



The river dolphin inhabits the Iténez and Mamoré rivers in Bolivia — Photo © WWF-Canon/Mark Carwardine

## EFN fellow Enzo Aliaga-Rossel on rescuing river dolphins and declaring them a national heritage

**BOLIVIA** – Throughout the world, EFN grantees are engaged in important conservation work. We interviewed Russell E. Train Fellow Enzo Aliaga-Rossel, Bolivia’s leading river dolphin expert, about his efforts to protect the rare mammals and what threatens the future of the species.

### How did you decide to study the river dolphin?

Ever since I was young, I wanted to be a zoologist. I enjoyed studying mammals, but I didn’t have any one species that I liked the most. As an undergraduate I decided to study river dolphins (*Inia geoffrensis boliviensis*) because there were very few individuals studying the species at the time. It was a rewarding

but difficult species to study due to the fact that they inhabit the murky waters of the Amazon basin, and at the time there was very limited data. My research provided an important look at the distribution and abundance of the river dolphin in the Tijamuchi River, Beni, Bolivia. For my master’s, I began studying the movement of the agouti, a small rodent, which is a highly hunted species that most researchers don’t pay much attention to. However, I began to see the important role in seed dispersal that the rodent played. For my PhD, I focused on the effect of hunting over mammal populations and how the reduction of density affects forest structure.

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EFN funds workshops to improve tortoise care and survival in Madagascar. — Photo © WWF-Canon/Tanya Peterson — Story, page 3

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Russell E. Train  
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**In 2010 you made international headlines after you helped lead a dolphin rescue. Tell us what happened.**

Yes, in 2010 I was part of a large rescue mission to save a pod of more than 20 river dolphins that became stuck in a small tributary. That year flooding pushed the dolphins out of the main river and into shallower areas. As the waters began to recede, the dolphins were cut off from the main river and became stuck. For three months we monitored the dolphins, but as the water levels began to drop we realized that without intervention, the dolphins would not survive.

Originally we believed that about nine dolphins were trapped, but as we began the rescue we encountered more than 20 dolphins, including a newly born calf. Relocating the dolphins was not easy, but we did it, and all of them survived. It was an amazing experience.

**Recently you were part of a successful effort to protect the Bolivian river dolphin. How did that develop?**

Yes, I'm very proud that Bolivia recently declared the river dolphin a national heritage. This is the first species Bolivia has ever declared a national heritage, and it has important conservation implications for the protection of this endemic species.

Additionally, the city of Trinidad, Bolivia, also declared the river dolphin a departmental heritage after I gave a presentation to the city council. They were so touched by the presentation that they declared the river dolphin as a symbol of the city right then and there.

**Why are Bolivian river dolphins unique?**

The Bolivian river dolphin is relatively rare. They only exist in a small number of rivers worldwide. The Bolivian river dolphin is actually a separate species from the Amazon river dolphin, and it inhabits two main sub-basin rivers, the Iténez and the Mamoré.



In 2010 Enzo Aliaga-Rossel, above, helped rescue more than 20 river dolphins that had become stuck in a small tributary — Photo by Frankling Aguanta

**What are the largest threats to this magnificent species?**

One of the major threats is local fishing practices. Dolphins are killed because they have been known to destroy fishing nets and because they compete with humans for fish. In Colombia and Brazil, even dolphin fat is sometimes deliberately used as bait for fish. It is tragic. Scavenger fish eat the bait, and these small fish (often catfish) are caught to be sold for high prices in urban areas, because in rural areas the fish are considered undesirable. In both of these countries dolphin kills are very high. Right now this is not a major problem in Bolivia, but it is starting to happen. We are concerned that it could become a bigger issue without proper management and if regulations are not enforced.

**What are you doing now?**

I just started teaching biogeography at the University Mayor de San Andrés in La Paz, Bolivia. In 2011 I completed a post-doctoral position at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and returned to Bolivia to continue my career.

Until I began teaching, I was volunteering here, mainly working on

dolphin issues. I spent a good amount of last year doing presentations to indigenous communities near Trinidad. Trinidad has a municipal protected area that connects two main rivers. There are not many dolphins, but they are there. This is also an area where they are killing dolphins. I have been trying to do workshops and presentations with some basic posters and other environmental materials to help educate the population about the importance of dolphins.

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*Enzo Aliaga-Rossel received a Russell E. Train Fellowship to pursue his doctoral studies at the University of Hawaii. His dissertation was titled, "The cascading effect of mammal species defaunation on seed and seedling survivorship as a result of hunting."*



Graduates of the tortoise husbandry workshop in Ifaty, Madagascar — Photo courtesy of grantee

Topics included species identification and distribution, threats to tortoise populations, national and international laws that protect tortoises, roles and responsibilities of various groups in tortoise confiscations, factors to consider when transporting tortoises seized from the trade, triage, housing construction and husbandry considerations, feeding and watering, and the collection of naturally occurring food plants. Lectures also dealt with the types of information that needed to be collected from confiscations and the reintroduction of tortoises.

In lively discussions, participants attempted to work through the various obstacles to tortoise conservation, including lack of financial resources available locally to effectively deal with tortoise protection, enforcement, and the resulting confiscations.

They also compared the country's Androy Region to the western Atsimo Andrefana Region, where there is no cultural taboo against harming tortoises, and where there is little support for tortoise protection. Participants agreed to lobby regional authorities to become part of the current tortoise conservation initiative and to approach the judiciary system to be more cooperative in dealing with illegal tortoise harvesting cases.

The workshops has already resulted in increased survival rates for confiscated tortoises and is acting as a catalyst to empower other groups monitoring illegal trade of radiated tortoises.

## Radiated Tortoises: Refugees in Their Own Country

On October 10, 2012, two passengers on an Air Madagascar flight to Bangkok, Thailand, and Guangzhou, China, were arrested at Ivato International Airport after attempting to smuggle four suitcases full of 569 radiated tortoises (*Astrochelys radiata*) through customs. In all more than 50 perished.

Record levels of poaching of Madagascar's radiated tortoise are threatening the survival of this endemic species. In fact, the October 10 confiscation was not unusual—WWF estimates that hundreds of radiated tortoises are illegally gathered each week. Local authorities are ramping up antipoaching efforts, but lack of knowledge and inadequate holding facilities result in a high mortality rate among confiscated turtles.

With wild populations crashing rapidly, radiated tortoises are increasingly becoming refugees in their own country. But properly cared for captive tortoises can be released back into protected areas, where they can help reestablish



Photo © WWF-Canon/Martin Harvey

extinct populations and bolster small populations depleted by the illegal trade.

In response to the growing number of tortoise confiscations in the country, and to improve tortoise care and survival, EFN funded a husbandry workshop in early 2012, conducted by Turtle Survival Alliance with manuals provided by the Knoxville Zoo. Approximately 50 people participated, representing Madagascar National Parks, the Forestry Department, local police, and local communities.

# Russell E. Train, 1920–2012



Russell Train photo courtesy of WWF

**“I believe the most important thing we can do for conservation worldwide is to invest in the training of men and women to manage their own natural resources.”**

On September 17, 2012, EFN lost its friend and namesake, Russell E. Train. Throughout his life, Mr. Train was an ardent believer in the need to build local capacity for biodiversity conservation and natural resource management.

Mr. Train was founder and chairman emeritus of World Wildlife Fund. One of the most influential and well-known leaders in American conservation, he served as the first chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) in the Executive office of the President and as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under Presidents Nixon and Ford. While at the CEQ and EPA, Mr. Train oversaw the creation and implementation of much of the legislation that would become the basis for environmental policy in the United States, from clean air and water laws to the Toxic Substance Control Act. His visionary leadership brought new attention to land use concerns, delivered innovative international agreements on endangered species and pollution control, and helped bring the issue of the environment to the broad attention of the American public.

Following his roles in the government, Mr. Train became president and chairman of World Wildlife Fund from 1978 to 1990. Under his guidance, World Wildlife Fund-US grew from a small, primarily grant-making organization into a global conservation force with more than 1 million members.

Mr. Train’s commitment to building conservation capacity around the world began in 1961 with the founding of the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation, today known as the African Wildlife Foundation, followed by the creation of the College of African Wildlife Management in Mweka, Tanzania. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1991 in recognition of his work in conservation.

In 1994, upon his election as WWF chairman emeritus, WWF established the Russell E. Train Education for Nature Program in recognition of his commitment to capacity building for conservation. Through EFN, WWF honors Mr. Train’s legacy by investing in the education and training of conservation leaders around the world.

## The Impact

EFN heard from hundreds of grantees after Mr. Train passed away. The following are excerpts from the many messages of sympathy and appreciation.

**There falls the veritable hero of the conservation of African wildlife!** He championed and promoted the global course of wildlife conservation in the most practical, pragmatic, objective, and non-discriminatory manner. His love for wildlife had little comparison, his generosity and magnanimity unequaled.

— *Nickson E. Otieno, Kenya*

I owe him my eternal gratitude, as it was his support that allowed me to become a scientist and conservationist. I hope through my work and that of other fellow Russell E. Train grantees around the world, **we will keep his spirit alive** and honor his contribution to science and scientists.

— *Laura J. May-Collado, Costa Rica*

**We have lost our 'ecological father.'** He has created a nucleus of conservationists around the globe, and therefore we will carry forward his mission and vision for nature. We will strive to make you proud always.

— *Durga D. Sharma, Bhutan*

It is said that little drops make an ocean. This is very true for your EFN work and support for us Africans, and to African women in particular. **Your legacy will remain forever in our hearts and in our work** to save the rich biodiversity of the Congo Basin.

— *Ntongho Anne, Cameroon*

**By facilitating the education of one single person, you cemented the education of hundreds** of others, in an exponential, domino effect.

— *Pablo Granados-Dieseldorff, Guatemala*

I am so grateful and proud to be part of the EFN family and to be the first EFN grantee from Laos. **Mr. Train's vision of building conservation capacity worldwide lives on in EFN.** Thanks to Mr. Train and EFN, I am managing my home country's natural resource and helping to build the next generation of conservation leaders in Laos.

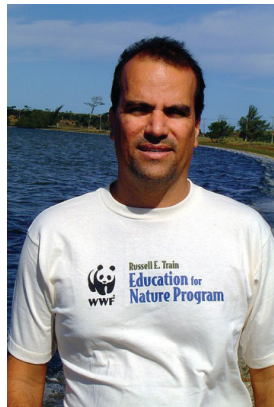
— *Somchanh Bounphanmy, Laos*

## The Legacy



**Shivani Bhalla, Kenya**

I founded the conservation NGO Ewaso Lions and was named Africa's "Young Women Conservation Biologist of the Year" in 2009.



**Luis Firmino, Brazil**

I am the Secretary of Environment for the state of Rio de Janeiro and a leading expert on freshwater management.



**Carmela Española, Philippines**

I discovered a new bird species in my home country—the Calayan Rail—and two insects have been named after me.



**Saturnin Régis Ibata, Republic of Congo**

I manage GIS data for the Gorilla Natural Reserve and promote local community involvement in protecting this flagship species.

# EFN Grantees in the News



2011

**Jim Nyamu**  
Kenya

Professional Development Grantee

Jim Nyamu recently led a 500-kilometer walk across Kenya to raise awareness about the dangers of poaching ivory from the country's endangered elephant population. The "Ivory Belongs to the Elephant" walk, which took place February 9-23, 2013, started in Mombasa and ended in Nairobi.

Organizers at the Elephant Neighbors' Center, which Jim co-founded, hoped to raise \$600,000 to establish and support community-based elephant monitoring programs in Loita-Koromoto in Maasai Mara (Serengeti), Amboseli-Namanga (Kilimanjaro), and the Kora, Bisinadi, and Tsavo ecosystems in collaboration with local communities.

According to the Elephant Neighbors' Center, the elephant population in Kenya in 1970 was 167,000. There are just 35,000 elephants in the country today, and Kenya loses one elephant daily to poaching.



2007-2009

**L. Cynthia Watson**  
Guyana

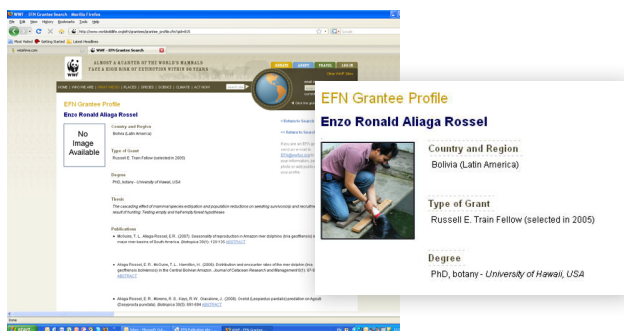
Russell E. Train Fellow

Cynthia Watson cowrote an op-ed that appeared in the *New York Times* on January 18, 2013. Titled "Rumble in the Jungle" and written with Nathan K. Lujan and Devin D. Bloom, the essay argued that reality television shows glorify gold mining, glossing over harsh truths about illegal mines that evade regulations, upend river sediment, discharge mercury, fuel unchecked urbanization, and create pollution.

"Tropical rivers and forests are marvelously diverse and intricate ecosystems, but the default tendency of [channels like History and Discovery] is to eschew nuanced portrayals in favor of sensationalist accounts of man-eating fish and reptiles," the authors wrote.

Cynthia is a fisheries biologist and an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Cincinnati. Read the full op-ed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/18/opinion/a-rumble-in-the-jungle.html>.

## Contribute to EFN's Grantee Database!



EFN has a grantee database where visitors can view short profiles of grantees, as well as any publications they have authored.

Grantees are invited to submit citations for their conservation-related publications to [efn@wwfus.org](mailto:efn@wwfus.org).

[worldwildlife.org/efn/grantees](http://worldwildlife.org/efn/grantees)

# EFN Opportunities

## Current and Upcoming EFN Grant, Fellowship, and Workshop Opportunities

### NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS!

#### EFN - Select WWF Priority Places Reforestation Grants

These grants support local organizations to conduct reforestation projects in more than 20 WWF priority landscapes around the world. Proposals should include a training or capacity building component. Applications must be submitted no later than May 1, 2013, and proposed activities must be completed by September 1, 2013. To apply, applicants should fill out the EFN Conservation Workshop Grant along with a reforestation project proposal. Grants will provide up to US\$10,000 in funding.

### Accepting Applications in July 2013

#### EFN - Select WWF Priority Places Professional Development Grants

These grants provide support for mid-career conservationists to pursue short-term, non-degree training to upgrade their knowledge and skills through short courses, workshops, conferences, and study tours, or through practical training such as internships and professional attachments. Professional Development Grants are awarded throughout the year, on a first-come, first-served basis, given the availability of funds.

### Accepting Applications in July 2013

#### EFN - Past Russell Train Fellows and Scholars Only EFN Alumni Grants

These grants provide support for ongoing education and training for former Russell E. Train Fellows or Scholars who have earned a degree through EFN. Alumni Grants are awarded throughout the year and may be used to support short-term training, attend a workshop, present at a conference, or to conduct research within a WWF priority place.

### Accepting Applications in July 2013

#### EFN - Select WWF Priority Places Conservation Workshop Grants

These grants support nongovernmental organizations, community groups, government agencies and educational institutions in conducting training workshops. Costs covered include travel expenses, meals and accommodations, room rentals, materials, and other related costs. Administrative costs should be no more than 15 percent of the requested amount. Typical grants are between US\$1,500 and US\$7,500.

To apply for an EFN grant, please visit our website at [worldwildlife.org/efn](http://worldwildlife.org/efn).

Each program has unique application guidelines.  
Please read the guidelines carefully before you apply.  
EFN encourages past grantees to share these grant resources  
with your colleagues and partners in the field.



Former Russell E. Train Fellows Judith Morales, from Mexico, and Alicia Medina, from Honduras, attended a special celebration in honor of Mr. Russell E. Train in December 2012. The two WWF Mesoamerican Reef Program staff members spoke to current and former WWF staff about the important impact their Russell Train Fellowships have had on their professional careers.

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