their won CwN event.



Due to the impact of Covid-19, the Ambassador programme had to take place virtually.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the Ambassadors had successful Learn and Act stages where they received 25+ hours of training from leading experts and undertook 20 hours of individual volunteering by co-creating and delivering multiple Connect with Nature events, engaging in Youth Circles, and mentoring Nature Champions to complete their hours.

By the end of 2020, our Ambassadors demonstrated profound progress along their leadership journey, particularly in public speaking forums and communicating environmental issues effectively. The Ambassadors led CwN events such as the Ghaf Youth Majlis and co-led virtual activities such as quiz nights and debates. In 2021, these leaders will use their experience to promote the programme and encourage others to join the CwN movement.

Figure 3: Ambassadors Programme



# 2020 IN REVIEW



“

This movement has truly inspired many youth to take a step forward and help protect nature with their own ideas and resources. I am really lucky to be a part of the team and inspire young minds to take action which was possible only because of the pathway created by **Connect with Nature**. Thank You.

”

- Meenakshi Nair,  
15-18 years old

“

With Connect with Nature, I have met amazing people, discovered new places and I have gained the knowledge and experience to **reduce my footprint on nature** and encourage others to become eco-friendly.

”

- Abdulla Almatrooshi,  
19-22 years old



## ▣ Nature Champions

CwN launched the **Nature Champions programme** a few months after the Ambassador initiative, which is the first tier of the Emirates Nature-WWF Youth Sustainable Leadership Program to build the skillset and confidence of members to grow the movement and drive momentum through awareness-raising events.



Nature Champions have been mentored and guided by their fellow Ambassadors to help complete their program requirements. Nature Champions pass through two stages: Earth School, where they embark on a series of learning delivered via video and deliver a Connect with Nature experience. Approximately 30 youth are taking part in Nature Champions.



# 2020 IN REVIEW

## Re-Imagine Youth Circle Series

During the lockdown of summer 2020, Connect with Nature and the Federal Youth Authority launched the Re-imagine Youth Circle Series to provide our future leaders with a platform to co-create the Nation's vision for the next 50 years. From May to November, we organized 10 youth circles that addressed various environmental topics and hosted **1,600 youth** and 19 expert speakers including **H.E. Abdulla Bin Touq**, Minister of Economy; **H.E. Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed Belhaif Al Nuaimi**, Minister of Climate Change and Environment; and **H.E. Mariam bint Mohammed Almheiri**, Minister of State for Food Security; **H.E. Razan Al Mubarak**, Managing Director of the Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi; **H.E. Noor Al Marzouqi**, Deputy Director General of the International Fund for Houbara Conservation; **H.E. Dr. Shaikha Salem Al Dhaheri**, Secretary General of the Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi; and **H.E. Mohammed Saleh Hasan Baidani**, Director General of the International Fund for Houbara Conservation.

Media announcement of the series reached

# 818,280

across top tier publications. Op-eds linked to this announcement by EAD's Managing Director **H.E. Razan Al Mubarak**, EAD's Secretary General **H.E. Dr. Shaikha Salem Al Dhaheri**, and Emirates Nature- WWF's Director General **Laila Abdullatif** and others were featured in Al Ittihad, Gulf News respectively.

## Incredible Support from High Level Decision Makers



**H.E. Dr. Abdullah Belhaif Al Nuaimi**  
Minister of Climate Change and Environment

“Youth empowerment and engagement in shaping the nation's future strategies is a long-standing priority for the UAE and its wise leadership. In this regard, the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment is keen on participating in events targeting young people and launching initiatives that raise their awareness about environmental action and boost their ability to devise innovative ideas that support the country's sustainable development.”

He noted that sessions that allow the young generation to interact with decision makers from the government and other sectors offer a prime opportunity to learn about their ideas and views of the future and enable the new generation to actively contribute to designing the next 50 years of the nation.



**H.E. Shamma Bint Suhail Faris Al Mazrui**  
Minister of State for Youth Affairs

She shared an inspirational statement on the critical role that youth can play: “Nature remains the lifeline of our survival. It is vital now, more than ever to refresh the regulations that have resulted in the challenges we're battling today. However, it is not too late. I am certain that we can shift our patterns with the joint efforts of both local, regional and global cooperation. Our hope remains on the youth and I strongly believe that with their forward-thinking mindset, together we will achieve the positive change for nature we want to see for the coming generations. Publication of the white paper: CwN becomes known as the “voice of the youth”.



# 2020 IN REVIEW

## Re-Imagine Youth Majlis White Paper

UAE youth have spoken and acknowledged the role that they play in driving change, reimagining a green recovery for the nation, as well as drawing a roadmap for the next 50 years. The Re-Imagine Youth Majlis series' final white paper titled **'Is Nature a Priority for UAE Youth in the COVID-19 Recovery?'** was presented by youth, for youth, in the final youth circle attended by 370 young people across the nation. **Recommendations** focus on four key areas of action that scale, accelerate, and amplify individuals' impact for the benefit of both people and planet. These include:



Preserving Nature and Wildlife



Stimulating a Green Recovery and Achieving No Plastic in Nature



Accelerating Climate Action



Ensuring Food and Water Security

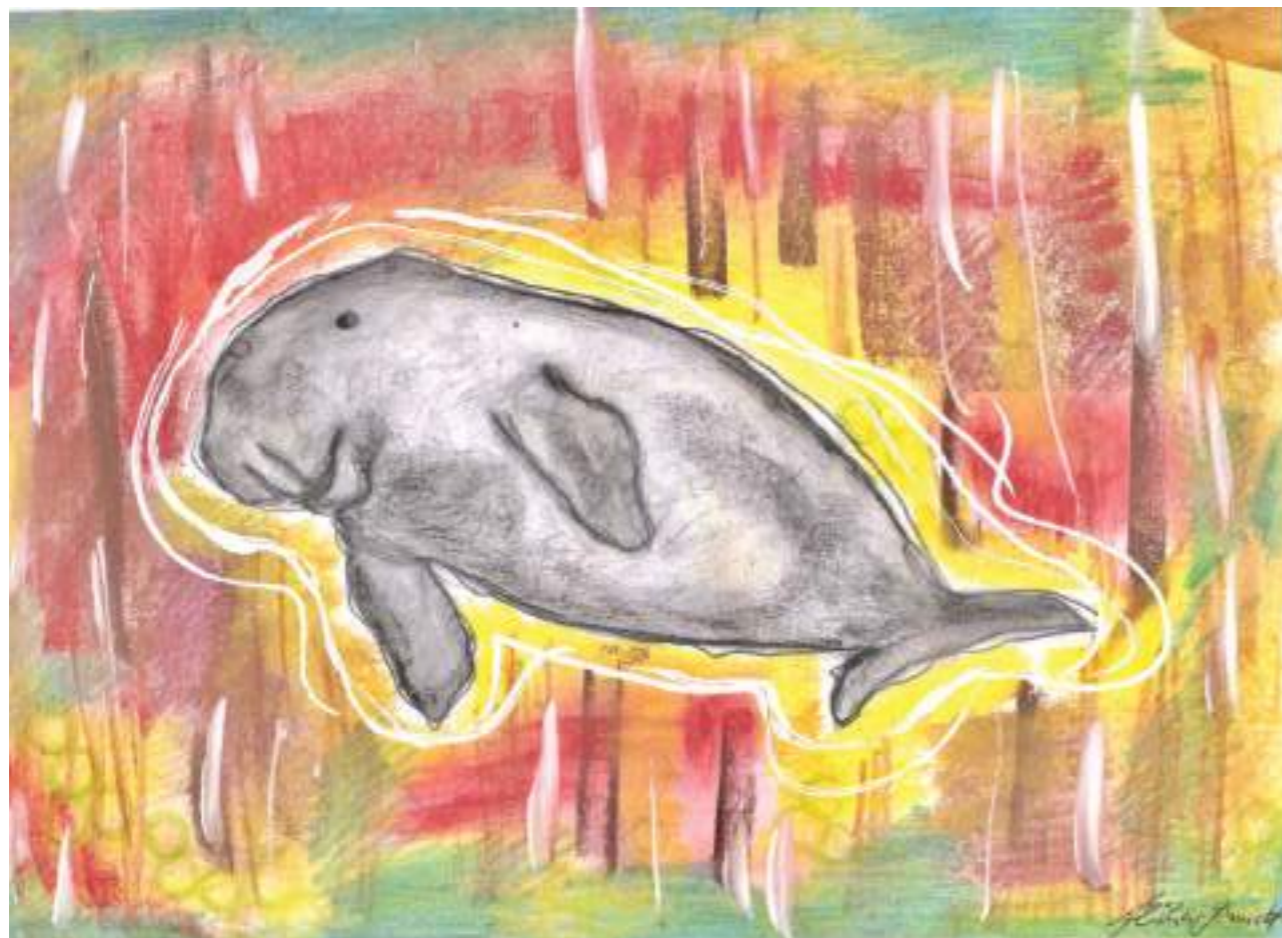


# 2020 IN REVIEW

## Ghaf Youth Majlises

Another impactful youth circle series was the **Ghaf Youth Majlis**, which was launched in November 2020. Connect with Nature and the Al Fahim Group took a novel approach to collaborate in three youth circle sessions with the aim of spreading environmental awareness through storytelling. A total of **511 youth** attended the sessions.

Inspired by the UAE's National Tree, the storytelling aspect of the Ghaf majlis series probed important questions and encouraged open discussion between sustainability leaders, decision-makers, experienced environmentalists, and youth to help find a balance between modern life and protecting our ecosystems, whilst keeping our traditions alive.



Alongside the Youth Majlis sessions was a threatened species illustration competition, launched with the aim to raise awareness on 10 threatened species in the UAE across three categories: Artwork, Photography and Poetry. The winners were selected live during the final Youth Circle with exciting prizes provided by Al Fahim and social media exposure. It was a wonderfully inspiring event and competition that spread optimism amongst the community.



# 2020 IN REVIEW

## Virtual Escape Room

On **World Habitat Day**, the 5th of October, the Connect with Nature programme launched the UAE's first conservation-themed '**3D Virtual Mobile Escape Room**' offering youth an engaging new experience and learning opportunity. Through a series of exciting challenges, the all-new, 3D virtual mobile escape room educates youth on the importance of **Houbara conservation** and the **UAE's rich natural heritage**.



## 2020 IN REVIEW

### Challenges faced towards the end of 2020

Despite high attendance at the virtual youth circles, it became difficult to maintain engagement in other virtual activities. As restrictions eased and the weather cooled, youth began prioritising the need to spend time in nature. The CwN team was so proud to see the community engage in nature on their own, but could not hold group outdoor experiences with members due to safety protocols.

In order to address these challenges, Connect with Nature expanded self-guided activities to include fun outdoor options, allowing youth to explore nature around the UAE by themselves or with their friends (while maintaining as much as safety as possible). These activities included badge-earning opportunities such as:

- ✓ **Scavenger Hunts:** searching for hidden QR codes in a specific nature site while also learning new facts
- ✓ **Discover UAE:** explore key nature sites
- ✓ **Mission Blue:** self-guided marine activity for International Coastal Clean-up day where youth conducted beach clean-ups
- ✓ **Just Wing It:** raising awareness & celebrating World Migratory Bird Day



## 2020 IN REVIEW

### Looking ahead – 2021 and beyond

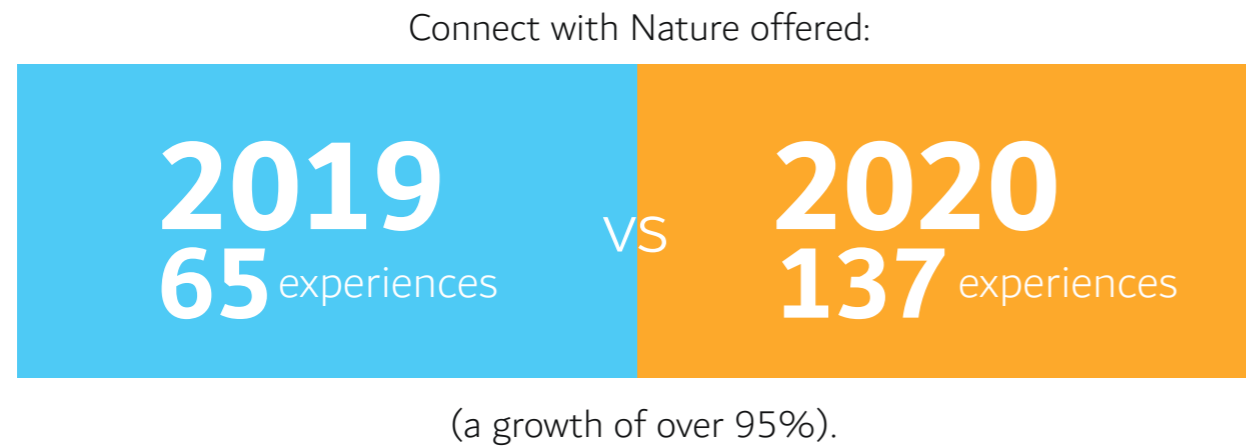
In 2021, we aim to **empower more youth** and **other individuals** in contributing to their own future journeys for nature. Our youth engagement initiatives will expand further as we work closely with schools and universities to expand the reach of CwN and transform students into **future leaders in sustainability**.

Beyond youth, we aspire to offer **volunteering opportunities** to people across all walks of society – governments, business, and the public. Volunteers will have the opportunity to **ideate and co-create critical solutions to sustainability**, and then implement these solutions at scale as part of communities of action.





# NUMBERS & GRAPHS IN DETAIL



## Connect with Nature Events

### NUMBER OF EXPERIENCES

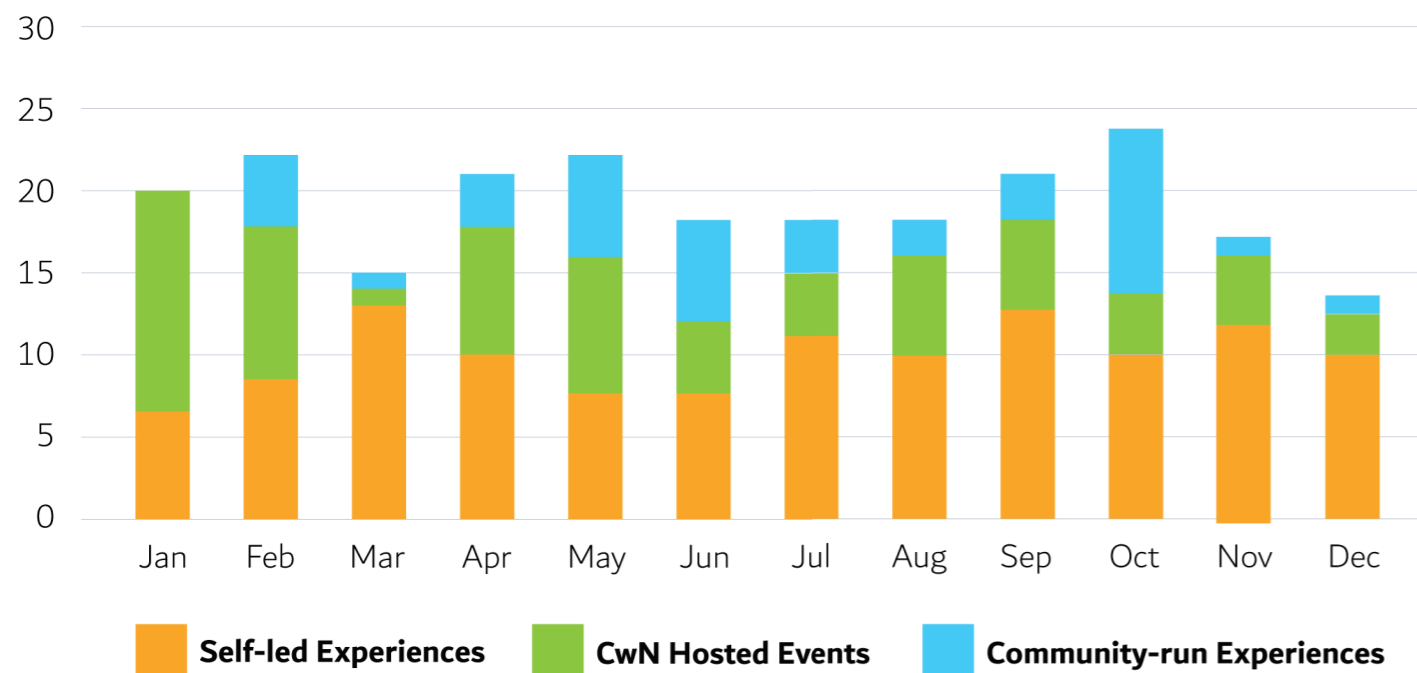


Figure 4. Number of experiences in 2020

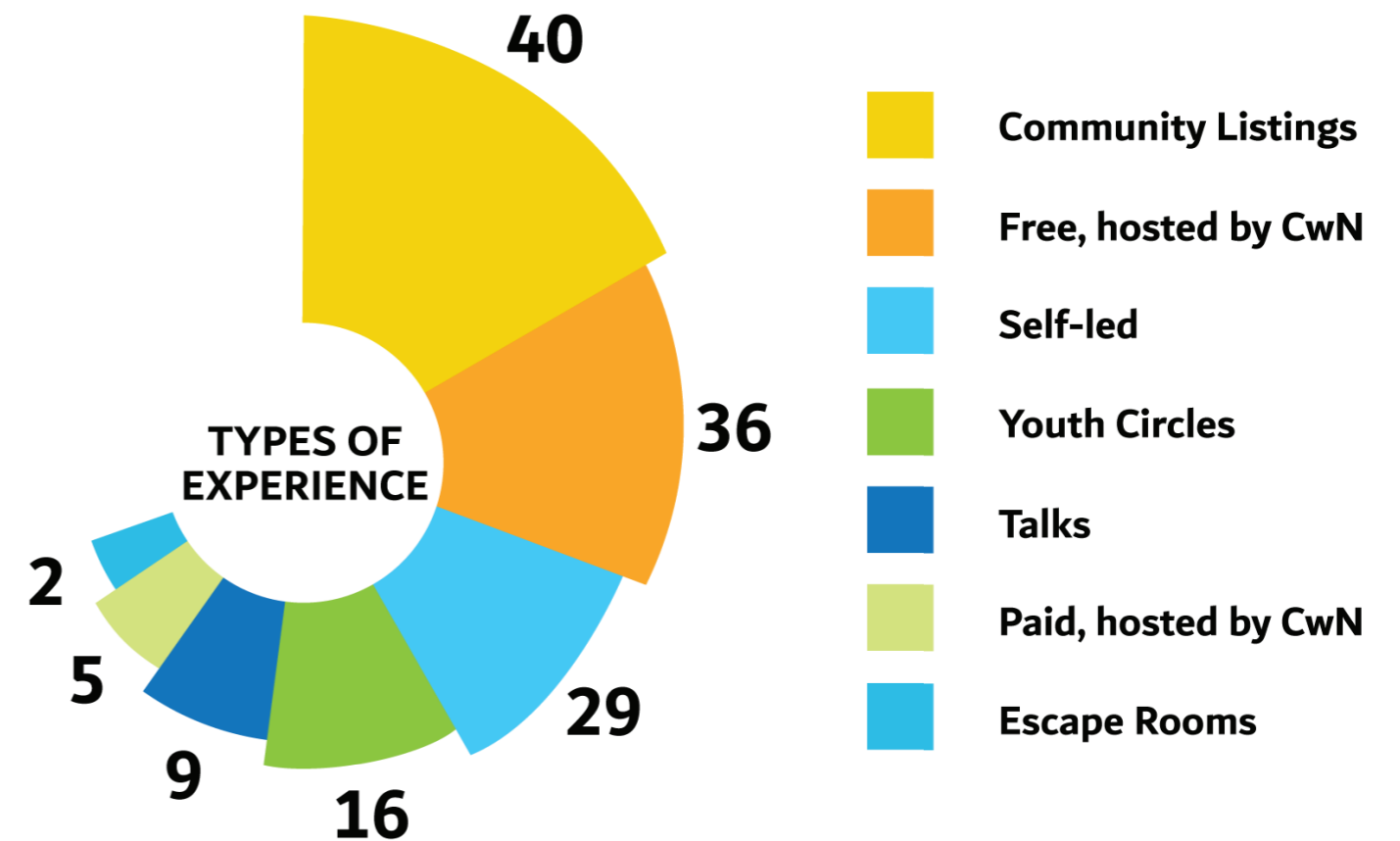


Figure 5. Types of experiences in 2020

**Self-guided activities** dominated throughout **2020** representing the highest number of activities compared to other categories, this was fuelled by the inability to gather in groups due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Almost all CwN activities in 2020 were **free of cost**. Paid CwN experiences only have a minor presence in 2020, mainly due to free virtual activities charge.

**Youth Majlises** played a major role in the development and growth of the program in 2020 with **15 sessions** taking place throughout the year.

**October 2020** saw the largest number of events with community listings, new self-guided activities, and the **launch of the virtual 3D Mobile Escape Room**.

# NUMBERS & GRAPHS IN DETAIL

## EXPERIENCES PARTICIPATION 2019 VS 2020

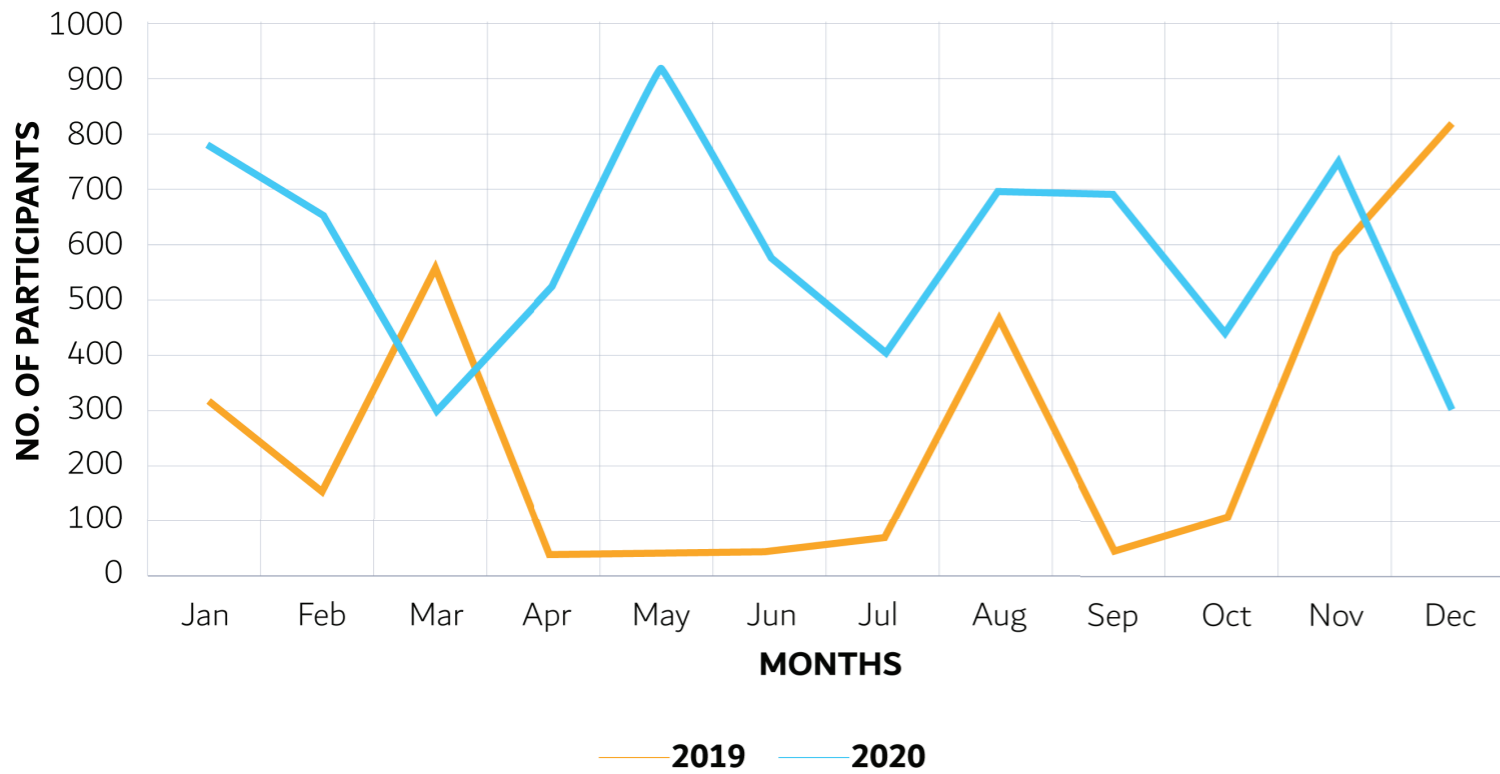
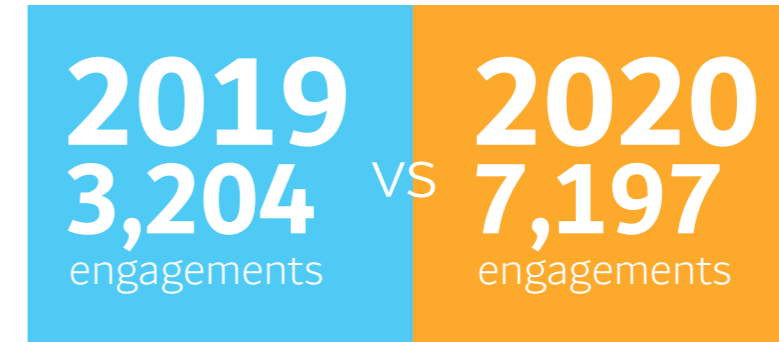


Figure 6. Experience participation each month in 2020 vs 2019

Despite the lockdown, May 2020 was the most successful month with a total number of **921 participation**. Youth were collecting as many badges as they could to compete and fulfil the UAE Ambassador for Nature application requirements during this time.

November 2020 saw the largest number of participants in a single experience, as **622 youth** attended the final Re-imagine Youth Circle series where the CwN team along with the Ambassadors for Nature, revealed the findings of the **White Paper report**.

Connect with Nature had:



Despite the pandemic, 2020 saw the number of participations in our experiences more than double. As displayed in (Figure 6) Experience participation was **higher in 2020** than all months in 2019 except for March and December, which is a directly related to the pandemic as lockdown was imposed in March and cases started rising again in December 2020.

The lowest experience participation was seen in March 2020 as a result of the suspension of CwN activities and the CwN team preparing to switch to **virtual activities**.

Overall, the **Re-imagine Youth circle Series** was the **most successful experience** as each circle had an average of **200 participants**.

Each month had many factors effecting participation, from lockdown, to the rise and fall of Covid-19 cases to the onset of online fatigue from attending many **virtually sessions**.



# NUMBERS & GRAPHS IN DETAIL

## Community Survey Feedback

Trend 1

94% would recommend Connect with Nature to a friend

- When asked about their favourite experience, the answers varied widely, suggesting that our wide range of activities succeeded in appealing to a variety of interests within the community.
- When asked about the impact and engagement of the virtual activities, **95.7%** of respondents gave a rating of **7 or above out of 10**. It is heartening to see that the community has responded well to our adapted activities during the pandemic.
- Survey data shows that we are most effective at fostering an emotional connection to nature. A stronger **emotional connection** is an indicator that the programme is influencing participants' values and allegiance to the natural world.

Trend 2

Our participants scored an average of **86%** on the Nature Connectedness Index (NCI)

- The CwN framework guides participants towards feeling that they are part of the natural world, rather than nature being a commodity. The survey showed that the community are well connected with nature scoring an average of **86%** on the Nature Connectedness Index. Nature is clearly placed in high regard by our community.

## PARTICIPANTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATURE

Agreement with these statements on a scale of "completely disagree" to "completely agree"

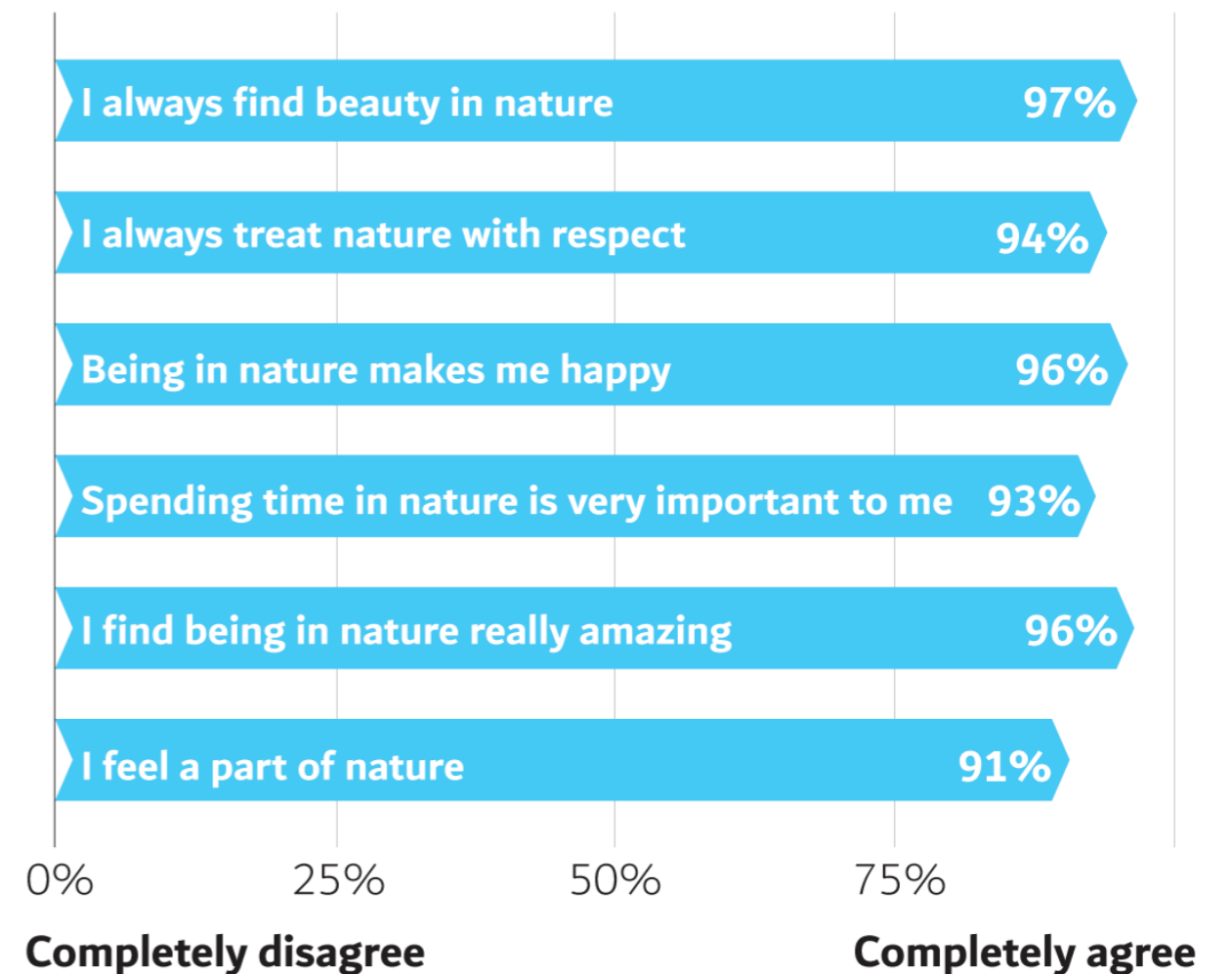


Figure 7. Importance of nature to participants

# NUMBERS & GRAPHS IN DETAIL

## Behaviour Change

Studies show that awareness does not necessarily lead to action. CwN employs a **theory of behaviour change through its activities** that enables people to not only enjoy nature but protect it too. The programme uses experiential learning through **nature to encourage pro-environmental attitudes**, and to instil intrinsic values and emotional connections to the natural world that **fosters future behaviour change** within participants.

Trend **3**

**87%** of participants said Connect with Nature has dramatically increased their commitment to the environment

- When it comes to making sustainable choices, participants are now demonstrating **a healthy level of pro-environmental behaviours** and are particularly committed to **reducing single-use plastic and water conservation**.



## PARTICIPANTS' SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOURS CHOICES ON A SCALE OF 1-5



Figure 8. Participants sustainable choices



# COMMUNICATIONS

## Social Media

We keep our community inspired and up to date with our latest news and activities through our social media channels (**4,207 followers**), with the majority of the engagement happening on Instagram. All our social channels continue to grow organically with a 25% growth recorded in 2020.

 **3,574**

 **633**

Total Followers **25%** organic growth

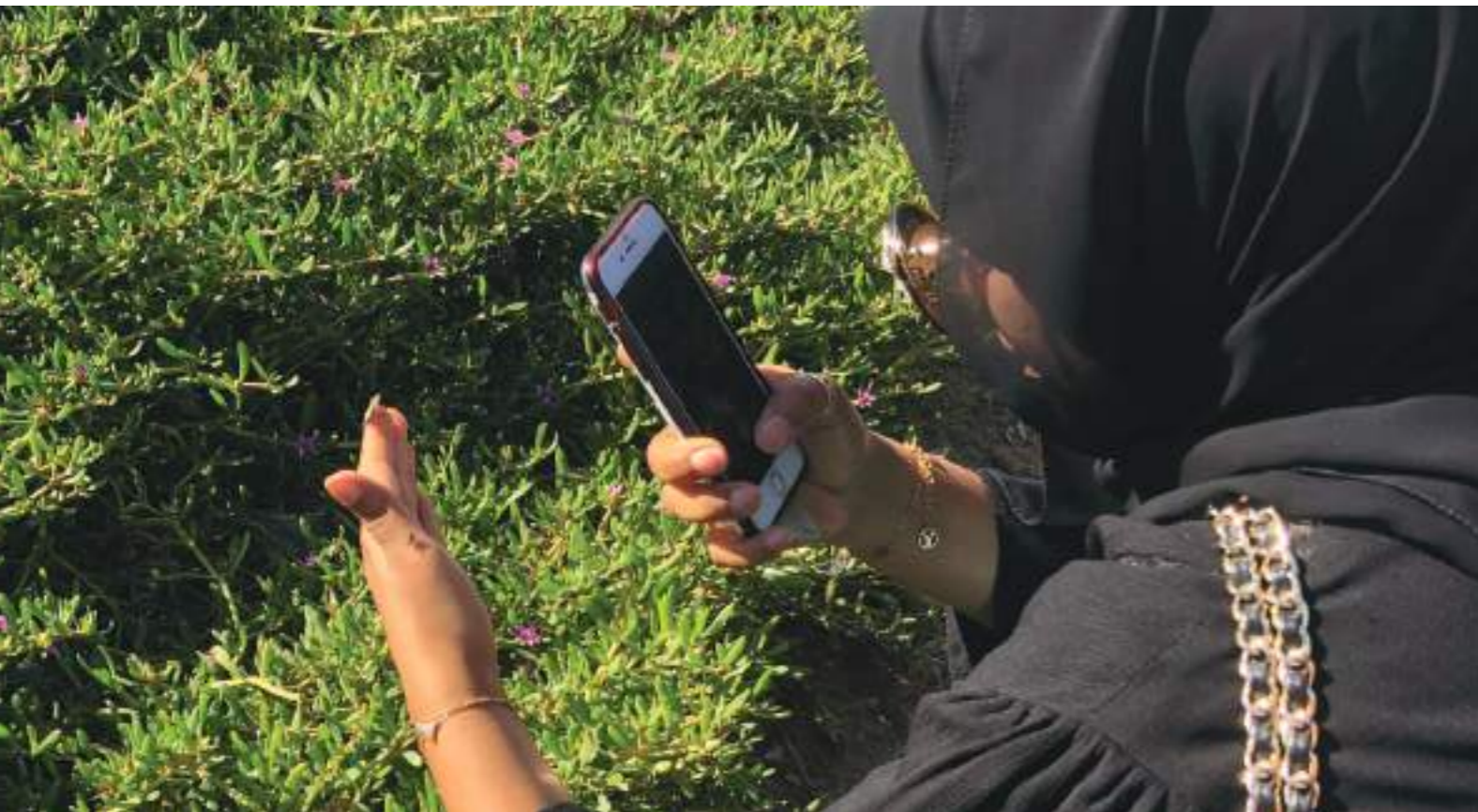
## Email

In 2020, our database saw a **21% increase**, with ongoing communication including a weekly newsletter promoting our activities and news. Our newsletters have an average of 32% open rate an increase of 50% from the previous year and 2x better than the industry standard (12-15%).

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an increase of **50%** from the previous year

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## Connect with Nature Website

At the center of our ecosystem is our **website**. Our community hub is designed to provide visitors with all the information they need about the movement, events and activities, as well as drive them to take action by either joining the movement or registering for our events.

In **2020**

**50%** growth in users visiting the website

**69,997** unique users viewing

**154,099** total pages viewed

**5x** more than the average for most websites in this industry!

Ratio of users visiting the website in 2020

**+5%** minor increase in MALE users visiting the website

**44%** MALE visiting the website

**55%** FEMALE visiting the website

majority are located in **Dubai and Abu Dhabi**

We have seen a decrease in the amount of time spent on the CwN website, which is now 1 minute 40 seconds, down from 3 min 19sec in 2019. This is lower than the global standard for a website (2 minutes), which is due to a higher adoption of the **CwN app** and a larger reliance on Hubspot forms to drive registration to activities. (Ads were leading straight to form hosted on Hubspot for higher conversion).



## Connect with Nature Website

The App facilitates the **user's engagement with nature** in an exciting and modern way. Offering youth a new way to connect with nature via **technology** enriches the experience and fosters stronger relationships with nature by ushering youth to **complete the programme**. The App also helps CwN to quickly measure **levels of engagement** and follows users throughout the programme cycle.

The APP features **gamified nature locations** and **educational events** offering users the opportunity to learn and explore UAE locations. It offers various types of challenges and badge-earning opportunities, including:

- Wild workouts
- Quiz nights
- Movie nights
- Environmental debates
- Sketching workshops
- Behaviour changing: Plastic Free July, Ramadan Resolutions, Mission Blue



## Connect with Nature Mobile App

4,311 times downloaded

70% retained users

42 average number of people using the App

This has seen a sharp decline as outdoor gamified activities delivered through the app were limited in 2020, and we found that community members were more interested in the activities themselves rather than gaining badges especially once our Ambassadors were selected and there was no competition. That said, our active users spent 50% more time on the app than they did last year, averaging 8 minutes and 27 seconds which means they found the app engaging.

In 2020

our users earned a total of 3,241 badges

including 1,587 Explore badges

and 1,644 Impact badges

This shows that users are equally interested in both **explore** and **impact activities**.

# PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS

Thank you to all our **esteemed partners and sponsors** to create the Connect with Nature programme allowing us to inspire, motivate and enable youth to be part of the **solution to change the world**.

## Partners



الصندوق الدولي للحفاظ على الحبارى  
International Fund For Houbara Conservation

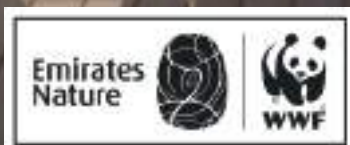
## Collaborators

- Abu Dhabi Investment Office
- Al Fahim Group
- Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA)
- Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM)
- Emirates Marine Environmental Group (EMEG)
- Herriot Watt University, Dubai
- Husaak Adventures
- International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA)
- Ministry of Artificial Intelligence
- Ministry of Climate Change & Environment
- Ministry of Education
- Food Security Office
- Ministry of Health and Prevention
- Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund
- Panthera
- Sea Hawk
- Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority
- Sustainable Development Research and Training Institute
- The Gamifiers
- The Federal Youth Authority





 **connect  
with  
nature**



Emirates Nature–WWF is a non-profit organisation established to drive positive change in the United Arab Emirates to conserve the nation’s natural heritage. Established in 2001 under the generous patronage of H.H. Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Ruler’s Representative in the Al Dhafra Region, we work with partners to devise policies, educate communities and implement conservation solutions to ensure the future health of the Earth, its ecosystems and inhabitants. We are part of the global WWF network, which has a 50-year legacy of environmental conservation and is supported by more than five million people worldwide.

For more information about Emirates Nature–WWF, please visit [emiratesnaturewwf.ae](http://emiratesnaturewwf.ae)