

Pressrelease: POWERSHIFT

New international research project aims to “shift power” in nature conservation

Why are some biodiversity conservation initiatives successful, while others lead to conflict and inequity? A new three-year international research project, **POWERSHIFT**, seeks to answer this question by examining how power imbalances shape conservation efforts — including whose voices are heard, who makes decisions, and who ultimately benefits.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of inclusive conservation, many key decisions are still made far from the people most affected. Local communities often bear the daily costs of living alongside wildlife, while governments, large NGOs, or private actors typically control funding, rules, and priorities. These imbalances can fuel mistrust and conflict, undermining conservation outcomes for both people and nature.

Why does this matter?

Long-term conservation success depends on the meaningful involvement of those who live and work in affected landscapes. Understanding who holds influence, who is excluded, and how decisions are made is essential to ensuring that conservation is perceived as fair, legitimate, and effective.

The interdisciplinary research project **POWERSHIFT** is led by **Drs Lou Lecuyer and Juliette Young** (INRAE, France) in collaboration with **Dr Ranjini Murali** (Humboldt University, Germany), **Dr Jacqueline Loos** (University of Vienna), **Dr Laura Pereira** (Stockholm University), and **Dr Valeria Salvatori** (the Istituto di Ecologia Applicata, Italy) and **Dr Jethro Petit**. The project approaches conservation not as a set of isolated interventions, but as part of a broader societal movement, asking how power can be shared more equitably across scales.

Funded by the **Austrian Science Fund (FWF)** under the **Biodiversa+ Joint Research Call “Biodiversity and Transformative Change (BiodivTransform)”**, POWERSHIFT promotes critical reflection among both researchers and practitioners. Drawing inspiration from social movements, the project asks: Where is power held? How is it used? And how can collaboration with local communities become fairer and more inclusive?

The research focuses on three regions where people and large carnivores live in close proximity: **Kyrgyzstan** (snow leopards), **Italy** (wolves), and **Tanzania** (lions). These case studies highlight how diverse interests, knowledge systems, and decision-making processes intersect in conservation practice.

By better understanding and reshaping power dynamics in conservation, POWERSHIFT aims to move beyond fragmented projects towards a connected global movement that supports both biodiversity and social justice.