EDGE Fellowships—Building Capacity to Conserve the World’s Most Extraordinary Species

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Who are we?

The Zoological Society of London’s (ZSL’s) EDGE of Existence Programme (www.edgeofexistence.org) identifies, highlights and conserves the world’s most irreplaceable threatened species. It prioritises species for conservation attention according to their degree of unique evolutionary history (Evolutionary Distinctiveness), weighted by the risk of extinction (Global Endangerment, represented by the threat status according to the IUCN Red List). EDGE species are not only on the verge of extinction, but are also totally unique in the way they look, live and behave: if they disappear, millions of years of unique evolutionary history will be lost with them and there will be nothing like them left on earth. EDGE species are often the sole representatives of entire branches of the Tree of Life.

What is an EDGE Fellowship?

A huge proportion of neglected EDGE species occur in developing countries, which frequently lack the capacity, resources or political will to protect them. Our EDGE Fellowship programme equips promising early-career conservationists with the skills and expertise to implement two-year research and conservation projects on their countries’ little-known EDGE species. Projects must contain: 1) ecological research answering a specific conservation question; 2) a review of the current status of the species; 3) development of conservation recommendations; 4) a multi-stakeholder workshop resulting in a Survival Blueprint; 5) targeted conservation action; and 6) community engagement.

Where do we work?

Since 2007, the Programme has supported 68 EDGE Fellows, in 36 countries, to conserve 63 EDGE species. We have helped Fellows to achieve large scale habitat restoration, to lead national conservation strategies and even to discover new species. 100% of our Fellows have continued to work in conservation, training over 1000 additional people and bringing communities together to appreciate one-of-a-kind species and their fragile habitats.
Become an EDGE Fellow

If you would like to apply for the EDGE Fellowship programme and receive structured training to undertake an applied research or conservation project on a local EDGE species, you need to meet the following criteria:

- Focus your work on a priority EDGE species from the curated list of mammals, amphibians, birds, reptiles and coral species. Species not included in these lists will not be considered. If you are interested in becoming an EDGE coral Fellow you must apply for a species found on this information sheet.
- Be an early-career conservation biologist or wildlife manager with less than 10 years’ experience.
- Be a resident of the country in which the proposed focal species occurs.
- Priority will be given to projects focusing on EDGE species where limited research has been done and/or that currently receive little or no conservation attention.
- To complete an application, please download the guidelines for terrestrial Fellowships or guidelines for coral Fellowships plus the coral species information, application form, risk assessment form and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Application process

- Applications open in early April each year with a closing date in mid-June. All applications are reviewed by a panel of experts and successful applicants will be informed by the end of August.
- Applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss their projects with the EDGE Team before applying. They are happy to provide feedback on draft applications before the deadline. Feel free to contact us at fellows@edgeofexistence.org.
- All participants who are shortlisted to stage two will receive written feedback on their applications (both successful and unsuccessful). We will try to inform applicants who are rejected in stage one but if you have not heard anything by September then you have not been successful. If unsuccessful, you may submit it to a subsequent Fellowship application round assuming you meet the eligibility criteria.
- If shortlisted, you will receive an initial offer and a place on the EDGE Conservation Tools Course. Your Fellowship will only be awarded to you once you have attended the entire course and passed the assessments.

Assessment process

- Applications are assessed by the EDGE internal and external review board. If any member has been involved in the development of an application, they will declare their involvement and will not assess that particular project.
- Applications to the EDGE Fellowship are assessed in a number of ways to ensure only the strongest projects are accepted for funding.
- The process for assessment occurs as follows:
  1. Initial review: Applications that do not meet the essential eligibility criteria will be rejected. You will be informed of the reasons for rejection.
  2. Expert peer review: Eligible applications will be distributed to three or more review board members for scoring against the assessment criteria.
  3. Moderating panel: The EDGE panel uses comments and scores from peer review to recommend projects for funding.
**The EDGE Programme will provide:**

- Support and technical advice to develop a 2-year project on a priority EDGE species;
- A project grant of £10,000;
- Support to find match funding;
- A fully funded four week Conservation Tools training course at a biological research station;
- A fully funded two week Conservation Leadership training course in London;
- Ongoing technical support and mentoring (including distance learning modules, web-based tutorials and field visits);
- Access to the use of a camera or camcorder for the duration of the Fellowship;
- Inclusion in a global network of scientists and conservation practitioners working on EDGE species.

**We expect that Fellows will commit to:**

- A 2-year EDGE Fellowship project (non-transferable). These can be carried out in conjunction with academic and/or professional responsibilities but sufficient time must be dedicated to achieve the project objectives and meet programme requirements;
- Attendance at all training courses;
- Completion of a distance learning module;
- Brief monthly reports;
- Six monthly project reports and financial reconciliation;
- Quarterly blogs, including images and film footage;
- A Species Survival Blueprint with recommendations to conserve the focal EDGE species.

**‘It has been great to spend time with people who care about the same things, and have the same questions’ — EDGE Fellow, 2015 cohort.**
Conservation Tools Course

Before the start of their Fellowships, each new cohort of EDGE Fellows attend a four week course based at an internationally renowned biological field station. During the course, they are taught modules tailored to their requirements by international experts from ZSL. This ensures they have the required skills to complete an effective conservation project. Fellows are awarded their Fellowships when they pass the course. Course modules include:

- Principles of conservation biology;
- Designing effective conservation research projects;
- Ecological and social surveys;
- Animal handling;
- Data analysis and interpretation;
- Software e.g. GIS and R;
- Adaptive project management and planning;
- Budget management;
- Monitoring and evaluation;
- Reporting;
- Communication and applied conservation action.

Fieldwork

During fieldwork week, Fellows are taught practical fieldwork techniques such as line transects, point sampling, distance sampling, mark-recapture, environmental data collection and how to set traps to safely collect animals. Fellows are given plenty of opportunity to meet amazing local wildlife in the field.

Classroom

In the classroom, training is delivered via a combination of lectures, practical activities and one-to-ones to ensure that Fellows learn all the skills they need to complete their Fellowships.

Local training

During their Fellowships, ZSL staff can also visit EDGE Fellows in the field to offer bespoke support and training and to troubleshoot any issues.

‘This is one of the best courses I have ever attended’—EDGE Fellow, 2017 cohort, Madagascar Conservation Tools course.
Conservation Leadership Course

When Fellows are 18 months into their projects, they are invited to ZSL London Zoo for two weeks for the Conservation Leadership course. ZSL staff teach modules tailored to the Fellows’ individual requirements to ensure they have the required skills to continue to implement and scale their conservation projects. The course includes sessions on:

- Fundraising;
- Engaging with corporates;
- Scientific writing and publications;
- Leadership;
- Presentation skills;
- Team management;
- Technical clinics.

The course also includes a networking event and internal symposium where Fellows have the opportunity to present their projects and receive feedback.

‘I have learnt so much in so little time’—EDGE Fellow, 2015 cohort, Conservation Leadership course.

EDGE Fellows Alumni Network

Each Fellow who is funded through the EDGE Fellowship becomes part of a growing EDGE Alumni Network. This global community of conservation leaders, offers mentoring and networking opportunities, enables Fellows to share knowledge and experience and helps them develop professionally.

Via our online social network, EDGE Fellow Alumni are supported to share project results, guidance and funding opportunities.

After the Fellowship

Skills learnt on the Leadership Course enable EDGE Fellows to develop and scale their projects. Many of our Alumni continue to be mentored by ZSL staff at the end of their projects.