



## Austin youth to present original conservation research at IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi

17 October 2025 | News

**Ten young conservation leaders from Families in Nature (FIN), the Austin-based nonprofit dedicated to advancing youth leadership in environmental science, are headed to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, to showcase their original research and education projects at the IUCN World Conservation Congress, taking place October 9-15, 2025.**



**Ten young conservation leaders from Families in Nature (FIN), the Austin-based nonprofit dedicated to advancing youth leadership in environmental science, are headed to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, to showcase their original research and education projects at the IUCN World Conservation Congress, taking place October 9-15, 2025.**

Held once every four years, the Congress is one of the world's most influential gatherings for biodiversity and climate action, uniting experts, policymakers, and organizations from over 195 countries to set global priorities for protecting nature.

The FIN delegation—comprising Jo Joly (31), Harper Thomas (17), Aubrey Teffer (17), Sawyer Kuhlken (15), Lou Roe (24), Lexi Arguello (18), Jaxi Arguello (21), Liam Flockhart Ford (24), and Addison Marry-Chow (28) from across Texas, California, and Puerto Rico, along with Senyacen Ramirez (27) from Tela, Honduras—represents a diverse spectrum of backgrounds and expertise. Their projects range from coral reef resilience studies to the development of inclusive science tools designed for learners with visual or linguistic barriers.

"These youth aren't just the future—they're shaping conservation now," said Heather Kuhlken, Executive Director of Families in Nature, who is leading the delegation. "They're asking the critical questions, they're doing the research, and they're building the tools that future generations will use to connect with nature."

Among the highlights is the team's coral reef resilience research in Tela Bay, Honduras, where students have been investigating one of the Caribbean's most unexpectedly healthy reef systems. Their fieldwork explores biodiversity, coral reproduction success, sea urchin population dynamics, and seabed sediment patterns to uncover why the Tela Bay reef continues to thrive despite global warming pressures. The findings could help inform restoration models for threatened reefs worldwide.

Equally innovative are the inclusive outdoor education projects developed by FIN youth members in Texas. Using creative design and sensory science, they've built interactive "science boxes" that translate natural experiences into tactile and auditory forms—making nature exploration accessible for blind and visually impaired learners. The prototypes are currently being tested with the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, advancing FIN's mission to ensure that every child, regardless of ability or language, can engage deeply with the natural world.

"I'm really excited and honored to be here, because it's a chance to show how important youth are in conservation and to share a little bit of the beauty of Tela's reef with the world," said Senyacen Ramirez, a Honduran biologist from TelaMarine and FIN research partner. "It's inspiring to see young people so passionate, and I hope our work encourages others to include youth in their projects."

Ramirez and FIN have been collaborating with TelaMarine and local researchers to investigate the ecological drivers of Tela Bay's resilience—work that could influence coral restoration strategies across the Caribbean and beyond.

By bringing these youth voices to a global stage, Families in Nature underscores how early scientific inquiry, cross-cultural collaboration, and inclusive education can cultivate the next generation of conservationists—proving that leadership in environmental stewardship is not bound by age, geography, or circumstance.