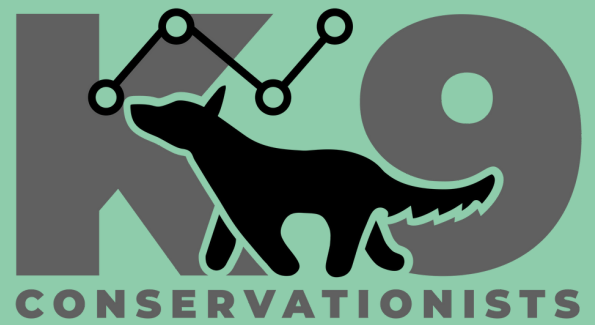


2023 ANNUAL REPORT

CONTINUING EDUCATION AND
CARNIVORE DIETS



DEAR FRIENDS

Once again, 2023 was a big year for K9 Conservationists! We achieved a significant milestone by securing our first paid fieldwork opportunities, with captivating and challenging carnivore scat surveys in the scenic landscapes of Guatemala and California.

The year began with a focus on growth and professionalization as we expanded our Board of Directors, who bring valuable support and expertise. With the support of our new board members, we grew our online handler course, our mentoring programs, and our free podcast. Simultaneously, Heather initiated a "Search for a Search Dog" in a quest to find an additional working dog. We'll share more details about this endeavor later in the report.

Finally, 2023 was the year of continuing education for our co-founders! Rachel embarked on a master's, while I began a PhD program. Despite the challenges of balancing academics with running K9 Conservationists, we're eager to leverage the increased knowledge for the benefit of our organization

At K9 Conservationists, passion and grit are at the heart of everything we do. We walked hundreds of kilometers, woke up before dawn dozens of times, and wrote thousands of words of proposals and feedback for our students. None of this would be possible without your support. From the bottom of our hearts and with wagging tails, thank you.

Kayla Fratt

KAYLA FRATT

Co-Founder





K9 Conservationists

at a Glance

Our mission is to unite highly trained conservation detection dog teams with researchers to collect scientific data. We aim to provide mentorship, deliver quality education, and foster collaboration among scientists, novice handlers, and local communities.

Our core values are collaboration, Humane Hierarchy-based training, and enthusiasm for sharing knowledge about conservation detection dogs.

We pride ourselves on creative solutions for challenging projects, top-notch dog welfare, and safety in the field.

2024 by the numbers

+1

new dog
on the
team

+11

new
target
odors

14

grant and
RFP
submissions

60

online
handling
school
students

70

patrons in
online
learning
club

67,032

podcast
plays



Mentorship

Helping more dogs and people protect the planet



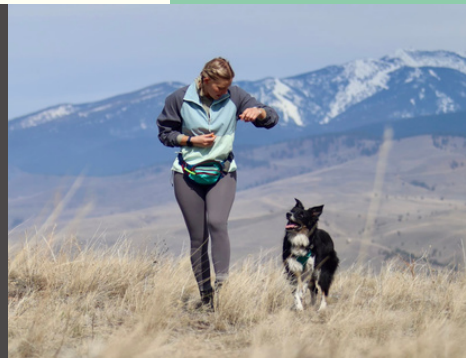
Online Coaching

Dozens of trainers at various stages in their careers joined our online coaching program. This year, several started their own projects, acquired and trained puppies, and/or met up with us for further networking. We can't wait to see where they go in 2024!



Self-Study Course

A major growth driver for us, this year we launched a self-study version of our Conservation Dog Handler Course. 60 students commenced the program, many of whom received assistance through our scholarship program.



Free Resources

Our podcast, show notes, and blog continue to maintain our commitment to produce free educational materials to benefit all aspiring K9 Conservationists. Additionally, Kayla provided substantial in-person mentorship to aspiring handlers in El Salvador and Guatemala.

JAGUARS IN GUATEMALA

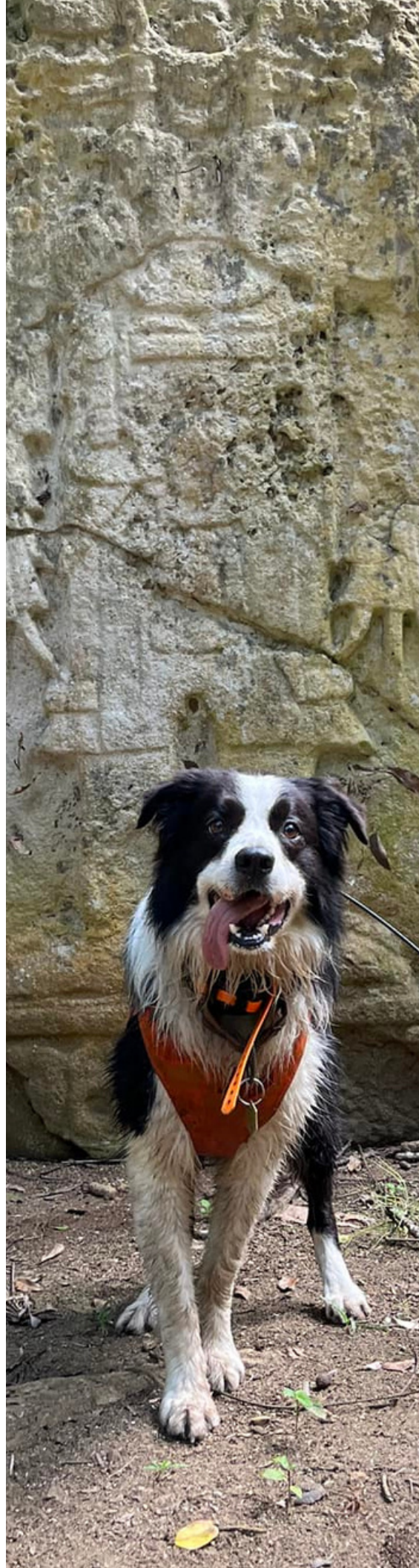
Guatemala's Petén rainforest hosts a diverse array of wildlife, including jaguars, pumas, ocelots, margays, jaguarundis, tayras, grey foxes, and coyotes. Oregon State University PhD student Ellen Dymit, working alongside Wildlife Conservation Society Guatemala, is collecting scats of these carnivores for genetic diet analysis.

Locating scats in the dense foliage of the rainforest is challenging, as they are often concealed under leaf litter or hidden just off-trail. K9 Conservationists dog teams proved to be invaluable assets in this intricate environment.

Kayla, Barley, and Niffler's efforts extended across Tikal National Park. We utilized various modes of transport, including trucks, boats, and trekking, to access the remote Laguna del Tigre Reserve. The dogs successfully discovered ~60 scats amidst the ancient ruins and dense jungle, achieving an impressive daily average of 5-7 scats—far surpassing the capabilities of human-only teams, who typically found only one scat per day in such challenging terrain.

The project shed light on the unique challenges Niffler faced, as he adapted to the intricacies of dense jungle and narrow trails, a departure from his previous experience in wind farm work. Despite encountering difficulties, Niffler demonstrated his capabilities by discovering scats along wider trails and even had a close encounter with a jaguar, much to the excitement of the human half of the team. We have training plans to help our "understudy" prepare for his next big project.

Fortunately, Barley stepped up to the plate, readily shouldering the workload and contributing to the team's overall success. The entire team expressed satisfaction with the end results, emphasizing the collaborative effort.



CALIFORNIA'S COASTAL CARNIVORES

At the start of 2023, we were thrilled to see an inquiry from Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant, National Geographic Explorer, host of "Going Wild", and co-host of the Mutual of Omaha's "Wild Kingdom." Dr. Wynn-Grant is a big deal in the conservation world, and we were honored to have the opportunity to contribute to her project.

Dr. Wynn-Grant needed canine assistance to survey the Jack and Laura Dangermond Preserve for puma scat. Her University of California Santa Barbara colleague Dr. Hillary Young and her PhD student Grace Lewin also joined the project, expanding the search objectives to include bobcat, bear, and coyote.

Throughout June, Barley, Scottie, and Kayla were deployed to California for the project, partially funded by National Geographic. Scottie, just months after his adoption, astounded us with his careful discrimination between bobcat and coyote scat, while Barley excelled at locating scat from every carnivore in the area.

The collected scats will undergo analysis to unravel the unique diets of carnivores in this coastal preserve.

Both dogs were brave and patient in the face of drones, GoPros, and big microphones. Stay tuned, as you'll eventually catch a glimpse of them in a documentary showcasing Dr. Wynn-Grant's groundbreaking work!



LESSONS LEARNED

As the K9 Conservationists team continues to develop expertise in a variety of targets and search environments, we've have learned a couple of lessons "the hard way."

In Guatemala, we identified gaps in our training program when transitioning a dog to more challenging projects, particularly in the presence of large field crews and challenging odor conditions.

Additionally, we encountered the formidable challenge of preventing tick-borne diseases. Despite robust tick prevention protocols, Barley was diagnosed with Ehrlichia and anaplasmosis, leading to a few weeks of partial paralysis. Thankfully, he made a full recovery with the support of his veterinary team.

In California, we realized the importance of planning for two dogs per project, even for brief projects. Barley required assistance from Scottie due to his health status at the time.

These experiences led to the development of new Standard Operating Procedures, course materials, and a Safety Series in our podcast. We aim to continually enhance our training programs and ensure everyone's well-being in the field.



A NEW ADDITION

We had been talking about expanding the K9 Conservationists crew for about a year, but started seriously searching when the time was right for Heather to add a second dog. Within days of starting the search for the perfect rescue pup, Heather connected with this handsome man's owner.

At just 2 years old, this high-energy border collie had already gone through three homes, showed no interest in herding or agility and had a dangerous habit of hopping fences... so he also in search of a more suitable home. With a name change from Mr. Spot to Scottie, he quickly integrated into our extended family. Did we mention he is THE CUDDLIEST dog you will ever meet?

While preparing Ellie for the upcoming field season, Heather began scentwork training with Scottie. Within a month, he had imprinted on his first target odor and passed evaluations for surveys at the wind farm. He may be our rookie, but Scottie truly excelled this June to support Barley on our California carnivores project. Scottie showed a natural talent for reading tricky air currents to clear areas of scat. When we hit an area FULL of coyote scat, Scottie diligently searched for the bobcat samples scattered along the trail.

This whiz kid is a shining reminder why it pays off to search for the right canine partner. We can't wait for the rest of his career!



Photo credit to Crystal Wing

PODCAST

In 2023, we introduced various thematic collections, focusing on significant subjects such as social justice, odor discrimination, and field safety. Our most popular episode of the year centered on heat-related injury in working dogs. Additionally, we featured insightful interviews with our biologist counterparts in both Guatemala and California.

37

hours of
podcasting
published

35

guests
highlighted
on the show

39

different
countries
represented
in listeners

5.0

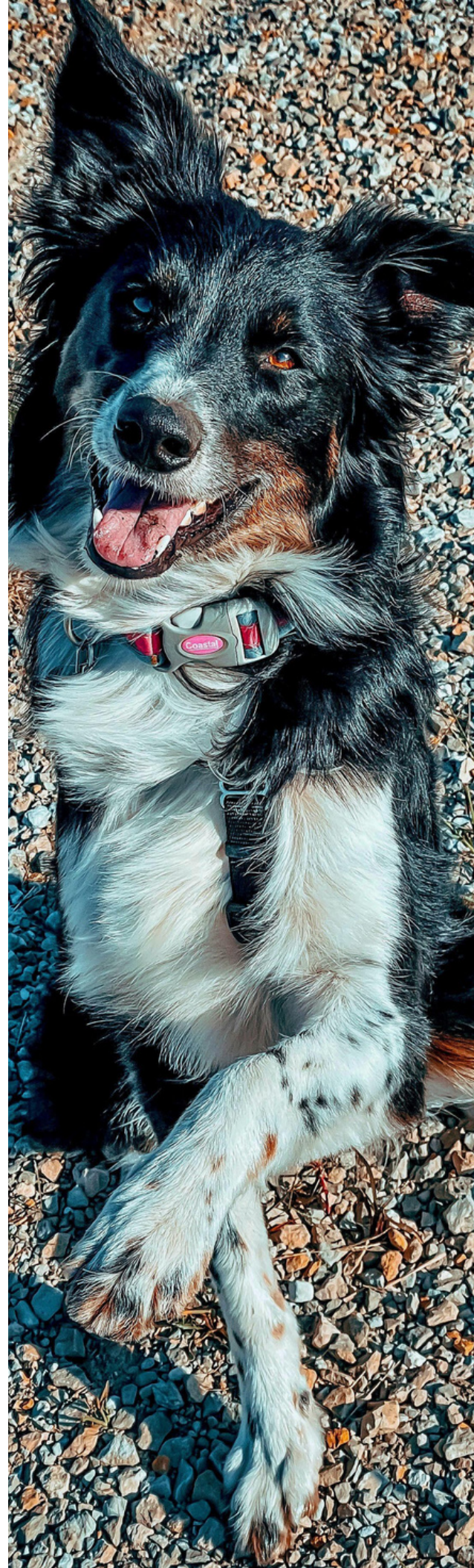
podcast
rating
(out of 5)

20%

increase in
followers

67,032

podcast
plays



STAFF EDUCATION

The K9 Conservationists director team is as dedicated to our own continuing education as we are to our students’.

In 2023, Heather dedicated her time at the K9 Sensus Foundation for a Systematic Search seminar, where Scottie learned to “engage the nose, not the feet.” He encountered activities such as brick walls and line-ups for the first time, astonishing Heather with his swift comprehension of the novel tasks. The systematic approach equipped Heather with a well-structured progression plan, allowing for methodical advancement in their training regimen.

Rachel has started a master’s program at University of Montana. She is studying Business Analytics, a program that focuses on creative and innovative ways to use data for storytelling and business management. We are excited to have these skills on the team!

Kayla was awarded the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, enabling her to embark on a PhD program at Oregon State University. Under the wing of Dr. Taal Levi, Kayla is studying diet and connectivity of wolves in Alaska and pumas in El Salvador. Of course, both Niffler and Barley will play integral roles in aiding in data collection for her studies.



OUTREACH

The K9 Conservationists team is passionate about sharing the wonders of conservation dogs to groups of all ages. This year, the team spoke at Caño Palma Biological Research Station, University of Montana, and the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science.

Kayla had the honor of presenting at the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants Conference. Her talk focused on the careful selection of shelter dogs for detection work and the implementation of a training protocol aimed at enhancing specificity in conservation dogs.

Our work has been showcased in [Discover Magazine](#), the [American Animal Hospital Association](#), and on [KCLU](#), where we delved into the topic of California coastal carnivores. Additionally, [KRBD](#) covered our upcoming wolf conservation efforts in Alaska. We are grateful for the recognition and look forward to continuing our mission of advancing conservation through the incredible abilities of our canine partners.

