

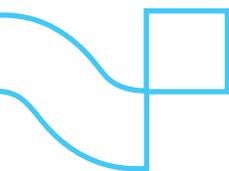
# CONNECT WITH NATURE

## 2023 Review



FOUNDING PARTNERS





## HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023

In the Year of Sustainability and COP28, Connect with Nature pivoted to integrate Public Participation in Scientific Research (PPSR) into all field activities. We mobilized the community to participate in real science and drive tangible impact on the ground, by contributing to conservation projects as citizen scientists.

2023 was also the first full year without social distancing restrictions, enabling us to expand the number of events organized. 50 events were held across the country, with half taking place across Abu Dhabi. More than 4,000 data points were gathered at these events, ranging from the amount of litter categorized and nurdles collected, to observations captured on the iNaturalist app, camera trap images analyzed, and trees planted or monitored.

Building upon our legacy of nurturing UAE youth into leaders of sustainability, Emirates Nature-WWF and the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) launched a comprehensive Youth Legacy for COP28 engagement strategy to guide campaigns and activations for the year. The strategy outlines a detailed journey map to move youth through various stage of advocacy, from driving awareness on the ground to inspiring

participation and encouraging youth to upskill themselves. Nationwide, our community of youth changemakers and environmentalists dedicated 4,670 hours for nature. Their commitment to nature was evident in the field and in their homes as well. Nearly 1,000 youth joined virtual events and digital workshops such as our staple Climate Series and popular Turtle masterclasses, which were held primarily during the summer months.

Our mangrove-themed escape room toured the nation in 2023, inspiring thousands to learn about Nature-based Solutions and join the movement to build a sustainable future. The newest cohort of youth Ambassadors for Nature will build upon this strong legacy of impact in the coming months, as they inspire even more UAE youth to explore, study and protect nature.



**Arabella Willing**  
Head, Conservation Outreach  
and Citizen Science  
Emirates Nature-WWF

“Connect with Nature serves as a crucial stepping stone for the nation’s youth, bringing them closer to nature while also developing their skills, knowledge and experience in preserving our environment. We look forward to expanding our reach in the years ahead, and creating opportunities for youth community leaders to amplify their impact.”



## HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023



**2,530,000**  
**YOUTH**

REACHED IN 2023



**50 EVENTS**

ORGANIZED ON THE  
GROUND AND ONLINE



**40,798 UNIQUE**  
**VISITORS**

TO WEBSITE IN 2023



**2,692 MOBILE**  
**APP USERS**



**10% GROWTH**  
IN INSTAGRAM  
FOLLOWERS



**50**  
**MEDIA**  
**STORIES**



**10+ MEDIA**  
**INTERVIEWS**  
**DURING COP28,**  
REACHING MILLIONS  
OF READERS



**2,500**  
**PARTICIPANTS**  
IN THE ESCAPE ROOM



**10 AMBASSADORS**  
**FOR NATURE**



**4,000+**  
**DATA POINTS**  
GATHERED



**4,670**  
**HOURS**  
FOR NATURE



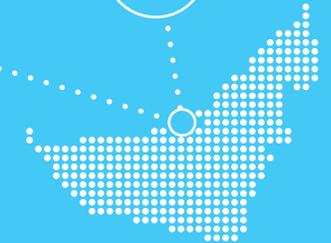
**2,360**  
**YOUTH**  
**PARTICIPANTS**

**2,000+ HOURS**  
FOR NATURE  
RECORDED



SPOTLIGHT:  
**ABU DHABI**

**24 EVENTS**  
ORGANIZED



SPOTLIGHT:  
**VIRTUAL EVENTS**



**980 YOUTH**  
PARTICIPANTS

**1,500+ HOURS**  
FOR NATURE



**16 EVENTS**  
AND MASTERCLASSES  
HELD ONLINE



## NOTABLE PROJECTS IN 2023

2023 was an exciting year for Connect with Nature, as we embedded PPSR elements across events and prioritized the collection of data to support scientific research in the UAE.

### Sahim – A New Era for Citizen Science

Developed by the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD), Sahim enables people of all ages to become citizen scientists. Through this inspiring initiative, our youth community cleared litter from the natural environment, categorizing and geotagging it to better inform research. The data collected is crucial to existing conservation projects and will ultimately help inform decision-making and policy.

### Caught on Camera

Youth volunteers also contributed towards biodiversity surveys, helping analyze footage captured at camera traps and through Emirates Nature-WWF projects. The data collected improves our understanding of local wildlife.

### Mighty Mangroves

Biodiversity preservation efforts include the planting of mangrove trees and subsequent monitoring of their health and growth over time. The Connect with Nature community supported these activities, gathering vital information to assess which sites are suitable for mangrove restoration and what factors contribute to the survival of mangrove trees.

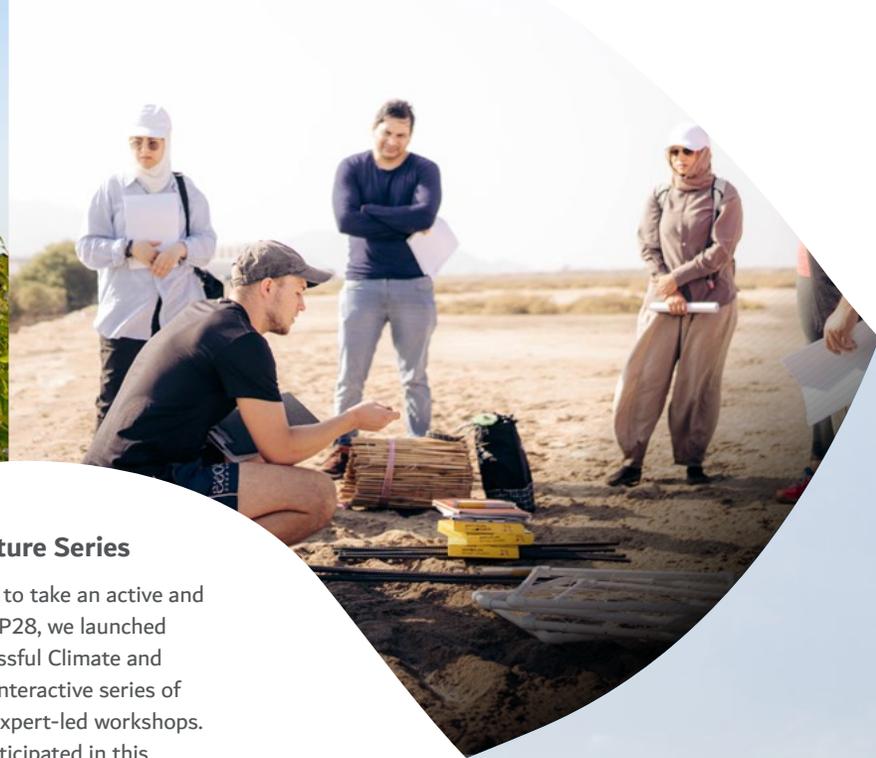
### Climate and Nature Series

To encourage youth to take an active and informed role at COP28, we launched the incredibly successful Climate and Nature series – an interactive series of masterclasses and expert-led workshops. **815 individuals** participated in this popular series, which featured talks such as Mermaid Diaries, Climate Fresh and Food for Thought.

“As a Connect with Nature volunteer, participating in conservation activities such as Turtle Surveys and Clean Ups has deepened my connection to nature. Our ecosystems are vital for coastal protection and vulnerable biodiversity. Each of these experiences has made me more aware of the impact of pollution on our environment and inspired me to be more mindful of my lifestyle choices, so that I actively contribute to the preservation of nature.”



**Shefeek Mohammed**  
Connect with Nature  
Participant



## COP28 PROJECTS

COP28 served as an excellent platform to reach new audiences and drive greater youth participation in conservation and citizen science. Our projects brought youth closer to the issues and solutions at hand, inspiring a legacy of action that will continue to thrive beyond COP28.

### Youth Insiders

To scale up our impact in this crucial year and uphold our “for youth, by youth” approach, we launched **Youth Insiders**, a newly inaugurated group of young industry professionals who are working to advance green solutions in the UAE. On the Road to COP28, our Youth Insiders shared their insights and led open discussions with youth and the wider public around climate action and sustainability.

**At COP28, Youth Insiders participated in numerous talks and panels, such as the RewirEd Summit 2023 by Dubai Cares and Climate Series.**

### Mangrove-themed Escape Room

One of our most exciting community activations in 2023 was our mangrove-themed escape room. On World Environment Day, we re-launched our successful escape room experience with a new theme that highlights the critical role of mangrove forests as a key Nature-based Solution for climate, biodiversity and people.

Following its inauguration in June, the escape room visited four separate locations and made a final stop in the Green Zone at COP28. With support from our community of volunteers, the escape room was operational for 13 days at COP28 and attracted over 2,000 participants – reaching both local and international audiences.

### ESCAPE ROOM



**2,500+ PARTICIPANTS**  
IN 2023



**900+ HOURS**  
FOR NATURE



### SPOTLIGHT: COP28



**2,000 PARTICIPANTS**  
AT COP28

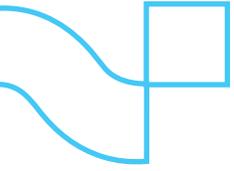


**500+ HOURS**  
FOR NATURE



FOUNDING PARTNERS





## AMBASSADORS FOR NATURE

In 2023, we re-launched the youth Ambassadors for Nature programme. 10 promising students and youth between the ages of 16 to 35 were handpicked to become our newest cohort of Ambassadors for Nature. They began their year-long journey at COP28, joining the global discourse on climate and nature, and inspiring others to explore, study and protect nature. These inspiring leaders will play a vital role in shaping the future of Connect with Nature.

An additional 15 youth aged between 15 to 17 were trained through the **Murshed Youth Rangers Programme**, which is organized by EAD. The programme provides youth with academic and professional development opportunities while also nurturing a spirit of environmental stewardship. Connect with Nature supports the programme by training rangers to become mangrove guides and citizen scientists.



**10 AMBASSADORS FOR NATURE**



**15 MURSHED YOUTH RANGERS TRAINED**

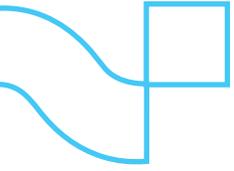


**Tejasvi Prakash**  
Ambassador for Nature

“My experience as a volunteer triggered a profound sense of ecological sensitivity and a heightened awareness of the unique landscape of the UAE. I grew to view and love the UAE in a very different way, recognizing its rich biodiversity and realizing the urgent need to protect and preserve it.

The Ambassadors for Nature platform provides me with the right skills, knowledge and tools to share my passion for environmental conservation and inspire in others a greater sense of responsibility toward our environment. I aim to make a tangible difference by encouraging waste reduction, proper waste segregation at home and recycling, as well as spreading the message on the importance of mangroves, by organizing community and school workshops and clean-up events.”





## THE ROAD AHEAD

Moving forward, Ambassadors for Nature will have the opportunity to expand their impact, by playing a leading role in our data collection endeavour and overseeing community engagement events run by promising 'Community Leaders.' These are members of the wider community who have expressed interest in hosting events for their communities, in alignment with Connect with Nature standards and guidelines. Not only will these events help grow the reach of the overall movement, they will also provide valuable data that meet PPSR requirements and help accelerate the rate at which we collect data.

**As we approach the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Connect with Nature, we have strong confidence in the unwavering capability and dedication of our youth leaders to steer the youth movement and achieve greater scale and impact.**



## 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](http://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 organization was founded in 2001 by our Honorary Founder and President, 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 organizations.