



## BACKGROUNDER 2024

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# PERPETUAL PLANET INITIATIVE ROLEX AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

### **ABOUT THE PERPETUAL PLANET INITIATIVE**

For nearly a century, Rolex has supported pioneering explorers pushing back the boundaries of human endeavour. The company has moved from championing exploration for the sake of discovery to protecting the planet, committing for the long term to support individuals and organizations using science to understand and devise solutions to today's environmental challenges.

This engagement was reinforced with the launch of the Perpetual Planet Initiative in 2019, which initially focused on individuals who contribute to a better world through the Rolex Awards for Enterprise, on safeguarding the oceans as part of an established association with Mission Blue, and on understanding climate change via its longstanding partnership with the National Geographic Society.

An expanding portfolio of other partnerships embraced by the Perpetual Planet Initiative now includes: Cristina Mittermeier and Paul Nicklen in their work as conservation photographers; Rewilding Argentina and Rewilding Chile, offspring organizations of Tompkins Conservation, which are protecting landscapes in South America; Coral Gardeners, transplanting resilient corals to reefs; Steve Boyes and the Great Spine of Africa expeditions, exploring the continent's major river basins; the Under The Pole expeditions, pushing the boundaries of underwater exploration; the B.I.G Arctic Research Expedition, gathering data on threats to the Arctic; and the Monaco Blue Initiative, bringing together ocean conservation experts.

Rolex also supports organizations and initiatives fostering the next generations of explorers, scientists and conservationists through scholarships and grants such as Our World-Underwater Scholarship Society and The Rolex Explorers Club Grants.

### **A NATURAL PARTNERSHIP**

Rolex's involvement in exploration led the company into a natural partnership with the National Geographic Society in 1954. The Society has supported courageous people and transformative ideas for more than 130 years, making valuable contributions to exploration, science and conservation. Articles about these ventures appeared in its eponymous magazine, National Geographic. In 1954, one of those articles described Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's history-making ascent of the world's highest peak, Mount Everest. Rolex was also involved in this epic adventure, having supplied the expedition with watches.





## TWO-YEAR ROLEX AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PERPATUAL PLANET AMAZON EXPEDITION CONCLUDES

### SPIRIT OF DISCOVERY

This spirit of discovery is quintessential to Rolex and National Geographic as they have – at times together and at times individually – supported pioneers exploring new realms. The two organizations have both been involved, separately, in expeditions to the Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the oceans, located in the Pacific.

The first was in 1960 when the bathyscaphe Trieste, piloted by Jacques Piccard and Don Walsh, carried an experimental Rolex Oyster watch, the Deep Sea Special, fixed to its exterior as it descended to a record depth of 10,916 metres (35,800 feet). It returned to the surface in perfect working order.

Fifty-two years later, in 2012, filmmaker and Rolex Testimonee James Cameron completed his solo dive aboard the DEEPSEA CHALLENGER, which carried an experimental diver's watch, the Rolex Deepsea Challenge, on its robotic manipulator arm. The watch, waterproof to 12,000 metres (39,370 feet), resisted more than 12 tonnes of pressure on its crystal, kept perfect time and emerged from the water unscathed.

Thirty Laureates of the Rolex Awards for Enterprise have also been National Geographic Explorers or recipients of grants. They include Johan Reinhard, who won a Rolex Award in 1987 for his project to preserve the patrimony of the Andean people through high-altitude cultural anthropology; he became a National Geographic Explorer in 1999; conservation biologist Erika Cuéllar, selected as a Rolex Laureate in 2012, became a National Geographic Emerging Explorer the following year for her work to train local people to protect the biodiversity of the Gran Chaco, one of South America's last truly wild environments.

In 2019, Pablo García Borboroglu won a Rolex Award for his project protecting the world's threatened penguins and became a National Geographic Explorer in 2022; Brazilian biologist João Campos-Silva won a Rolex Award, also in 2019, for his work enlisting local communities to save the world's biggest scaled freshwater fish, the arapaima. He is now a National Geographic Explorer who is involved in the Perpetual Planet Amazon Expedition.

In 2017, the partnership between Rolex and the National Geographic Society was officially enhanced to promote exploration linked to preservation of the planet.

### PERPETUAL PLANET EXPEDITIONS

In 2019, Rolex and National Geographic Society decided to explore the planet's most vulnerable environments under the name Perpetual Planet Expeditions. The partnership harnesses world-renowned scientific expertise and cutting-edge technology to reveal new insights about the impacts of climate change on the systems that are vital to life on Earth: mountains as the world's water towers, rainforests as the planet's lungs, and the oceans as its cooling system.





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The first expedition supported by this partnership was to Mount Everest and ran from April to June 2019. The Everest expedition team, led by National Geographic and Tribhuvan University, set out to better understand the effects of climate change on the glaciers of the Hindu Kush-Himalaya that provide critical water resources to 1 billion people downstream. The team installed a network of five weather stations including what was then the world's highest, just short of the summit of Everest.

Studies were conducted on the region's biology, geology and glaciology, which led to the publication of a number of scientific papers. The information gained from the expedition, coupled with additional data sets on water supply and demand from mountain chains across the world. In advance of the Everest expedition, several members of this team and other scientists, created a groundbreaking index to track the health of the most important and vulnerable water systems and inform decisions to help protect them which in turn determined the basis of the additional Perpetual Planet Expeditions into high-alpine environments.

The next expedition was in early 2021 when a National Geographic team of explorers and scientists installed a weather station – the highest in the Southern and Western Hemispheres – just below the summit of Tupungato Volcano, in the Southern Andes.

With the installation of the weather station, scientists will have a window into atmospheric processes in the high Chilean Andes. One of the most vulnerable water towers in the world, these mountains provide fresh water to more than 6 million inhabitants in nearby Santiago. In 2021, glaciologist Alison Criscitiello climbed Canada's Mount Logan, the second-highest mountain in North America, with geologist Rebecca Haspel and installed a weather station. A year later she returned with an expedition and extracted an ice core at a record depth of 327 metres, which is estimated to contain thousands of years of climate change information.

In April 2022, Rolex and National Geographic announced a series of scientific studies over the next two years spanning the entire Amazon River Basin from the Andes to the Atlantic. The land, ocean, atmosphere, people, and animals are all connected by its hydrological cycle as its natural ebb and flow affects nearly every living organism near it. Repeated and increased degradation such as deforestation, poaching, commercial agriculture, and climate change decreases the Amazon's ability to adequately provide critical ecosystem services for the planet.

Led by National Geographic Explorers – a team of scientists, storytellers and local community members investigated the basin, showcasing its intricate connectivity. They honed in on the region's hydrological cycle and the critical role that the river's seasonal flooding has on access to fresh water and the survival of communities and wildlife. The studies ranged from monitoring climate change impacts on the high Andes; ecosystem services of the Amazon mangroves; impacts of deforestation on the Andean bear; pollutants in the Amazon River, and the rainforest's ability to absorb greenhouse gases.



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The projects saw fantastic results: María Jimena Valderrama and 2024 Rolex National Geographic Explorer of the year Fernando Trujillo surveyed 1,270 kilometres of river across four countries, calculating 1,366 river dolphins in the region; in the mountains of Peru, Baker Perry and Tom Matthews installed the highest weather station in the tropical Andes at 6,349 metres; and along the Atlantic coast, Angelo Bernardino discovered the first mangrove forest growing in fresh water known to science.

This work built on the Tropical Forest Vulnerability Index, developed by National Geographic in 2019, with the assistance of Rolex. The index indicates that each forest reacts differently to stressors such as heat, drought, fires and pollution, and requires a diversity of solutions.

These expeditions go to the heart of the commitment Rolex has made to a Perpetual Planet and to future generations, by supporting individuals and organizations in their efforts to preserve the natural world and the systems that sustain life. The insights gained from them should prove invaluable to informing decisions on how the world can best tackle the planet's most pressing environmental challenges.

### **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORERS FESTIVAL**

Rolex has supported the National Geographic Explorers Festival since 2017. The annual event brings together innovative scientists, conservationists, educators, storytellers and change-makers from around the globe to share their discoveries, insights and solutions for creating a more sustainable future.

The Rolex National Geographic Explorer of the Year is awarded at the festival to an explorer who shines a light on important issues, discoveries, and challenges facing the planet.

### **OTHER LINKS**

Rolex and National Geographic have also been associated in other ways. Scientists from the National Geographic Society have served as members on the Rolex Awards for Enterprise jury. Both partners have long alliances with Sylvia Earle, filmmaker and explorer James Cameron, and underwater photographer David Doubilet.

In addition, Rolex is now supporting the expansion of the National Geographic Society's headquarters in Washington, D.C. to help preserve their shared legacy of exploration and storytelling for generations to come. Since 1888, explorers have brought back findings from their expeditions to the National Geographic Base Camp, and the reimagined campus will be the most significant expansion in the Society's history.



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The new space, which is slated to open in 2026, will connect the Society headquarters, an expanded museum, and new public spaces. Rolex is also supporting the development of the new Explorers Landing space, which will be dedicated to sharing the inspiring stories of National Geographic Explorers through the years and highlighting their contributions to science, education, storytelling, and exploration.

### **PERPETUATING THE LEGACY**

Being a part of some of humanity's greatest adventures inspired Rolex's commitment to exploration and explorers, as well as something beyond discovery: a sense that humanity must take better care of the planet. The Perpetual Planet Initiative, with its partners such as National Geographic Society, is Rolex's long-term commitment to support those finding solutions to the environmental challenges that are confronting ecosystems from the Amazon to the Himalayas, from the Arctic to the Antarctic and beyond.

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