

ACCELERATING CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP FOR EDGE RAPTORS IN ASIA

**INTERIM REPORT
OCTOBER 2025**



PROJECT DETAILS

Accelerating Conservation Leadership for EDGE Raptors in Asia

ZSL's EDGE of Existence Programme and The Peregrine Fund

Project Period: 01 September 2024 – 31 May 2027

1-Year Interim Report (October 2025)

Project Aim: The first grant to ZSL EDGE of Existence Programme will support two EDGE Fellowships targeting at least two EDGE raptor species in Asia. The fellowships will catalyse locally-led conservation action for EDGE raptors in Asia.



Otus thilohoffmanni
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OVERALL PROJECT PROGRESS

Output 1: Two EDGE Fellows identified and trained in critical practical conservation and leadership skills essential for conserving their focal EDGE raptor species

Status: In progress – on track

Significant progress has been achieved with both EDGE Raptor Fellows successfully selected, trained, and now receiving customised technical and leadership support.

Fellow Identification and Selection

The 2025 EDGE Fellowship application call was launched in April 2024, prompting a highly competitive pool of applicants from across Asia. A rigorous multi-stage selection process took place between April and October 2024, involving application review, interviews, and assessment of project feasibility and leadership potential. In close collaboration with The Peregrine Fund, two outstanding early-career conservation leaders were ultimately selected to lead fellowship projects focused on priority EDGE raptor species.



Malyasri Bhattacharya
White-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*)
India



Waruni Tissera
Serendib Scops Owl (*Otus thilohoffmanni*)
Sri Lanka



Core Training Completed

Both fellows joined 18 other participants on the intensive 28-day EDGE Conservation Tools Course in Chaloem Rattanakosin National Park, Thailand (03 Feb – 02 Mar 2025). The course is a foundational training program designed to equip participants with the skills, confidence, and knowledge needed to plan and deliver successful conservation projects. The course emphasises building relationships, fostering collaboration, and preparing participants for the practical realities of leading their first conservation project. The course evaluation results were overwhelmingly positive, and a full course debrief is attached as supporting evidence.

OVERALL PROJECT PROGRESS

Project Visits

Each fellow has received a project visit from Dr Jyoti Das (Regional Manager for Asia) and Dr Trisha Gupta (EDGE Conservation Scientist)

Waruni Tissera – Project visit (30 May – 7 June 2025)

During the visit, project sites in Kitulgala and Sinharaja were assessed, with the team working closely with the Fellow to finalise the project plan and methods, confirm logistics and health and safety procedures, and meet with supervisors and local partners. All objectives of the visit were successfully achieved, and a full visit report is appended to this document as supporting evidence.

Malyasri Bhattacharya – Project visits

A brief project visit took place from 3–11 September 2025 to coincide with International Vulture Awareness Day. Although heavy monsoon rains and flooding caused delays to some of the planned celebrations, essential outreach activities were still delivered. A second, more in-depth visit is scheduled for November/December 2025, during which both Trisha and Jyoti will attend. A comprehensive report covering both visits will be submitted by February 2026.

Ongoing Support

Throughout their project periods, both fellows are receiving continuous mentorship and tailored online training to support their technical and leadership development. They will also attend the EDGE Conservation Impact Course in April 2027, a high-level training focused on leadership, conservation impact, and project scale-up, which takes place at the end of the fellowship and in conjunction with the Student Conference in Conservation Science (SCCS) at Cambridge University.



> Waruni's Project Site, Sri Lanka



> Jyoti and Malyasri with students at the Vulture Festival

OVERALL PROJECT PROGRESS

Output 2: At least two comprehensive Survival Blueprints for focal EDGE raptor species will be developed based on the outcomes of the EDGE Fellowship projects.

Status: Not yet due – on track

Survival Blueprints are the final deliverable of each EDGE Fellowship and are intentionally produced at the end of the fellowship, once project results and data have been collected. Both fellows are currently in the implementation phase of their field projects.

Key steps already completed to enable Survival Blueprint development:

- Fellows trained on the Survival Blueprint framework during the 2025 Conservation Tools Course.
- Project plans and methods have been designed to generate the data required for the Blueprints.
- Fellows will begin drafting in late 2026 and are required to bring a draft to the EDGE Conservation Impact Course in March/April 2027, where they will be refined and finalised.

Two high-quality Survival Blueprints will be delivered by the end of the fellowship period as scheduled.





> Project Visit to Waruni: Jyoti and Trisha with Waruni and her in-country supervisor team.



> Project Visit to Waruni:
Fieldwork, individual project
support, and training sessions
with Waruni's team.

OVERALL PROJECT PROGRESS

Output 3: Improved conservation knowledge will be available, and contributions will be made towards IUCN Red List or Green Status assessments for at least two focal EDGE raptor species.

Status: In progress – on track

This output depends on the fellows' fieldwork and stakeholder engagement, which are currently in progress.

Progress to date:

- Each fellow has a clear, actionable project plan targeting data gaps.
- Project methods were refined during the Conservation Tools Course, subsequent reviews, and during project visits to ensure plans are appropriate.
- Field data collection and community/stakeholder engagement are underway in both projects.
- ZSL and in-country supervisors will support data analysis and preparation for Red List or Green Status contributions as required.

> Waruni in the field



OVERALL PROJECT PROGRESS

Output 4: Comprehensive species impact assessments will be conducted for projects spearheaded by EDGE Fellows focusing on raptors.

Status: In progress – on track

EDGE uses a standardised Species Impact Assessment (SIA) framework with 21 indicators to measure the conservation impact on individual species attributable to the EDGE Fellowship.

Progress to date:

- Baseline (“before”) Species Impact Assessments have been completed for both focal raptor species as part of the project planning process.
- These assessments use a scoring system refined from several methods to provide indicator scores across three themes: species knowledge, contextual knowledge/enabling conditions, and existing species-focused interventions.
- The SIA process is integrated into ongoing monitoring, ensuring data collected during implementation directly supports the final assessment.

Next steps:

- The “after” Species Impact Assessments will be conducted at the end of the fellowship projects (2027) to measure impact over the course of the fellowship.

> Malyasri in the field.



OVERALL PROJECT PROGRESS

Output 5: There will be heightened global awareness about EDGE raptor species and the work of the EDGE raptor Fellows.

Status: In progress – on track

Raising the global profile of EDGE species and the Fellows working to conserve them is a core element of the programme. Significant progress has already been made during the first year.

Progress to date:

- The two EDGE Raptor Fellows were publicly announced in July 2024, generating interest across ZSL and The Peregrine Fund networks.
- EDGE has featured raptor species in global awareness campaigns, including International Owl Day and International Vulture Awareness Day.
- The raptor fellows have been profiled in the EDGE newsletter, which reaches a global conservation audience.
- Promotion of EDGE raptor species at London Zoo and the Raptor Fellows' personal accounts through EDGE's IG stories.

Ongoing and upcoming activities:

- Continued social media storytelling and species spotlights for both fellows.
- Newsletter updates showcasing progress and impact.
- Blogs by both Raptor Fellows are to be featured on the EDGE website and promoted through newsletters and social media.

> Malyasri conducting outreach as part of the Vulture Festival for International Vulture Day.



EDGE FELLOWSHIP PROJECT PROGRESS



Malyasri Bhattacharya
White-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*)
India



Objectives

1. Understand the WRV nest habitat selection by March 2027.



2. Assess tagged vulture habitat use and threats in the landscape (Depends on agreement with WII supervisor) by December 2026.



3. Propose priority areas for vulture conservation based on habitat use and nest site selection by May 2027.



Progress

Surveys in Nagrota Surya and Jawali (Kangra district) located 14 WRV nest sites, predominantly in Chir pine (>20 m). At least 10 nests are active; the remainder appear inactive/abandoned. Sites are widely dispersed across steep, mountainous terrain; progress in August–September was constrained by landslides and heavy rainfall. A standardised datasheet for ecological/microhabitat variables has been finalised, and habitat-selection sampling is scheduled to begin in October 2025. Overall, the team has established a solid baseline and priority colonies for continued monitoring.

Malyasri has access to GPS/radio-telemetry data for three vultures from a previous Wildlife Institute of India (WII) project. Analysis is contingent on a formal data-sharing/publication agreement with WII (supervisor: Dr Gautam). During a recent field visit, the EDGE Regional Manager completed an initial review of the dataset; however, work cannot proceed until terms are agreed upon. The main complexity concerns authorship on any future publications. A meeting with Dr Gautam is planned to finalise the agreement and enable analysis of movement and habitat-use patterns across the landscape.

This objective is dependent on the outputs of Objectives 1–2 (nest-site habitat selection and telemetry). To date, Malyasri has compiled confirmed nest locations across Kangra district and produced preliminary GIS maps. These will be refined with ecological covariates from the habitat-selection surveys and, pending a data-sharing agreement with WII, movement data from tagged vultures. Together, these layers will underpin a draft priority-area proposal and management recommendations targeted for May 2027.

EDGE FELLOWSHIP PROJECT PROGRESS



Malyasri Bhattacharya
White-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*)
India



Objectives

4. Promoting the maintenance and increasing use of three open carcasses disposal areas by March 2027.



5. Communication, education and public awareness of the WRV with different stakeholders by December 2026



Progress

Three open carcass disposal grounds have been identified in Kangra district (two in Jawali), located along rivers near Gujjar and Chamar community settlements. The sites face growing pressure to convert to burial grounds due to disease concerns and scavenging by free-ranging dogs. Constructive relationships have been established with community leaders; the next phase is to formalise community agreements and, with local veterinarians/authorities, develop simple management protocols that address public- and animal-health concerns while maintaining these areas as safe provisioning sites for vultures.

Malyasri delivered education and public-awareness sessions in local schools and colleges, and led a Vulture Festival tied to International Vulture Day (first week of September) featuring talks on WRV conservation and student competitions. She was also invited to speak at the Central University, where she presented her WRV work and project aims. These activities have noticeably increased awareness among students and educators, with positive feedback and interest in follow-up sessions and materials.



> School groups taking part in the Vulture Festival for International Vulture Day.

EDGE FELLOWSHIP PROJECT PROGRESS



Waruni Tissera
Serendib Scops Owl (*Otus thilohoffmanni*)
Sri Lanka



Objectives

1. Assess the distribution of the species in Sinharaja and Kitulgala Rainforests of Sri Lanka using field data and citizen science data by 2027



2. Identify the factors influencing the distribution of the species and characterize its microhabitat by 2027



3. Identify potential new areas of species occurrence in the wet zone of Sri Lanka by 2027.



Progress

Objectives 1, 2 and 3 will be implemented simultaneously, using a single integrated field-survey design.

Waruni has developed and tested the full methodology for both the field survey and citizen science components of the project. The approach and datasheets were piloted during the initial field visit and the ZSL project visit to Sinharaja and Makandawa Forest Reserves, after which the methods were refined and the survey grid maps finalised. Research permit applications have been submitted to the Department of Forests and the Department of Wildlife Conservation; approval has been confirmed by the Forest Department, and official letters from both authorities are expected shortly. The citizen science questionnaire has been designed, and a comprehensive list of stakeholders, including wildlife researchers, tour guides, and trackers, has been compiled through consultations. Pilot interviews with several of these groups have already been conducted. All field equipment outlined in the project budget has been successfully procured, and a database of GPS species records has been established to consolidate both field and citizen science data. Field data collection and stakeholder interviews are scheduled to begin in October 2025, once the official permissions are in hand.

EDGE FELLOWSHIP PROJECT PROGRESS



Waruni Tissera
Serendib Scops Owl (*Otus thilohoffmanni*)
Sri Lanka



Objectives

4. Sensitise wildlife tourism and other stakeholders to promote better practices for the conservation of the species within 24 months.



5. Enhance the public awareness of the species in Sri Lanka within 24 months.



Progress

Waruni carried out visits to both the Sinharaja and Makandawa Forest Reserves, meeting with the forest officers in charge of each area to introduce the project and discuss opportunities for collaboration. These meetings helped to identify key local stakeholders and gather initial insights into existing tourism and management practices. The officers expressed strong support for the study and a willingness to assist during implementation. A questionnaire was developed to capture the views and recommendations of stakeholders, which will inform the creation of best-practice guidelines for wildlife tourism and species conservation. Pilot interviews were conducted to test and refine the questionnaire ahead of the main data collection phase.

Waruni is developing a documentary on the species, highlighting its discovery, ecology, threats, and conservation significance to enhance public understanding and appreciation. Preliminary discussions have taken place with a professional filming crew, and work on the script is underway. In parallel, she is creating project-branded materials, including stickers and a project logo, to strengthen outreach and visibility. A draft logo design has already been completed with support from a professional designer, and these materials will be used to promote the project through schools, community events, and digital channels once production is finalised.



> Waruni and Malyasri with their cohort of EDGE Fellows at the EDGE Conservation Tools Course held in Thailand.



ZSL