



INTERNATIONAL RANGER FEDERATION

PRESS RELEASE

World Ranger Day 2026:

Increased risks facing Guardians of a changing planet.

On **31 July** each year, we take time to recognise the men and women around the world who are working tirelessly to give nature a future. The [International Ranger Federation](#) (IRF) calls for rangers everywhere to be honoured, remembered, and recognised for their service and sacrifice.

In 2025, the IUCN adopted [Motion 102](#), titled “*The role of rangers as essential planetary health workers.*” This motion raised serious concerns about the conditions under which rangers operate. As environmental defenders safeguarding natural and cultural resources, rangers often work in life-threatening and resource-challenged environments. The IRF [Roll of Honour 2026](#) stands as a tragic reminder of these risks, and the profound challenges rangers continue to face.

The IRF solemnly acknowledges the loss of 147 rangers across 40 countries between 2025 and 2026. Tragically, homicides accounted for 29% of these deaths, making them the leading cause. The second highest cause (22%) was attacks by the very wildlife rangers dedicate their lives to protecting.

These deaths speak directly to the increasing threats rangers face and resonate with this year’s World Ranger Day theme: “Rangers: Guardians of a Changing Planet.” A growing global shortage of natural resources is driving demand and values upward, leaving rangers, those who guard these resources at their source—exposed to organised criminal networks.

Many of these incidents occurred in the Global South, which holds the majority of the world’s biodiversity, between 70–80%¹, with 14 of the 17 megabiodiverse countries located in this region. This reality underscores both the immense responsibility carried by rangers in these areas and the heightened vulnerability they face in safeguarding such critical natural wealth. At the same time, the loss of wild areas, expanding human-dominated landscapes, and the severing of wildlife corridors are intensifying human–wildlife conflict. Rangers are increasingly on the frontline of these encounters, facing aggressive wildlife while striving to protect both people and nature.

The IRF is also deeply concerned about the health of rangers, both physical and mental. Recent data revealed troubling numbers of ranger deaths from heart attacks and other unknown medical conditions. For the first time, our recorded data has flagged cases of suicide among rangers. This is a stark reminder of the immense pressures they face and highlights the critical importance of

¹ Armstrong, C. (2024). The biodiversity crisis and global justice: a research agenda. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2024.2380218>



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prioritising mental wellbeing. Greater attention must be given to ensuring rangers have access to the support systems, resources, and safeguards necessary to protect their health, resilience, and effectiveness.

In light of these realities, the IRF calls on the world's nations to invest more in the people who secure critical natural resources. This must include building the capacity of rangers, whether state, regional, communal, Indigenous, or private—to ensure they are equipped, supported, and protected.

If we are to secure nature effectively, the wellbeing of rangers must be prioritised. Addressing their morale, safety, and health is essential to strengthening their effectiveness and ensuring they can fulfil their critical responsibilities as frontline guardians of biodiversity and planetary health.

Looking ahead, the IRF will continue to strengthen its support for rangers worldwide. Prior to the next World Ranger Day, we will unite at the [11th IRF World Ranger Congress](#) under the theme: “*Rangers: Essential Workers for Our Planet.*” This theme highlights the critical role rangers play in safeguarding biodiversity, advancing conservation, and addressing the profound challenges faced by one of the world's most important professions.

On this World Ranger Day, we honour the fallen, stand with the vulnerable, and reaffirm our commitment to ensuring rangers everywhere are recognised, supported, and empowered as true guardians of our changing planet.

List Key words

Rangers; Biodiversity; Conservation; Wellbeing; Planetary health

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What is World Ranger Day?

World Ranger Day, observed annually on July 31st, honours the world's park and wildlife rangers who risk their lives to protect natural habitats and cultural heritage. It commemorates rangers killed or injured in the line of duty and celebrates the critical work these front-line defenders do for global conservation.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) works alongside the International Ranger Federation (IRF) to highlight the dangerous realities rangers face while managing natural parks, tackling wildlife crime, and mediating human-wildlife conflicts.



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About the International Ranger Federation

The International Ranger Federation (IRF) was founded in 1992 and is a worldwide, non-profit membership-based organization, established to develop, advance, and promote the ranger profession. The IRF recognizes rangers and protected and conserved area workers, whether state, regional, communal, Indigenous, or private, as essential on-the-ground planetary health professionals that are responsible for safeguarding nature, cultural and historical heritage, and protecting the rights and well-being of present and future generations. The IRF is the standard-bearer for the ranger profession globally and the voice of ranger associations and rangers everywhere.

<http://www.internationalrangers.org/>

Images

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