



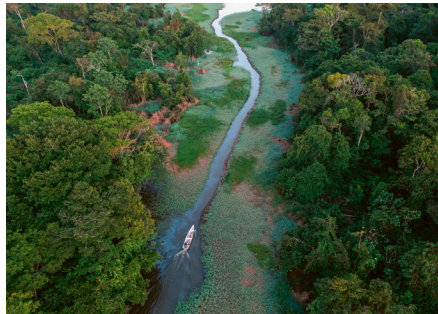
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TWO-YEAR NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AND ROLEX PERPETUAL PLANET AMAZON EXPEDITION CONCLUDES



Researchers George Antony Muñoz Hermoza and Norma Gionona Momoni Moyto with National Geographic Explorer Ruthmery Pillco Huarcaya in the moss forest near the Wayqecha Biological Station.

© Pablo Durana/National Geographic



A fresh catch of arapaimas are transported across a floodplain in the Amazon Rainforest, near the Lago Serrado community. Arapaimas are the largest scaled freshwater fish in the world and are under threat. Local community groups have put fishing quotas in place throughout the river, helping the arapaima population increase by over 600 per cent in 15 years.

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National Geographic Explorer Angelo Bernardino measures the diameter of a mangrove tree's trunk. Bernardino recently discovered this unique mangrove forest in the Amazon Delta, the first to be scientifically documented growing in a freshwater environment.

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Clambering through a dense tangle of mangrove roots in the rushing waters of the Amazon river's vast estuary, a team of explorers are uncovering an ecosystem hitherto unknown to science. At the opposite end of the famous river, another team of explorers brave an icy climb up one of the region's tallest mountains to install the highest weather station in the tropical Andes. Though they are separated by more than 2,700 kilometres, they are united under the banner of a single, larger expedition.

Hitherto, Amazon research has concentrated on the rainforest itself, while comparatively little attention has been paid to the giant aquatic web that nourishes and connects the forest. Over the last two years, this has changed thanks to a ground-breaking collaboration between the National Geographic Society and the Rolex Perpetual Planet Initiative. Running from 2022 to 2024, the Rolex and National Geographic Perpetual Planet Amazon Expedition involved explorers, scientists and researchers in a wide range of disciplines, working with local community members in seven different projects across a huge swath of South America.

Both individually and collectively, this array of projects revolved around one question: to what extent are the water systems of the Amazon, which range over an area the size of Australia, being impacted by climate change, deforestation, pollution and biodiversity loss?

The question elicited a diverse range of responses, each looking into different challenges facing Amazonian ecosystems. The seven National Geographic Explorer teams were:



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- Baker Perry and Tom Matthews, who installed a weather station near the Nevado Ausangate glacier (among the highest in the world at 6,000 metres above sea level) to better monitor key source waters for the Amazon.
- Ruthmery Pillco-Huarcaya and Andrew Whitworth, who assessed the health of the Andean Bear population and their important role in regenerating the cloud forest that is being impacted by climate change.
- Thiago Silva and Julia Tavares, who used light detection and ranging technology to scan the forest's seasonal wetlands and investigated their functional traits to better understand how trees have adapted to environmental changes.
- Andressa Scabin and Rolex Awards for Enterprise Laureate João Campos-Silva, who worked with local communities to study and protect six of the Amazon's key riverine megafauna.
- Hinsby Cadillo-Quiroz, Jennifer Angel-Amaya and Josh West, who investigated artificial ponds created by human activity in order to find solutions for regenerating the transformed landscaped.
- María Jimena Valderrama and 2024 Rolex National Geographic Explorer of the Year Fernando Trujillo, who tracked populations of pink river dolphins, assessing the level of contaminants in their blood as a barometer for river health.
- Angelo Bernardino and Margaret Owuor, who surveyed the mangroves along the Atlantic coast and discovered the first mangrove forest growing in fresh water known to science.

The seven teams' projects took them to seven wildly different landscapes, scattered across the Amazon's water cycle, and joining them across these myriad locations was National Geographic Photographer Thomas Peschak. From the icy altitudes of the cordillera to the steamy jungles of the deep rainforest, Peschak made several visits to the teams throughout the two-year expedition to document their work and tell the story of the Amazon's waters like never before.

"This partnership between National Geographic and Rolex is a unique opportunity for both research and communication. A big part of our work is communicating to people what we do." – Angelo Bernardino, Marine Ecologist and National Geographic Explorer

The Rolex Perpetual Planet Initiative has always been dedicated to enabling scientific innovation and discovery, but communicating science to a wider public is also of vital importance. By not only supporting the researchers in the field, but sharing their stories and findings with the world, Rolex and National Geographic are changing the way we look at the Amazon.



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After two years of research, exploration and community work, the Explorers on the Rolex and National Geographic Perpetual Planet Amazon Expedition are more convinced than ever that reframing the narrative around the world's largest rainforest to draw attention to its waterways will be key in protecting it. Due to the Amazon's size, it has a significant role in carbon sequestration and climate regulation on a global scale, and so its protection is of the utmost importance for the planet's future.

For such a complex and large-scale project, every bit of support was vital, from the local people who collaborated with the explorer teams to the organisations that made the expedition possible. According to Peschak, "It was the union of National Geographic and Rolex, as well as all the explorers, scientists and community members, that made this mission possible."

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 the Rolex Awards for Enterprise, as well as long-standing partnerships with Mission Blue and National Geographic Society.

The initiative now has more than 30 other partnerships in an expanding portfolio. They include, for example, Cristina Mittermeier and Paul Nicklen, Rewilding Argentina and Rewilding Chile, offspring organizations of Tompkins Conservation, the Under The Pole expeditions, the Monaco Blue Initiative, and Coral Gardeners.

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.

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