

## Leading and influencing in the right way

### Tim Mackrill

I love it, but working in conservation isn't easy. When you care deeply about the natural world, it's hard to hear about the damage we humans are doing to the planet; whether it be plastic in the oceans, the global increase in CO2 emissions, or the decline of so many species. Sometimes it can all be a bit overwhelming. How can we possibly make a difference when scientific evidence points to the fact that we're in the midst of a global ecological crisis? Let's face it, none of us are drawn to conservation for the money. We're here because we want to make a difference. But how can we as individuals possibly do that? Well if I'm honest, I don't think we can do it alone. Yes, we can all do our own thing – but if we really want to work towards meaningful change, then we need to learn to work together and to inspire and enthuse others. And that's where 'Leading like Mary' comes in.

When you're in the early stages of your conservation career it's sometimes easy to underestimate how much influence you can have. You might feel you're at the bottom of the pile and that no one listens to you. Well I'd say, think again. Quite often jobs lower down on the conservation 'ladder' bring you directly into contact with the general public. You might be leading groups of volunteers in habitat management work, or talking to visitors to a nature reserve. Either way, you are in a position of influence. You have the potential to enthuse and inspire others – and that is how change begins to happen.

Last week we heard from Barry about Bill and Sidney; leaders at opposite ends of the leadership continuum. Neither are leaders we should aspire to be like, and neither are likely to either enthuse or inspire. This week though, Barry is introducing you to a very different kind of leader. A leader people want to follow because of who she is and what she does. Having been lucky enough to have worked with him for a number of years I think that the ten traits Barry believes define authentic leaders like Mary, are something we should all aspire to. Over the course of the next few weeks we'll be exploring those traits, and how you can incorporate them into your day-to-day life; both professionally and personally. I can guarantee that if you do that, you will not only become a more effective conservation leader, but also someone who influences others. And it's the ability to influence, inspire and enthuse others that is so important.

Only a very small proportion of the UK's land surface is designated as nature reserves, meaning that it is vital that conservationists are able to work with and influence other land managers – whether they be farmers, foresters or other local people. We also have to be able to inspire members of the public to take more of an interest in the natural world. We aren't going to be able to do that remaining in our comfort zones and talking to an echo chamber of other conservationists and people who support us. In my view we need to get out there and spread the word in a sensitive and non-threatening way but with a steely determination and real urgency to get things done. I believe that the only way to do that is to think about how our actions as a leader can influence other people on a daily basis. It is also important to recognise that no one is perfect. We all make mistakes, and, as Barry points out, one of Mary's key traits is that she is highly self-aware and recognises that she is far from perfect as a leader. However, by constantly striving to improve and to become more effective as a leader we can really start to have a positive influence on the people around us. And that is what 'Becoming a Conservation Leader' is all about. By thinking about the traits that define highly effective authentic leaders like Mary, and how we might incorporate them into our conservation work, we can all start to have a positive influence on the people around us and become conservation leaders who can genuinely make a difference.

