

# Harnessing Our Invisible Footprint

by **MISHELL ITKIND** /// EAC Volunteer

**Our invisible footprint is tied to power to create change in the world.**

MAIN PHOTO: Jimmie Pederson

TOP RIGHT PHOTO: Simon Ryder-Burbidge

BOTTOM RIGHT PHOTO: Mishell Itkind

Every day, we make thousands of decisions. This ranges from what we do, where we go, how we get there, what we buy and what we say. It's impossible to align all of our actions with our personal values of caring for the environment. Regardless, it's still worth being mindful of the choices we make. Although the immediate environmental consequences of our day-to-day lives may not be evident, these choices add up and affect the world in ways that we may not consider. When we don't pay attention to our invisible footprint, we also miss our invisible power to create change in the world.

Let's imagine a warm night in mid-July. You've decided to go camping, straying off a forest trail and to natural clearing in the backcountry. Birds wheel in the sky above you as you set up your tent. Breaking small branches off trees to nurture a small fire, you throw trash from your hiking snacks into the flame. As you continue to unpack, you notice a "leave no trace" sign. You didn't leave a trace, did you?

The countless decisions we make, even with something as simple and restorative as spending time in nature, can have cumulative effects on local ecosystems long after we've returned home. Straying from established trails to find a wild clearing can scare away and disturb endangered populations of birds, particularly during breeding seasons in late spring and early summer. Burning plastic wrappers with ink or paint releases harmful chemicals and toxic remnants for curious animals. Even something as small as not cleaning the soil from hiking boot soles between trips can introduce invasive species to an area.

**Mishell** (she/her) is completing Dalhousie University's master of resource and environmental management program. She's passionate about biodiversity conservation and hopes to work with orangutan conservation projects in the future.

## TAKE ACTION

Acting intentionally with a larger vision can amplify the impacts of our actions. By being mindful of our day-to-day choices, we unlock the power to find like-minded communities and make transformative and sustainable change together.

Learning about our larger invisible footprint and adapting some of our habits accordingly can make the change from simply appreciating nature to conserving it. Becoming more aware of these small choices can help create momentum and guide us to opportunities to take bigger actions.

When we integrate environmental principles into our daily lives and into more of our small decisions, it becomes easier to find like-minded people, become involved in your community and advocate for meaningful action together. Sharing your newfound knowledge with your community, writing letters to a company about their greenwashing or forming a group to meet with your political representatives about an environmental policy are just a few of the ways that changing one person's mind set and thinking about our invisible footprint can lead to further action.

Together, our individual choices, when combined with a larger vision, have the power to turn our invisible footprint into a tool for positive change – creating ripples that extend far beyond our immediate reach.