

My Work, My World

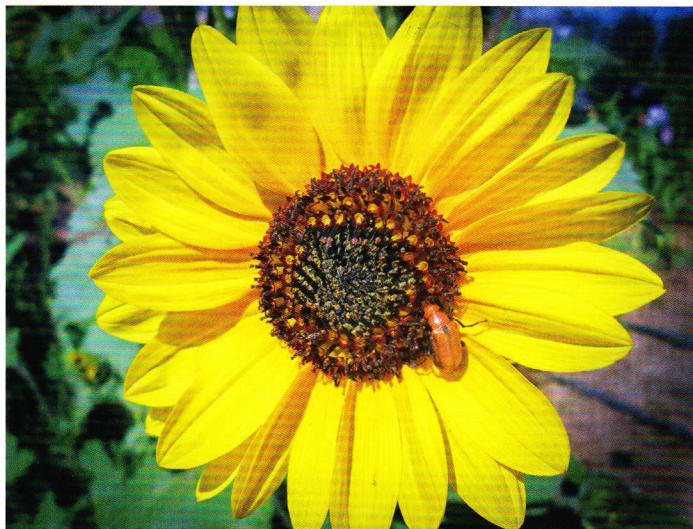
Giving a Voice to Biodiversity by Kira Sadler, MSc

I have always cared deeply about other species. While my curiosity about human cultures of the world inspired me to study anthropology at the University of Colorado in Boulder, it was my love for the natural world that brought me to the University of Kent in Canterbury, England, to complete a master's degree in conservation biology. The Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology at the University of Kent is based in the anthropology department, so my conservation education linked my curiosity and passion with a focus on how people impact and are impacted by conservation efforts. I came to understand that people and their ideas, cultures, preferences and actions must be considered in every effort to conserve the natural world and that people's perceptions and worldviews dictate their interactions with and actions toward the environment. Reversing damage to ecosystems is rarely successful unless the surrounding human communities are involved.

When I first encountered Voices for Biodiversity (V4B) in 2010, I remember thinking that I was born to be a part of this unique project. V4B is a multimedia platform that is completely inclusive in who we publish. We help people of all ages, regardless of their writing ability, to share their stories about nature. I have been co-director since 2017, sharing the responsibility of running the organization with ethnobotanist and environmental and indigenous rights advocate Nejma Belarbi, M.Sc., M.H. Through publication, our team works to empower our writers to speak out as environmental advocates, imprint the tremendous and intrinsic value of biodiversity upon our readers and encourage everyone to be a voice for biodiversity.

Species are going extinct at an unprecedented rate, potentially 10,000 times what is expected. With fewer species, species diversity also declines and damages ecosystems. Biodiversity — literally the diversity of life — creates resilient ecosystems. Most scientists agree that biodiversity loss may be just as damaging to humanity as climate change. Because humans are largely responsible for the current biodiversity crisis, we are capable of reversing it. The V4B team believes that changing human perceptions to include the tremendous intrinsic value of biodiversity is the first step toward saving and even enhancing biodiversity.

Have you ever read a story of someone's experience that touched you deeply and changed the way you see the world?



MARLEY GHARRITY (AGE 12)



MICHELLE MCCARRON

A 2013 study published in *Science* found that individuals who read narratives with in-depth portrayals of an individual's thoughts and inner feelings were more able to understand worldviews contrary to their own and had increased empathy for such individuals and perspectives. We draw on this science and our own experience with storytelling to increase our readers' empathy for other species and ecosystems.

The loudest voices in the field of conservation (and elsewhere) tend to be academics, politicians and formally trained journalists, and among those groups, the individuals speaking out are often Caucasian and male. V4B strives to bring diversity to conversations about biodiversity loss and conservation. We share the voices of individuals from all over the world, people of all ages, ethnicities, educational backgrounds and gender identities who have experiences with nature and conservation that have the potential to inspire. Our team of editors, transcribers and translators works to

bring these stories to publication. Moreover, whenever we can, we give a voice to other species that cannot tell their stories themselves.

In February, we published a photo gallery and interviews with children involved with the Field Institute of Taos in New Mexico. The children, aged 6 through 13, were able to share their photos and ideas about how to best conserve nature. Children often go unheard, but we have found they offer common-sense insights into how to best take care of our planet.

Another article was by Niyonkuru (Chris) Benjamin, a young Rwandan man who began to truly appreciate biodiversity through his experience publishing with V4B. He says, "After getting a chance to work with Voices for Biodiversity, I was interested in everything around me and deeply thankful for the possibility of knowing more about conservation. I want to take care of nature within my country and share this information with my people."



NIYONKURU (CHRIS) BENJAMIN

We also recently published an article by attorney Will Falk titled "How Do Dams Fall? Conversations With the Colorado River." In this tremendous testimony, Falk's lyrical writing and vivid experiences give the Colorado River a powerful voice.

While V4B always aims to give a voice to those who are not usually heard, including women, people of color and youth, we are especially thrilled when we are truly being voices for biodiversity, other species and ecosystems.

I close with an invitation to join our community. We would love to connect you with others in our network working on similar issues, to promote your important environmental work on our social media platforms and ideally to publish your story and help you

be a voice for biodiversity. Please check out our website VoicesforBiodiversity.org, connect with us on social media or get in touch with me at Kira@voicesforbiodiversity.org.

Kira Sadler is a new member of SWG.

