

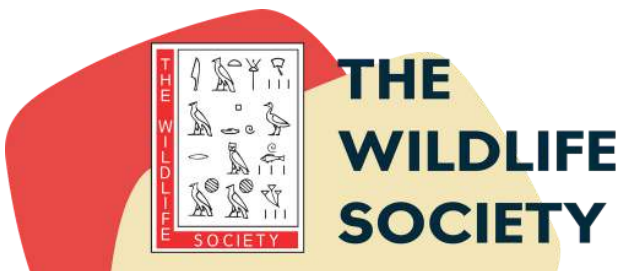
OCTOBER 2025

TrailBlazer Grant

2025 Report



A COLLABORATION:





Dear Donor,

On behalf of the Student Development working Group and Early Career Professional Working Group we would like to extend our deepest gratitude for your contribution to the TrailBlazer Grant program. As our grant continues to grow, your contribution will ensure we can continue to support the first steps of more members of our professional wildlife family. The 2025 TrailBlazer grant saw 85 applications and awarded a combination of 50 monetary and gear awards. Our third year of applicants has included members from across North America, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Australia. Applicants also ranged in degree type with 47.1% holding or pursuing a Bachelor's degree, 34.1% a Masters degree, and 17.6% a Doctoral degree. Applicants provided ample feedback on the grant with the overwhelming majority being positive feedback and welcome constructive criticism that will help us grow moving forward.

As an extension of The Wildlife Society's goal to break down barriers that prevent professional growth for all members, the 2025 TrailBlazer grant refined its ability to address historically underrepresented or marginalized groups in wildlife conservation. This includes visible/invisible disabilities, socio-economic background, first generation college students/degree holders, veterans, non-traditional students, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ethnic heritage, and race. As biologists', diversity is at the core of what makes the ecosystems we value function similarly, the efforts of this grant will diversify our community, strengthening the profession in the process.

We invite you to explore some of the stories shared by the 2025 TrailBlazer Grant award winners on the following pages to see the members of our wildlife family who you have empowered through your generous donations. Please understand these are their unedited words and photos intended to introduce you to these members at the dawn of their careers. As the 2025 TrailBlazer grant is now underway we invite you to share your experience as a donor with others to encourage the continued growth of this grant so we can ensure every wildlife biologist at the beginning of their professional journey is given the strength to make their career exactly what they envision.

Sincerely,

The Wildlife Society's
Student Development Working Group Board



Thanks to your support, in 2025
we provided 50 students & early career professionals
with monetary grants and field gear!



80+

We received 85
applications in
2025



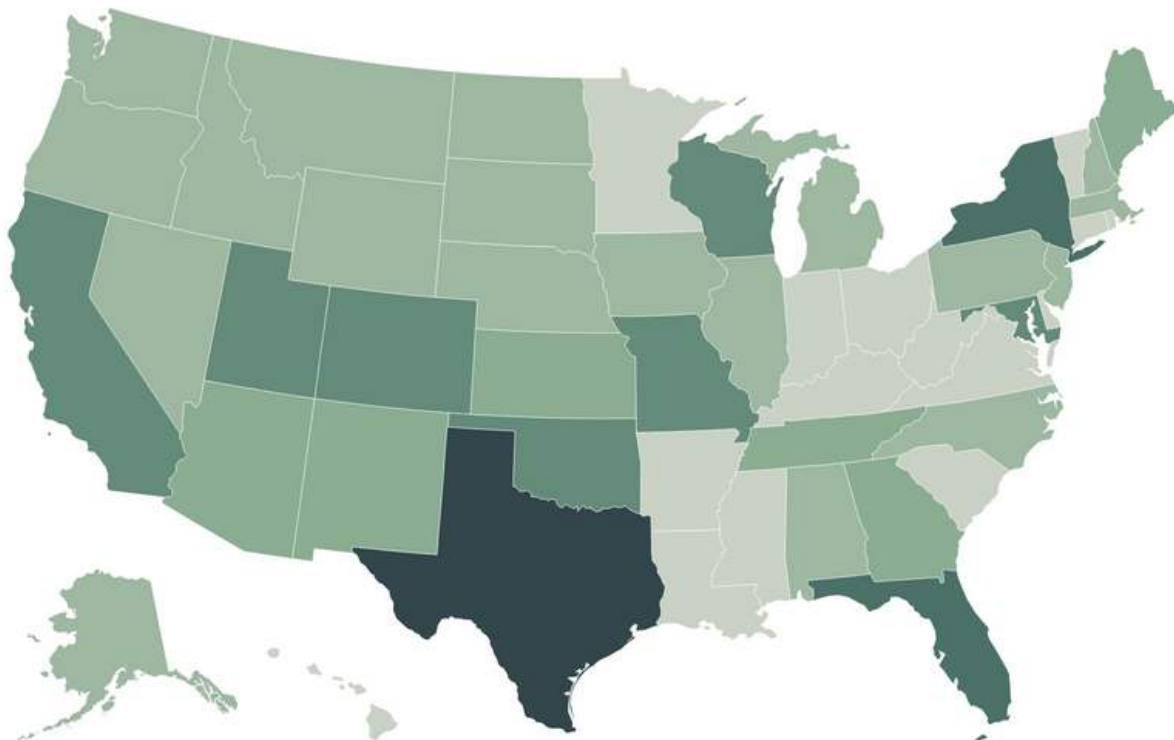
>51%

Over half of the
applicants were
pursuing advanced
degrees



6

Applicants were
from 6 countries
outside the U.S.



2025 TrailBlazer Awardees



Carly Naundorff

Since being gifted the Sitka rain jacket through the Trailblazer Grant, I've kept dry when checking bat detectors and setting up mist-nets as sudden afternoon summer Texas storms roll in above me. I'm so thankful to have been chosen as a recipient of this field gear during my final year as a graduate student studying bats at Texas State University. I am excited for the new and rainier places I will bring it along with me post-grad as I continue this wildlife journey. While I still welcome the rain and soaked clothes after a long field day, it's a relief to know I have a lightweight jacket to keep me warm and dry when I need it. Thank you, TWS SDWG and SITKA, for your kind gesture and for supporting students like me!



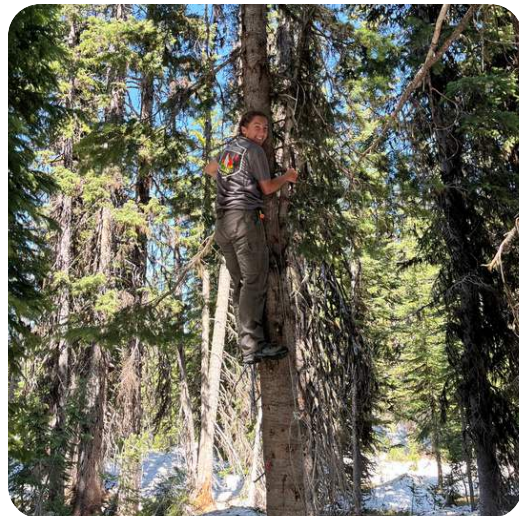
Adrienne Cohoon

I am a senior at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. With this grant, I was able to purchase a pair of heavy duty hiking boots for my summer internship. I worked in northeast Oregon as a cooperative intern between the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. We worked in a lot of steep terrain in both the Elkhorn and Wallowa mountains where a good pair of supportive boots are essential. I was incredibly grateful to have these boots during the summer. I was able to do all of the hiking (almost every day of the week) and not have to worry about rolling my ankles and having traction on slippery surfaces. Most of the hiking was high elevation to pick up mustelid camera traps, bighorn sheep collars, and to count mountain goats. It was very steep and I was very thankful to have supportive boots to be able to do everything I needed to. I am very grateful to be a recipient for this grant and I hope to continue using these boots for many more field seasons.

Photo 1: Me crossing the river on the West Eagle trail, holding my boots, after picking up a wolverine camera.

Photo 2: Me removing the camera from a tree at one of our wolverine camera sites in the Elkhorn mountains.

Photo 3: A picture of my boots while sitting at Cougar Saddle, overlooking Cougar Basin in the Elkhorn mountains counting mountain goats.



Wongibe Dieudonne

The Student Development Working Group Equipment awarded of the 2025 TWS Trailblazer Grant have significantly enhanced my capacity for distant, non-intrusive observation critical to marine and freshwater conservation research in Cameroon, particularly on shark and ray species as well as other threatened taxa. These binoculars have been indispensable in an experimental study of bycatch involving the threatened West African manatee, allowing detailed monitoring of manatee behavior around gillnets and assessment of spatial and temporal occurrence patterns critical for developing effective mitigation strategies. Additionally, this Vortex Binoculars enable upcoming offshore cetacean surveys along the Cameroonian coastline, improving detection of dolphin groups and contributing to understanding their distribution. In freshwater habitats such as Lake Ossa Wildlife Reserve, the binoculars help us identify and observation of the elusive Giant Otter Shrew's, first and their behavior and habitat use without disturbance. Access to this high-quality equipment addresses a key resource limitation in African wildlife research, elevating data quality, enhancing safety during fieldwork, and allowing more comprehensive ecological assessments. The binoculars have also fostered collaboration by serving as a shared asset among three peers, amplifying conservation research impact across projects. This award underscores the urgent need to support underrepresented researchers in Africa with essential tools to overcome systemic inequities that limit biodiversity conservation globally. Future acquisitions of such equipment will expand my research capabilities, improve management of marine and freshwater ecosystems, and promote social equity by empowering local scientists to generate inclusive, evidence- based solutions that conserve threatened species and support dependent communities.



Cerise Mensah

I am very grateful to have received the Trailblazer Grant from The Wildlife Society! This grant included a pair of Vortex binoculars, which greatly enhanced my ability to observe wildlife from a distance. I have used these binoculars extensively, especially during my study abroad trip to South Africa this summer. I was able to see remarkable birds like the Saddle-billed Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*) and African hawk-eagle (*Aquila spilogaster*) from afar, and their details were crystal clear thanks to these binoculars!



Liliana Navar

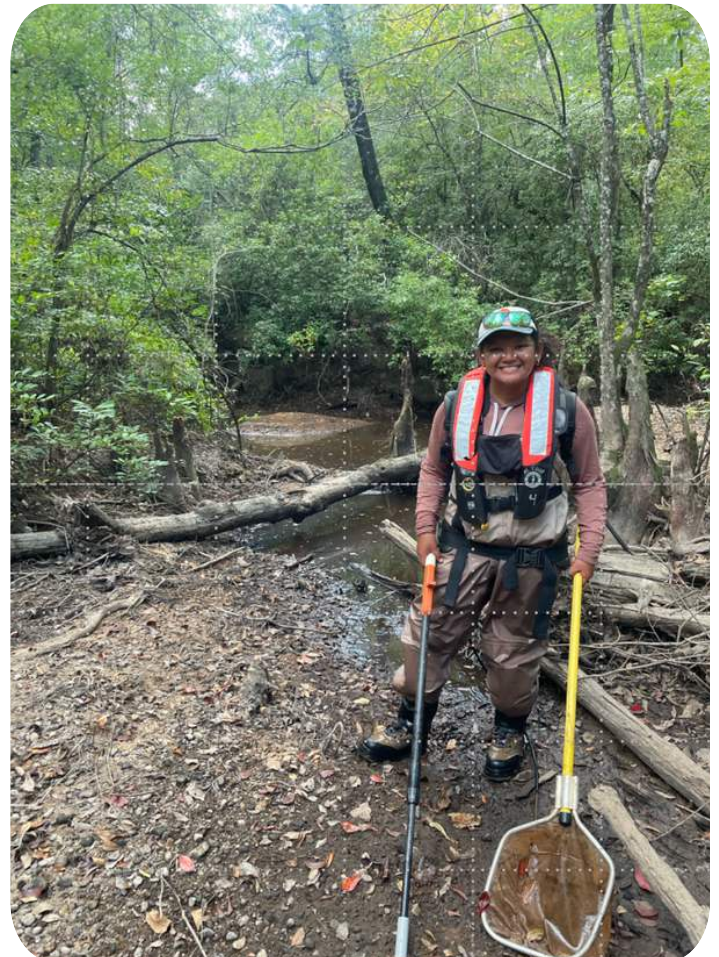
Receiving the Trailblazer Grant was exactly what I needed to continue pursuing my journey in wildlife and conservation. This summer, I had the opportunity to serve as a lead wildlife technician in South Texas, where I was responsible for supervising two technicians and assisting with habitat management and wildlife monitoring on the ranch. My new KUIU day pack quickly became essential in the field—it carried my water, first aid, and other gear, and gave me peace of mind knowing I had everything I needed for long hours outdoors.

This role not only strengthened my leadership skills but also deepened my experience working hands-on with wildlife in applied management settings. As I prepare to graduate this December, I have big aspirations to attend graduate school or to work with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Until then, and for many years to come, I plan on carrying this pack until it finally wears out.



Mariaguadalupe Vilchez

This field season I've been able to enjoy surveying creeks for my master's research all the more because of the assistance from the TWS Trailblazer Grant. I was able to invest in a pair of waders that can withstand sampling conditions on the tributaries of the lower Tallapoosa River. My waders are comfortable, leak-proof, and durable for conducting surveys, which are essential for the successful completion of my project. I am so grateful to have the support from The Wildlife Society, and to continue sharing my passion and enthusiasm for fisheries amongst the TWS community. My early involvement in TWS during my undergraduate years have been instrumental for my career development thus far, and I couldn't be more grateful to belong to an organization (especially now as an MS student) that supports and values diversity, young professionals, and their contributions to the field.





Riley Jones

Thank you to the Wildlife Society and Sitka Gear for my new rain jacket and field pants! It doesn't rain often in the mountains where I conduct research, but when it does the storms can be very unpredictable. The new jacket will help me be more confident going out during the rainy season. I'm also tough on my field pants, so having a pair of high quality pants helps reduce my worry about ripping them in the field (which I have definitely done before) in addition to stretching out days between laundry. A bonus is that they look good enough to wear while teaching lab!

Alyssa Lee

As an intern/volunteer for the Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, I have assisted in refuge management, visitor services, and biological monitoring with the help of the Trailblazer Grant award of Vortex Binoculars! This past summer, I had the opportunity to support these refuges through public outreach programs such as guided canoe and open-air tram tours, educational programs on black bears and sea turtles, and biological surveying of shorebirds! The Vortex Binoculars have been an immense help and useful tool for this summer's fieldwork and educational programs!



Hannah Pepper Atkinson

Thanks to the support of the Student Development Working Group's Trailblazer Grant I was able to purchase a backpacking tent for fieldwork! I am incredibly grateful to have been considered for this award. Throughout the summer field season this tent has allowed me to travel for research freely across Texas sampling vegetation and insects for rare and cryptic bumblebees. I look forward to taking it with me over these next couple sampling periods, from Big Bend to the Pineywoods, and plan to continue using it well beyond my undergraduate, with the ability to pursue research wherever it may take me. I sincerely thank The Wildlife Society and SDWG for supporting me financially as a young professional. As I grow in my career I hope to give back and make these opportunities more accessible to others in the future.



Edward Tomassetti

Howdy, my name is Edward Tomassetti, and I am a Ph.D. student at Texas A&M University studying the population and spatial ecology of javelina in South Texas within the Rangeland, Wildlife, and Fisheries Management Department.

This year I was honored to receive the Trailblazer Grant from the Student Development Working Group and the Early Career Professional Working Group of The Wildlife Society. I am extremely grateful for this support and deeply appreciate the Society's efforts to provide quality equipment to underrepresented groups in the wildlife profession.

Financial barriers can make it difficult for students and early career professionals to access the gear they need to succeed in the field. The Trailblazer Grant helps break down those barriers, allowing us to invest in durable, reliable equipment that will directly enhance our research and fieldwork.

I sincerely thank The Wildlife Society for their commitment to supporting the next generation of wildlife professionals.



Bright Olunsi

I am deeply grateful to The Wildlife Society for awarding me the Trailblazer Grant, which has allowed me to equip myself with essential field tools to support my research and early-career training in conservation science. As a PhD student studying human-wildlife conflict in Africa, I work at the interface of conservation, spatial analysis, and rural development. With the grant, I was able to purchase a GPS unit, binoculars, chest waders, and a sun-protective hat. This gear is crucial for my fieldwork in forest-edge communities in Nigeria, where reliable navigation, wildlife observation, and physical protection are vital for collecting data safely and effectively.

I recently tested my gear during a field visit to West Haven Farm in Ithaca, New York, as part of a climate justice training program. While the visit involved light ecological engagement, mostly observing birds and landscape interactions, the experience helped me become familiar with the gear's functionality and comfort. The binoculars and sun hat were useful for scanning tree lines and observing species in motion. This grant has not only eased the financial burden of preparing for fieldwork but also affirmed my place in the global community of early-career conservationists. As a Nigerian woman in environmental science, I am honored to be part of a program that strengthens inclusivity in wildlife research.

Thank you to the Student Development and Early Career Professional Working Groups of TWS for believing in the future we are building.





Become a Supporter of the Trailblazer Grant Program

The Wildlife Society, Student Development Working Group, and Early Career Professional Working Group need support through donations to nurture the next generation of wildlife leaders. Every contribution you make will create a significant impact.

Program support:

- Monetary Donations
- In-kind (wildlife gear)
- Conference Sponsorship

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