Are you a torchbearer for African Environmental Science? The Jennifer Ward Oppenheimer (JWO) Research Grant is looking for you.

In Africa's vast landscapes, where knowledge meets untapped potential, trailblazing researchers can make an enormous impact while putting the continent on the global map of excellence.

The Jennifer Ward Oppenheimer (JWO) Research Grant is a beacon for environmental science and continues to light the way for young researchers to make their mark.

Now in its seventh year, the grant seeks another visionary recipient whose work will bring clarity, innovation, and sustainable solutions to Africa's most pressing environmental challenges.

Historically, Africa has been overshadowed in the global research arena, with fewer resources dedicated to its scientists compared to other regions. Yet, within its diverse ecosystems and vibrant communities lies boundless potential for groundbreaking research. The JWO Research Grant offers a guiding light for African scientists to lead the way in environmental innovation and contribute to the global body of knowledge.

The Jennifer Ward Oppenheimer Research Grant (JWO Grant) was established in 2019 to honour the legacy of the late Jennifer Ward Oppenheimer, a distinguished pioneer in African education and environmental science. The JWO Research Grant has been instrumental in advancing vital research initiatives across the continent. As it approaches almost a decade of existence, the JWO Grant aims to attract a greater number of early-career scientists to apply in 2025, offering them the opportunity to receive a transformative award.

Over the past six years, early-career scholars and scientists specialising in various environmental disciplines such as biodiversity, microplastics, and disease vectors have eagerly sought this grant to explore innovative research topics aimed at addressing the unique challenges confronting Africa's natural environment.

Dr. Duncan MacFadyen, the Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation Head, emphasised the big contribution the JWO Grant makes to developing and promoting African knowledge.

"This is a unique award which addresses an important gap in the development of young African scientists," said MacFadyen. "Whilst annually there can be only one winner, we would encourage those who have previously applied to the JWO Grant to apply again. We look forward to receiving a wide diversity of research applications for the seventh edition of the JWO Research Grant. We are confident that the winning contributions will continue to not only enhance how we better manage our natural environment but also ensure the continued advancement of impactful science on our continent. We strongly believe this grant enables early career scientists to pursue their work and propose new and innovative solutions that help develop Africa in a sustainable way," he said.

This research not only sheds light on pressing environmental issues but also actively contributes African perspectives to international discussions on sustainability.

Last year's award winner, climate change biologist Dr. Shannon Conradie, is improving our understanding of thermal niches in predicting wildlife species' thermal vulnerabilities in the face of various global change scenarios across Africa's terrestrial and freshwater systems. Her project proposal for the JWO Research Grant, titled "Linking Physics and Biology to Inform Wildlife Conservation under Global Change", adopts an interdisciplinary approach to address these pressing challenges. By integrating data on physiology and behaviour into mechanistic models, Conradie is

uncovering how environmental changes impact species distribution, survival, and breeding outcomes.

Conradie’s research leverages cutting-edge technology, including remote sensing, thermal drones, and biophysical modelling, to assess species’ responses to global change on large spatial scales.

The winner in 2023, bryologist Dr Lovanomenjanahary Marline from Madagascar, used her grant to explore how bryophytes and lichen can be used in monitoring critical environmental and human health risks such as biodiversity loss, climate change, and air pollution. With the support of the JWO Grant, Dr Marline collaborated with researchers and students from across Africa to further her research.

The positive influence of the JWO Research Grant has been far-reaching since its inception.

The inaugural award went to Dr Hayley Clements for her project: "Quantifying the Biodiversity Planetary Boundary for Africa".

Dr. Bernard Coetzee, Dr Gideon Idowu and Dr. Elizabeth le Roux were honoured as recipients of the JWO Research Grant in 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively.

Dr Le Roux's research focused on aligning ecological processes with local livelihoods amidst the growing isolation of African protected areas.

Dr Idowu, from Nigeria, highlighted the importance of studying chemical pollutants and microplastics in Africa's freshwater systems. His innovative study extended beyond the well-explored ocean context, examining the short-and long-term effects on human health.

Dr Coetzee's research aimed to understand the impact of artificial light consumption on Africa and its potential role in spreading vector-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, the Zika virus, and malaria.

The JWO Grant has evolved into a significant source of support for researchers and individuals committed to fostering a better, more economically and environmentally sustainable Africa. This programme not only drives positive change but also empowers early-career scientists to address the pressing climate crises of our time.

JWO is calling upon early-career African scientists to apply and put forward their ground-breaking research for a chance to make a lasting impact.

Grant Eligibility

1. The lead applicant should be an early-career African scientist with strong links to a credible African institution and proposing to conduct research on the continent.

2. The 2025 JWO Research Grant encourages transdisciplinary research applications that demonstrate a strong link to biodiversity and conservation.

3. The applicant must hold a degree (PhD) and should have no more than seven years of work and/or research experience post-degree (excluding career breaks, including family-related breaks).

4. The institution must have a proven ability to manage funding and subscribe to good financial grant practices.

5. The institutional affiliation may be academic, research, government, NGO, or for-profit organisation.

Grant Award

The 2025 JWO Grant of $150,000 (USD) will be awarded to one successful applicant. The grant will support a research programme of up to three years. There will be an annual call for new applications (previously funded research will not be eligible), and the grant recipient will be announced at the Oppenheimer Research Conference on the 16th of October 2025.

To apply for the grant, please follow this link - https://jworesearchgrant.org/

Applications are open from the 24th of March, 2025 to the 2nd of May 2025.

About Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation

The Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation team continue to build a first-class research entity which partners with national and international researchers to conduct cutting-edge research focused on the natural sciences ensuring practical and impactful outcomes. They are committed to further developing, expanding, and promoting the growth of sustainable conservation programs and networks throughout the African continent.

For media inquiries, please contact:

Yves Vanderhaeghen: yves@jivemedia.co.za

Or

Mihlali Doko: mimi@jivemedia.co.za