



# A MAJOR Dilemma : Degree & Gender Distribution of Senior Staff in International Conservation NGOs



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## Who are conservation practitioners?

### Why do we need social sciences for effective conservation?

Historically, conservation programs have been guided primarily by life sciences<sup>1</sup>. However, in the late 1990s research on conservation projects found that their success relied on a broader range of disciplines being integrated into the conservation project plan, particularly the social sciences<sup>2</sup>. Since society is often at the root of biological imbalances and resulting conservation problems, the integration of social science into conservation projects offers potential solutions for mediating these imbalances<sup>3</sup>.

### So, are core conservation practitioners actually qualified?

Following the points above, we aimed to examine whether the academic backgrounds of persons in key positions in major international conservation NGOs are interdisciplinary or not. Having varying educational backgrounds could begin an active and informed exploration of the diversity of values, histories, institutions, politics & approaches in major conservation projects.

## How?

Identified IUCN-affiliated Conservation NGOs

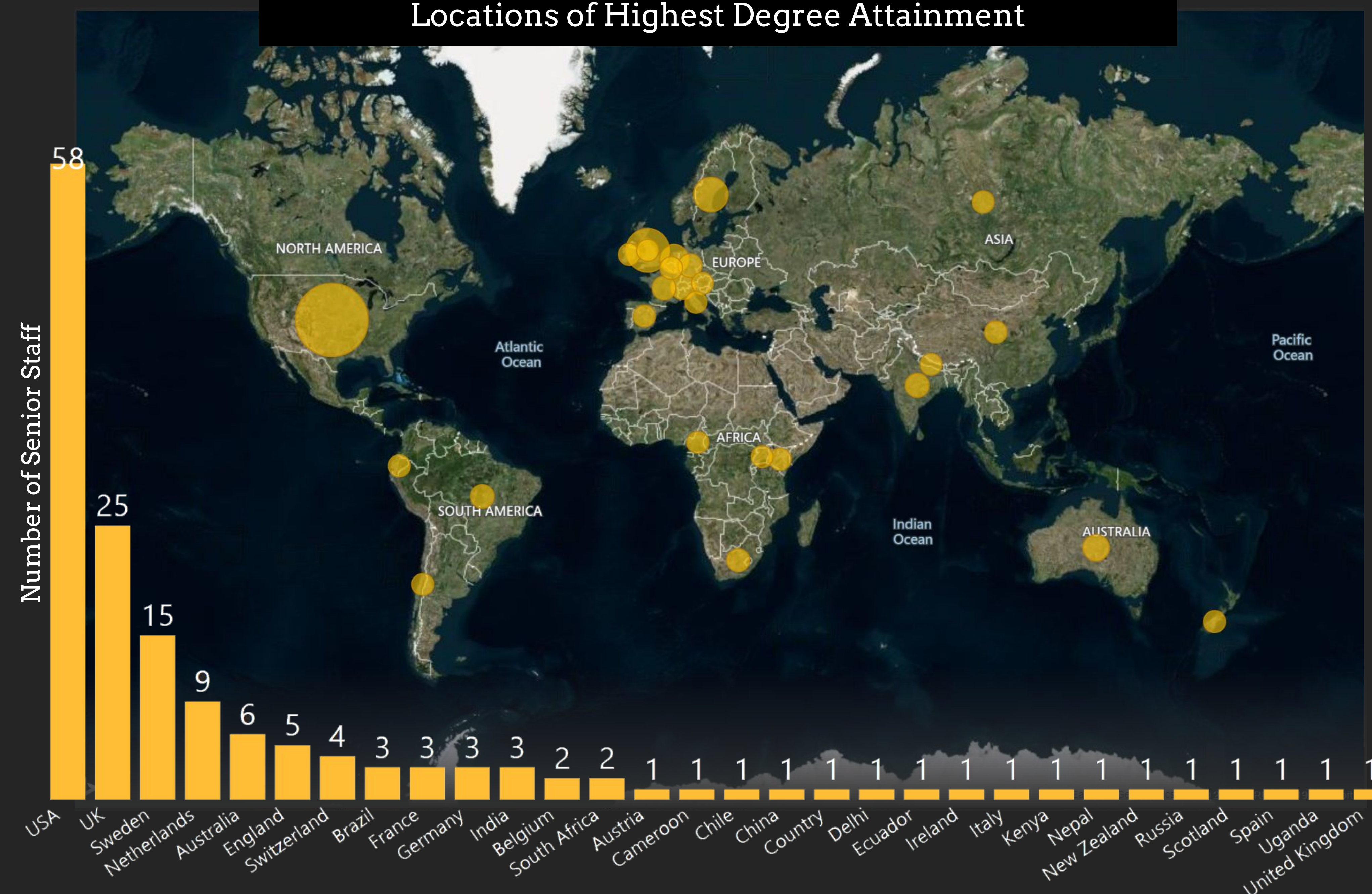
Identified staff with programmatic influence by coding for "Director", "Chief", "Senior", "Manager", "Executive", "President", "Head."

Gathered demographic, educational data based on NGO website bios and LinkedIn

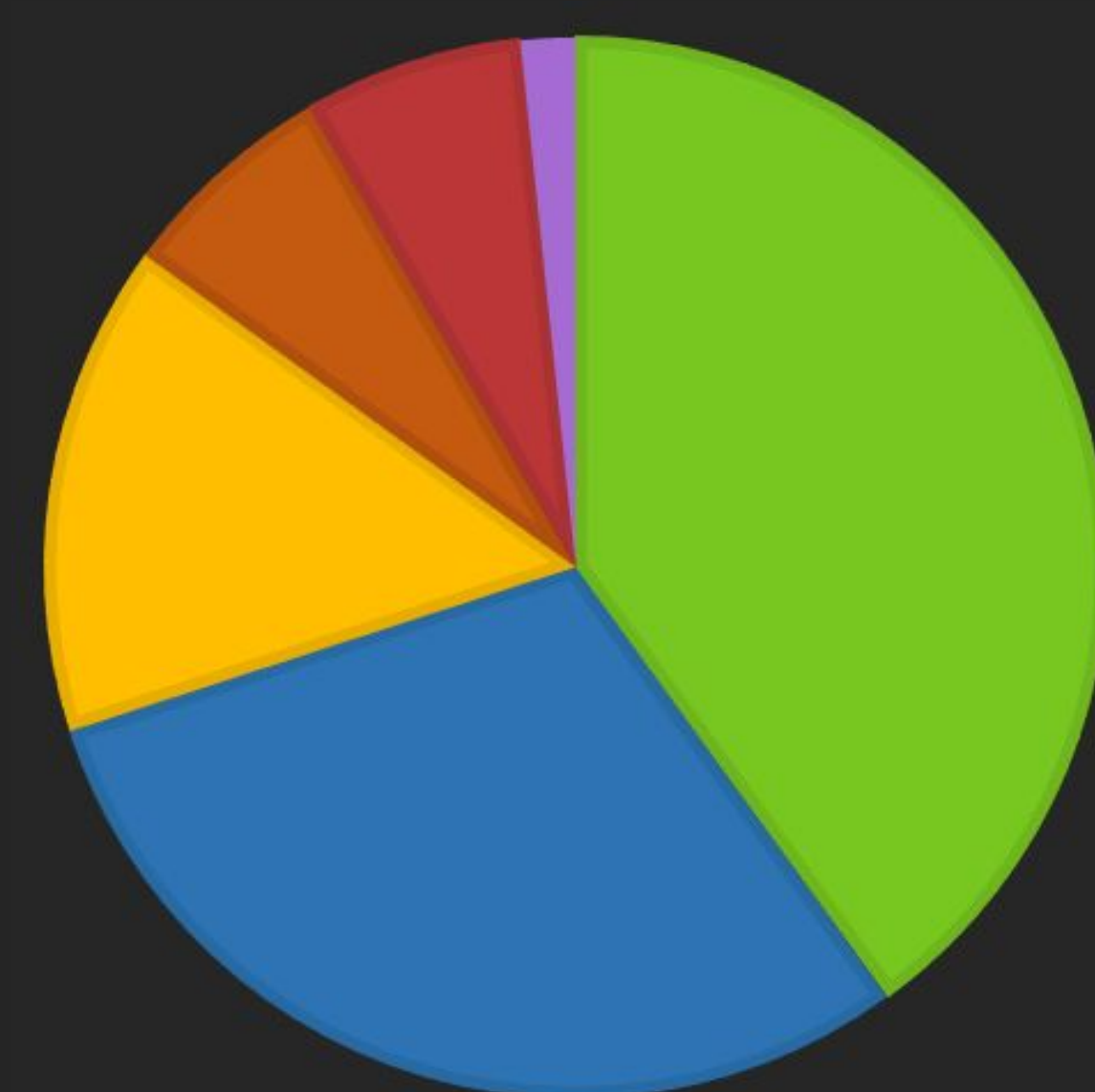
Identified trends from the data for discipline category, gender and location of education.

Total NGOs: 29 Total Senior Staff analyzed: 154

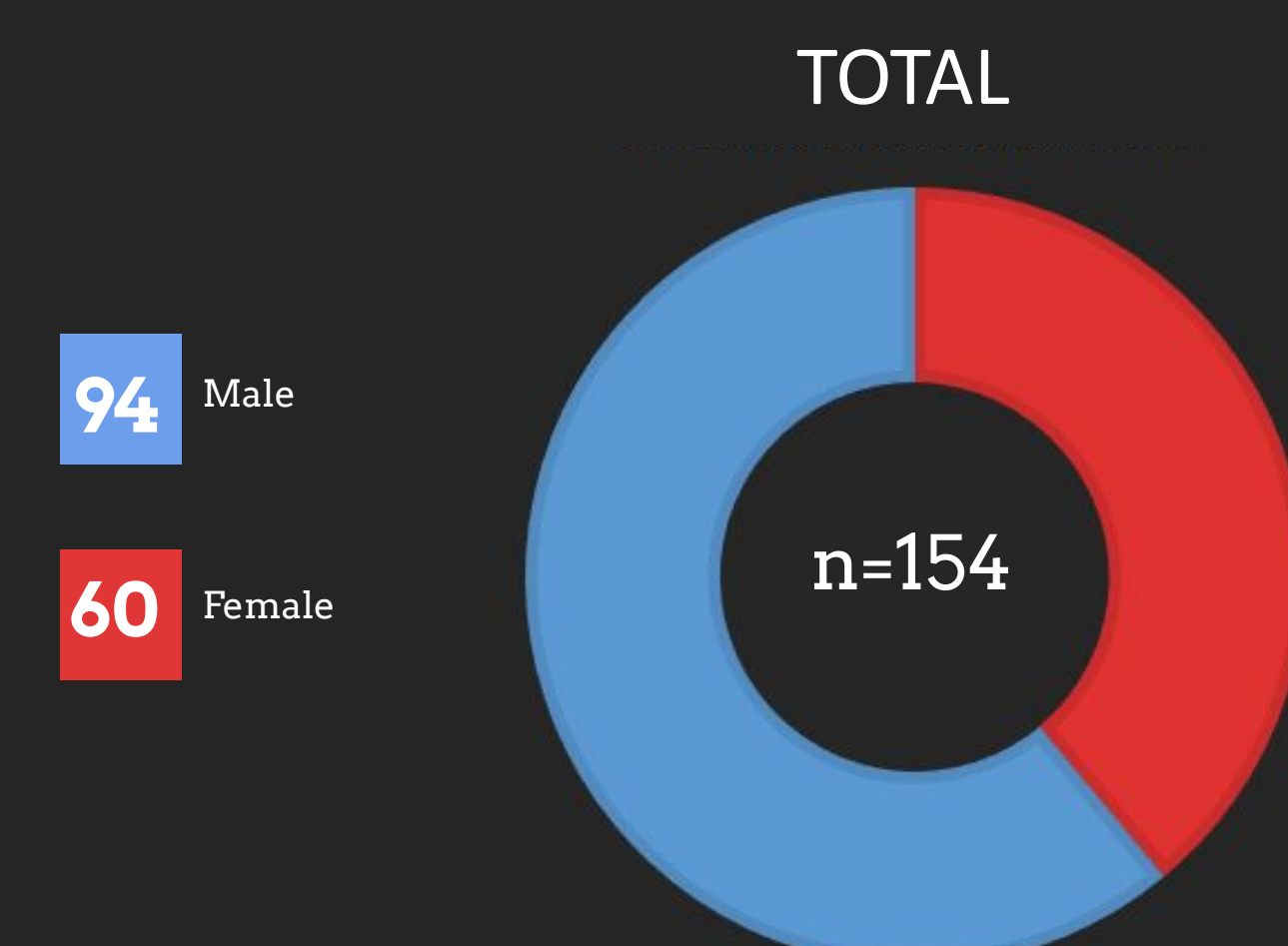
Locations of Highest Degree Attainment



Discipline distribution based on highest educational attainment



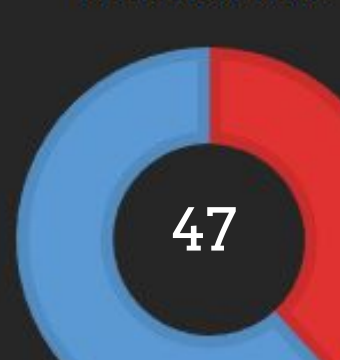
Apparent Gender of NGO Senior Staff



INTERDISCIPLINARY



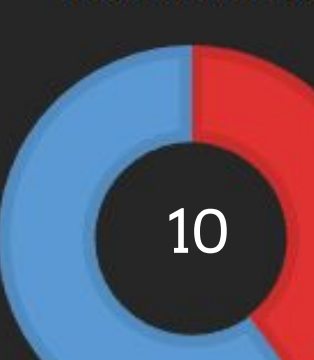
LIFE SCIENCE



BUSINESS



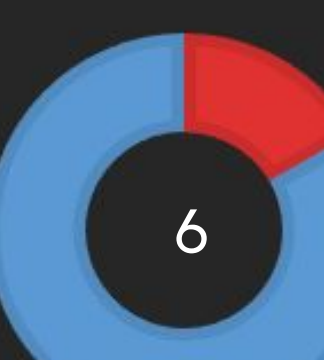
HUMANITIES



SOCIAL SCIENCE



MATHEMATICS



## Key Findings

Since the "call to interdisciplinarity"<sup>4</sup> in conservation efforts, we see that there has been a response from both conservationists and educational institutions to acquire and provide interdisciplinary education. Most of these degrees were obtained from Western countries, although some from the Global South have made their way to the top. This may indicate more upward mobility within NGOs for those educated in Western countries. While there is high inequality in the location distribution of education, the gender distribution for all discipline categories except for Mathematics enjoys a more even distribution, with most senior staff being men. In the discipline distribution, Business is interestingly the 3rd highest field, and scores higher than social sciences & humanities (fields that were encouraged). This could indicate the higher usage of business rather than social sciences/humanities within conservation efforts, particularly from senior staff.

## What next?

The NGOs analyzed were only those listed as partners of the IUCN, 4 of which did not include staff information. We recommend that more NGOs be analyzed to ensure wider generalizability, accuracy and precision of findings. Furthermore, all demographic and education data was sourced from public databases (NGO websites and LinkedIn), which limited the quality of these data. Data regarding lower degrees (ie undergraduate) were largely absent, but we therefore recommend that future research attempts to take into account these degrees, where data is available. For example, staff with multiple degrees could be analyzed to determine the level of interdisciplinary-ness across all of their degrees. This would provide another metric for determining how interdisciplinary NGO staff's backgrounds are.

## Literature cited

1. MaMascia, M. B., Brosius, J. P., Dobson, T. A., Forbes, B. C., Horowitz, L., McKean, M. A., & Turner, N. J. (2003). Conservation and the Social Sciences. *Conservation Biology*, 17(3), 649-650. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1523-1739.2003.00728.x>
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