

My name is Sanjayan. I'm a conservation scientist. I wasn't born here; I was born quite far away from this place actually, in a little, little island in the middle of the Indian Ocean called Sri Lanka. And when I was born, my grandmother looked at my head and noticed a pattern of swirling in my hair which you call cowlicks. You can see that on your head. And in Sri Lanka, people read this like you read your palm. So she had my head read and came back and told my family the bad news and that was I was going to die by drowning. And as a kid, that's kind of devastating news to get because I lived right on the ocean and I could not go in it. I was forbidden to go in the water. Then when I was about nine years old, my mother broke with convention and taught me how to swim. Her reasoning was, if, you know, the kid is going to die by drowning then I want to give this kid a real fighting chance. In a lot of ways, that's exactly where we are in the conservation movement today. And conservation science really gives us a fighting chance. A fighting chance to survive what we call the Age of Man, the Anthropocene. So we know we're having lots of impacts on the planet, lots of negative impacts on the planet. The question is, how do we survive it? How do we continue to have a quality of life without exhausting all the resources, without exhausting nature that we need and depend on to survive? It's conservation science that helps us do that. Now, how do you become a conservation scientist? Well, see, it turns out that most conservation scientists come from biology. But for me, it was a little bit different. See, my parents really wanted me to become a doctor or an engineer or a lawyer. I'm Asian. That's what your parents push you to do. And I sort of studied to do that but as I was studying to do that, I was also taking classes that I was really just good at. In turns out, I was good at biology classes because I just liked wildlife. I've always been curious about things that move and how the world works. And most kids are; they're curious about critters. And I had lots and lots of animals growing up, from guinea pigs, and hamsters, and parrots, and dogs, and cats to strange things like fish in my bathtub, right? And I got fascinated by that. So I kept doing the things that I really, really enjoy doing and that passion eventually drove me to the point where I had a PhD in that and I realized, "Wow, someone could actually pay me to actually do something with this." So I just followed my passion. The good news is, as a conservation scientist or an environmental scientist, you have lots and lots of options for work. See, 20 years ago, you'd pretty much work in academia, so in the university or school, or for government, maybe in the National Park Service as a ranger or as a scientist. But today, you can work for a non-profit, like I work for the Nature Conservancy which is a conservation organization that cares about nature and people, or you can go and work for a company. See, it turns out that if you were, say, Coca-Cola and you cared about where your water comes from, Cola-Cola uses lots of water for all the Coke that they make, obviously, you need to care about where that river is coming from, where the water in that river is coming from, or what kind of pollution you're putting back into your system. So, as a company living on a planet with seven billion people, you really do need to worry about the environment. And many conservation scientists and environment scientists today also work for companies. So that's the good news. So, what do we really do ultimately in conservation science? You know, what's the big questions that we really wrestle with? Well, it turns out that really the ultimate big question that we conservation scientists wrestle with is about trade-offs. So, let's say you wanted to save rhinos. There's only 3,500 black rhinos left on the planet. People kill them because they want their horns because a rhino horn is worth \$60,000 in some parts of Asia. So, how do you... how do you save rhinos? Well, you could go about with an armed guard. You could put a ranger to follow the rhino around and keep poachers away. You could put all the rhinos in the zoo and just breed them there. You could create lots of habitat, create a big, big national park, which is so far away and so remote that no one could get to them or you can cut off rhino's horns so that poachers won't be tempted to kill them. Or you can go and work with the Asian markets and convince people that rhino horns are nothing more than hair, which is what they are, and they really have no medicinal value. So, there's a lot of different ways in which you can go about trying to save the rhino. Which is the best way, which gives the rhino the best chance and which requires the least amount of work from us, if you will? So, how do you value trade-off tends to be really what the work that conservation scientists do. See, as a conservation scientist, when I got into it, I thought my job was gonna be all about saving big animals and save... you know, working on tigers or elephants or rhinos or sharks, but it turns out that most of what I do is working on how you manage people and that's the neat part about conservation science. It's biology but it's also economics and sociology. So, it's a combination of those type of things and it's about evaluating trade-off to see what gives you the best outcome. When a conservation scientist looks in the future, I think the big challenge that we have to face is that, where do we want nature to ultimately look like? Do we want to recreate something that was in the past or do we want to envision something that's out there into the future? So, are we looking backwards or are we looking forward in terms of restoring say a forest or a field or a marsh? The last thing I would say about conservation science is that it's something that everyone can participate in, everyone can be a bit of a citizen scientist. And doing that really puts me out of my job and that's wonderful if people can do that. So, you don't actually have to go and become a conservation scientist in order to participate in it. The ultimate question though that all of us in conservation will struggle with is what makes people happy, what makes people content? My

proposition, what I truly believe, is that if we live on a planet with lots of nature and lots of wildlife, we will live better and happier lives. Is that true? I don't know. What's the evidence?