Call for proposals
Small Grants Program

**Opening date:** April 25, 2022  
**Closing date:** June 30, 2022  
**Grant size:** 2,000 - 30,000 USD  
**Geographic focus:** Flexible

**How to apply**

- **First round:** Submit an [Expression of Interest (EOI) form](#) by June 30, 2022.
- **Second round:** Selected EOIs will be invited to submit a full proposal, animal impacts form (if applicable), and CV.

**Key dates**

- **Expression of Interest forms due:** June 30, 2022  
- **Full Proposal invitations:** July 15, 2022  
- **Full Proposals due:** September 30, 2022  
- **Decisions expected:** January 31, 2023

**Background**

Although the natural world is a source of great beauty and happiness, vast numbers of animals routinely face serious challenges such as disease, hunger, or natural disasters. There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to these threats. However, even as we recognize that improving the welfare of free-ranging wild animals is difficult, we believe that humans have a responsibility to help whenever we can.

Most wildlife research has been limited to the harms humans cause. Therefore, there is still much uncertainty about what animals' lives are like in the wild and what humans could do to help responsibly. Answering those questions will not be easy. The diversity of animal species and the complexity of ecosystem interactions requires a wider range of research expertise than any one organization could support.

Our grants aim to empower wild animal welfare researchers to explore topics neglected by other funders. We support research that advances our understanding of the fundamental concepts, novel methods, and preliminary interventions that will most rapidly accelerate progress in the field.
Themes

1. **Innovative methods for measuring wild animal welfare**

   While many methods have been developed to understand animal welfare, they have largely been applied in captivity. Development of methods and determination of metrics for welfare that can be feasibly assessed in the wild are needed to reliably assess wild animal welfare. It will also be important to establish baselines, ranges, and benchmarks for these metrics, as well as determine values for different species. Measuring animal welfare in the wild presents some unique logistical challenges. We therefore invite proposals that seek to apply novel approaches to the challenge and that will help with defining, improving, and expanding the use of proxies for measuring welfare in wild animals, including identifying novel measures of welfare and affective state for wild animals and validating them against existing welfare assessment techniques.

   - Projects that seek to measure positive welfare (e.g., experiences of comfort, pleasure, safety, or enjoyment).
   - Projects that seek to correlate behavioral and physiological proxies of welfare.
   - Projects that seek to develop and validate novel physiological welfare indicators.
   - Projects that seek to develop behavioral proxies to better understand affective state.
   - Projects that seek to validate non-invasive alternative proxies of wild animal welfare.

2. **Innovative methods for monitoring wild animal welfare**

   The very nature of wild animals means there are challenges for monitoring and evaluating their lives. A core component of wild animal welfare is understanding the daily activities of wild animals and how they vary by ecosystem, species, and lifestage. We therefore invite proposals that will help with identifying the most appropriate methods for continuous assessment of welfare, how it varies with time and environmental conditions, and the least invasive ways to obtain such information.

   - Projects that seek to apply methods developed in farmed-animal, zoo-animal, or other captive contexts to better understand the welfare of wild animals.
   - Projects that seek to use remote sensing or other advanced technologies for non-invasive monitoring of behavioral or physiological welfare indicators.
   - Projects that seek to demonstrate methods for concurrently understanding the welfare of large numbers of animals.

3. **Population regulation**

   It is clear that processes regulating the size of animal populations, such as resource availability, disease, predation, and disturbance, must also impact the day-to-day welfare experienced by individuals. Different species have evolved to prioritize different behavioral and energetic investments when faced with resource limitation. Adults
of some species prioritize their own health and survival, whereas others prioritize the health and survival of their existing offspring, and still others preferentially commit resources to further reproduction. Mechanisms of population regulation therefore affect not only the individuals’ welfare, but also the aggregate welfare of the population and ecological community. Projects planning to address this theme should consider the aggregate welfare — both within populations and across species, if possible — in their approach to each of the following more specific topics.

- Projects that seek to understand how population-level dynamics and metrics (e.g., density, disturbance) relate to the welfare expectancy of wild animals.
- Projects that seek to understand the trade-offs individuals make when faced with resource scarcity, and how these affect their welfare and that of their offspring.
- Projects that seek to understand how conflicts of interest among animals (e.g., resource competition, predator-prey dynamics) influence welfare.
- Projects that seek to understand impacts of population management on the aggregate welfare of multi-species communities.
- Projects that seek to understand the potential for wildlife contraception to improve wild animals’ lives.
- Projects that seek to understand community impacts on welfare, that make comparisons across species, comparisons between habitats, or provide heuristics for guiding land use decisions.
- Projects that seek specifically to estimate aggregate welfare at the population or community level.

4. Rehabilitation/conservation

Wildlife rehabilitation and some conservation interventions that aim to help wild animals survive and thrive through challenging periods, have the potential for long-lasting impact on the welfare of the affected animals. These impacts and what happens to animals once they are released back into the wild are currently not well understood and require targeted research to address this gap. We therefore invite proposals specifically targeting the following areas.

- Projects that seek to understand the potential for “headstarting” or similar practices to improve welfare expectancy in wild animal populations.
- Projects that seek to understand the fates of animals post-release, including tracking the survival and welfare implications of rehabilitation.

Eligibility

Wild Animal Initiative provides grants for research projects that help us understand and improve the lives of wild animals. Eligible projects will shed light on one of the following questions:

- What are the subjective experiences of wild animals like?
- What strategies can we use to improve the welfare of wild animals responsibly?
Invited full proposals will be required to explain how their anticipated results could inform part of a holistic welfare assessment based on the Five Domains framework of animal welfare (Mellor et al. 2020, Figure 1).

We will prioritize eligible projects insofar as they:

- Are especially likely to enable or motivate further welfare-relevant research, such as by establishing foundational concepts, developing novel methods, or engaging with areas of active discourse.
- Are especially unlikely to attract interest from other funders.
- Are relevant to especially numerous taxa.

**Who can apply**

This call is open to anyone, but we are especially interested in supporting postdocs and PhD students pursuing a long-term research career in the field of wild animal welfare, and researchers who have not previously included welfare considerations in their work. We particularly encourage applications from communities underrepresented in the sciences, including but not limited to people of color, self-identified women, and non-binary individuals.

If you are not sure whether your project would be relevant to understanding wild animal welfare, please feel free to contact us to discuss your idea.

**What we fund**

We will generally fund whatever is required for the project to be completed. However, we prioritize funding for direct research costs such as for supplies, materials, and travel. Funding for other expense areas (such as stipends, salaries, or durable goods) should be fully justified relative to the project goals.

**What we do not fund**

Wild Animal Initiative does not provide funding for indirect costs or institutional overhead.

**Selection criteria**

- **Impact**: How likely is it that this project will lead to an improvement in wild animal welfare now or in the future?
- **Engagement**: To what extent will this project accelerate or inspire other research or activity in support of wild animal welfare?
- **Scope**: How many animals could potentially benefit from the results of this project, and by how much?
- **Tractability**: Does this project have a high probability of being able to be carried out as described and deliver the expected answers or results?
Neglectedness: How likely is it that this project could be funded by another organization, without reducing its value for wild animal welfare?

Research ethics: How likely is the execution of this project to cause harm to non-human animals or people?

**Definitions**

- **Welfare**: The aggregate quality of an individual's subjective experiences over a given time period (or the sum of the welfare of each individual in a group). This can also be called “well-being” or “quality of life.” We use “improving welfare” interchangeably with “reducing or preventing suffering.” See [here](#) for further explanation.

- **Wild animal**: Any individual animal whose life is not closely managed by humans. This includes animals living freely in human-dominated environments, such as parks and urban spaces, but excludes pets, farmed animals, and animals kept in zoos or in laboratories.