



GOSCARs

GRASSROOTS OWEN-SMITH CONSERVATION AWARDS

open for nominations for 2026

The GOSCARs – the Grassroots Owen-Smith Conservation Awards – are presented annually to top-performing Namibian community-based organisations, conservancy game guards, conservancy lion or rhino rangers, fish guards or community resource monitors. Nominees must be registered as a community-based organisation or work for a CBO. Government, NGO or private sector are not eligible. **The awards for 2026 are now open for nominations.**

The awards recognise the organisations and individuals who work – and walk – in the field. They are the CBOs and individuals the late Garth Owen-Smith would want honoured in his name; they represent the original concept with which Namibia's internationally recognised community-based natural resource management program started.

The annual GOSCARs serve to remind us all that this is the front line of community-based conservation. Without community-based organisations and fieldworkers there would be no community-based conservation in Namibia – no communal conservancies, no communal forests and no communal fish reserves – and a lot less wildlife. The winner's conservancy and, if appropriate, their traditional authority, will also get a small award, recognising that it is the people who live with wildlife and other valuable natural resources who hold the future of conservation in their hands.

Namibian community-based conservation started with the appointment of community game guards by a few traditional leaders in Kunene and later in what was then Caprivi, now Zambezi. This early work, pioneered by Garth Owen-Smith, was enabled by a small NGO-funded grant covering community game guard rations and small salaries. These men were the foot soldiers who stopped rampant poaching in the early 1980s and who, with their far-sighted leaders and supportive community members, laid the foundation for what is today a vigorous national program supported by government and NGOs.

The near-forgotten early days were difficult on two fronts – community-based conservation went against the apartheid politics of the day and against conventional conservation thinking. Communities were seen as conservation's problem, not its solution. Those promoting community-empowerment were seen as subversive and a threat to the apartheid government. With community support, pioneers such as Garth Owen-Smith, Chris Eyre, Lukas Mbomboro and others prevailed. After independence the new government's early idealism resonated with the community-based approach that recognised valuable wildlife and other natural resources as community-owned, and that linked rights to responsibilities.

The awards thus aim to promote community-based natural resource management by going back to its roots – recognising the men and women at the front line as well as acknowledging responsible conservancies and related community-based organisations which are accountable to their members and fulfil their purpose. Specific criteria to be listed on the nomination form include effective monitoring of wildlife and other valuable natural resources, excellent communication with community members and conservancy committees, human-wildlife conflict mitigation and conservation outreach within communities.

Conservancies, community forests, fish reserves, NGOs or other organisations working in CBNRM, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, and the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources are all invited to assist with nominating a community-based organisation, community conservancy, community forest or fish reserve ranger by 1 December each year. The completed nomination form, including a brief motivation, should be sent or hand-delivered to the Namibian Chamber of Environment. Nomination forms can be downloaded from the NCE website at www.n-c-e.org. Hardcopy nomination forms will be available through NACSO partner's offices including IRDNC offices in Opuwo, Wêrledsend, Katima Mulilo and Windhoek.

A small GOSCARs committee chaired by Dr Margaret Jacobsohn will select finalists from the nominations. Beaven Munali, former Assistant Director of IRDNC Zambezi and retired Chair of the Zambezi Regional Council, and Ronnie Dempers, Executive Director of NDT and Chair of NACSO will also act as judges. The information provided about the finalists will be checked in the field. Winning organisations and individuals will then be chosen by the GOSCARs panel. A cash prize and framed certificate will go to each winner at a ceremony in April each year. The inaugural ceremony was held in April 2022, commemorating Garth's life.

These awards have been made possible by the generosity of hundreds of people, in Namibia and internationally, who contributed to the Garth Owen-Smith Memorial Fund. The GOSCARs and the fund are lodged with the Namibian Chamber of Environment, who are doing the administration at no cost and will assist the judging panel with raising funds for the annual ceremony and other costs.

Namibian Chamber of Environment

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AWARD NOMINATION FORM

Deadline: Friday 27 February 2026

Please fill in the form below and ensure you indicate the nominee's full name and his or her conservancy, community forest, residents' trust or community fish reserve. If applicable, also indicate his or her Traditional Authority.

Email, post or deliver the completed form to the Namibian Chamber of Environment:

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NOMINEE

(Person/organisation
being nominated)

Nominees must be registered as a community-based organisation or
work for a CBO. Government, NGO or private sector are not eligible.

Full Name of Nominee

Community Conservancy/ Forest/ Fish Reserve/ Residents' Trust

Position (e.g. game guard, rhino ranger, lion ranger, fish guard, resource monitor)

Email

Phone Number

NOMINATOR (Person submitting the nomination)

Full Name of Nominator

Organisation

Email

Phone Number

MOTIVATION (Please describe why the Nominee is suitable for a GOSCAR)

Motivation (500 words or less)