2010 Whitley Awards

Leadership in Conservation
“The Whitley Fund for Nature is a truly unique organisation. It doesn’t put its own people on the ground but seeks out local leaders who are already succeeding, backing solutions long before larger NGOs have begun to respond. It puts its money where it really counts, where every penny counts.”

Sir David Attenborough, Trustee.
**Welcome to the 17th Annual Whitley Awards** for International Nature Conservation. With each passing year, the breadth of WFN’s impact grows as we again connect with a new generation of conservationists from around the world. In 1994, our founding year, we recognised just a single winner, awarding £15,000. This year, we have 8 finalists working in 5 continents and tonight will award conservation funding of £270,000. In the 16 years in between, WFN has awarded more than £6 million in funding to support more than 100 conservation leaders in 55 countries.

Such expansion has necessitated that WFN also grow as an organisation. In this past year, we have moved out of the old shed and into new, fully equipped offices, and have brought in a new member of staff to enable us to help manage our ever growing network of winners.

Whitley Award winners are all trailblazers, and WFN is driven and inspired by them to continue to show leadership in the conservation sector through focused, effective grant giving.

The winners who join our growing network tonight are already leaders in their fields, their expertise recognised locally and respected regionally. With our help and through the recognition that comes with winning a Whitley Award, we hope that their influence will now extend internationally. This year we have finalists from Uruguay, Russia, Papua New Guinea, Argentina, Uganda, Cameroon, and two from Colombia. They are effective because they understand local culture, they know what needs to be done, and with leadership they know how to get it done. Together, their work covers a wide range of issues and, although their backgrounds differ, they are all united by their determination to make a difference to the wildlife, habitats and local communities who share the same space and resources.

Tonight, each Whitley Award winner will receive £30,000 of funding to support their project work over the coming year. Additionally, the most outstanding will receive the Whitley Gold Award and a second year of funding, totalling £60,000.

This year of growth has also seen WFN refocus and enhance the provision of Continuation Funding to previous winners of the Whitley Award whose outstanding work merits ongoing support. Winning a Whitley Award is never a one-off event. We stay in constant contact with our winners, helping them where we can to boost the impact, reach and influence of their work. In the last 4 years we have given more than £1.5 million to further the work of 27 Whitley Award winners in 20 countries. As another year passes, these figures will continue to grow.

Please join us in welcoming the Whitley Award Winners for 2010.

Edward Whitley
Chair, Whitley Fund for Nature
Dear Friends,

Thank you all for your kind donations, particularly in the run up to this Awards Ceremony. Every contribution matters and is pooled together to help us reach our annual target of a Whitley Award donated by the Friends of WFN and, if we continue to receive donations following the Ceremony, a Continuation Funding Award as well!

Since the last Ceremony, a new Friends committee has been formed and has been helping greatly in galvanising our fundraising efforts. I do hope the new Friends booklet which you received with your invitation has shown how effective the work of WFN is and why all donations count.

We are hugely indebted to all our donors, including the many people who elect to remain anonymous. On behalf of all the winners and the WFN team, thank you for your support.

Catherine Faulks
Chair of the Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature
Major Sponsors and Whitley Award Donors

Donations in excess of £30,000

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A special thank you to
Large Blue who edited the films you will see tonight at a charity rate using only footage shot by the winners themselves and their partners.
Dr. Alison Cook who very kindly donated her time to coach the Whitley Award winners in speaking tonight.
Gianni Alen-Buckley for donating her wonderful west eleven cocktails this evening.
Judging Process
We use our growing network of previous winners to reach out and find some of the world’s most effective grassroots conservationists. We receive 80–100 applications a year, which pass through four stages of assessment. At every stage we rely on the valuable input of our application screeners and Judging Panel, who offer their expertise voluntarily.

End October ’09  Deadline for applications
November ’09  Stage 1 Eligibility screen ends
January ’10  Stage 2 Scoring stage ends
March ’10  Stage 3 Judging Panel meeting to decide finalists
10th May ’10  Stage 4 Finalist interviews

The standard of conservation work taking place around the world is always inspiring. Congratulations to all the finalists who all deserve to be here and have already achieved so much.

Whitley Award Judging Panel
Dr. Ros Aveling
Deputy Chief Executive, Fauna and Flora International
Erika Cuellar
Whitley Award Winner 2007
Dr. Glyn Davies
Director of Programmes, WWF-UK
Georgina Domberger
Director, WFN
Catherine Faulks
Trustee, WFN
Francis Sullivan
Deputy Head of Group Sustainable Development, HSBC
Edward Whitley
Chair of Trustees and Founder, WFN

Application Screeners
Georgina Domberger
Director, WFN
John Laing
Vice Patron, WFN
Dr. Charudutt Mishra
Whitley Award Winner 2005
Dr. Mark Wright
Conservation Science Advisor, WWF-UK
Angela Maldonado (Associate Award Winner 2008) is Project Director of Fundacion Entropika, an NGO working for the long-term conservation of the Colombian Amazon through community led education and research.

The Colombia-Peru-Brazil tri-border area is one of the most culturally diverse areas in Amazonia and makes up part of the largest continuous tropical forest on Earth. However, illegal trade in wildlife and timber occurs here on an alarming scale, posing a real threat to biodiversity and impacting the communities who rely on the forests to survive.

Night monkeys are Amazonia’s only nocturnal primates. Traditionally captured and eaten by local communities, these monkeys are also sold to the pet trade. Today, however, the majority of those captured are illegally traded to Colombian laboratories for biomedical research. As well as decimating wild night monkey populations, the trade occurs across borders and provides significant income to only a small number of people. During 2007-2008, some 4,000 night monkeys were traded, generating a value of over US$100,000. However, indigenous collectors receive less than 10% of these revenues and the new trade demands also disrupt traditional resource use in a way that is drastically affecting people’s livelihoods.

Working in the region since 1998, Angela has already successfully engaged indigenous communities in Colombia to significantly reduce the hunting of other primate species. She is now seeking to adapt her previous success to target the drivers of the illegal trade in night monkeys.

Recognising that progress can only be achieved if stakeholders receive a benefit from conservation, Angela is working alongside local collectors to identify alternative, sustainable activities to substitute income from wildlife trade.

Combining science with traditional ecological knowledge, monitoring methods already implemented by indigenous Colombian communities are now being transferred to neighbouring Peruvian communities where primate extraction is most intensive.

“Currently, we have the only data available about the night monkey populations in the tri-border area. Local traders and collectors from four Peruvian indigenous communities have been doing census field work with the Entropika team since 2009. As a result, now they have decided to stop the capture of night monkeys.”

Angela’s project is single handedly raising awareness of the need to reinforce international wildlife trade regulations in Colombia, using these charismatic monkeys as a flagship species for wider habitat conservation. Simultaneously her team is empowering local communities to protect their natural resources, and their traditional way of life.
Dr. Diego Amorocho (Associate Award Winner 2008) is Founder and Director of the Centro De Investigacion Para El Manejo Ambiental Y El Desarrollo (CIMAD), an NGO established in 2003 to protect endangered sea turtles and their habitats through community education, training, and livelihood development. With over 20 years’ experience, Diego is one of South America’s leading turtle researchers and a true conservation pioneer.

Thousands of turtles are killed in Colombian waters each year, caught incidentally on hooks or in nets, or as a traditional source of protein. Under these pressures, green, olive ridley, hawksbill and leatherback turtle numbers are declining rapidly; coupled with the destruction of beach nesting sites, sea turtles are facing extinction.

CIMAD’s approach to marine conservation puts people’s needs at the heart of all activities. Diego explains: “Local people are heavily reliant on fishing to support their families... I realised that if you want to protect turtles for the future, you have to work with people.”

Diego’s team is successfully changing local attitudes and raising awareness of the importance of conservation, whilst teaching artisanal fisherman ways to reduce turtle by catch. The introduction of turtle-friendly fishing practices, including special hooks and devices to help free trapped turtles, allow fishermen to catch more of what they’re really aiming for: “Local people acknowledged the benefits of conservation when they noticed that changing fishing gear is not only saving turtles but also increasing the size and value of target fish.”

CIMAD also teaches ‘turtle first aid,’ enabling fishers to treat and release caught turtles, rather than killing them for their meat and shells or to recover valuable hooks. Turtles needing specialist care are taken by fishermen to CIMAD’s Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Centre, which also offers community education, from basic literacy to mentoring the next generation of conservation scientists. Turtles released from the Centre are satellite tagged, the data analysed and learning publicised internationally; local schoolchildren enthused by learning about the turtles on their doorstep now follow the migration online.

Generating new local businesses is also important. In an initiative led by fishermen’s wives, plastic litter cleared from beaches is being turned into hand-woven bags and hats for sale, preserving turtle nesting sites and boosting incomes.

Now Diego is working towards the implementation of a Pacific regional action plan to secure a long-term future for turtles, coupled with an ambitious socio-economic program designed to offset the cost to fishermen of releasing turtles.
Jimmy Muheebwa is Project Manager of Nature Uganda’s Crane and Wetland Conservation Project. Receiving over 60 inches of rain per year, the wetlands of Southern Uganda form part of the catchment of Lake Victoria and are an important ecosystem for both biodiversity and the communities who surround them.

In recent decades as human population has risen, the wetlands have become degraded and fragmented, with large areas drained and converted for agriculture and livestock production. Wildlife has declined, and worst affected has been the Grey Crowned Crane – The National Bird of Uganda. Loss of breeding grounds and food sources have seen populations decline by 80% over the past 30 years. Forced to raid crops for food, birds have been persecuted and trapped for illegal trade, further contributing to their decline.

Over the last eight years, Jimmy has led conservation efforts for the species. Using cranes as a flagship, his work has had a tremendous impact on both wildlife and the communities who depend on the wetland’s natural resources.

Recognising that community participation is essential to conservation success, Jimmy works with local people to raise awareness of the free services wetlands provide. The project helps local people develop alternative livelihood practices that reduce the pressure on wetlands whilst empowering them to improve their lives. People are moving their farming activities out of the wetlands and are benefitting from increased income through more sustainable practices such as rearing chickens or goats.

With the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, home to Uganda’s only population of mountain gorillas, bordering wetland areas, Jimmy is now seeking to develop the possibility of eco-tourism ventures, a potentially significant source of income to the region’s impoverished communities.

Local people are also taking active part in the monitoring of crane populations. Farmers are participating in “Adopt-a-crane” programs, enhancing hands-on approaches to wetland conservation and fostering a sense of responsibility. To date, 37 crane breeding pairs have been identified by community members whose farms cranes breed on.

A draft Wetland Action Plan is ready for implementation and areas of degraded wetland are being restored. Together with the project’s other activities, the future is looking brighter for cranes, wetlands and the wider ecosystem. Jimmy explains “Wetland related services previously lost through human impact are increasingly being restored. These include more and cleaner water, more thatch, mulch, tying and fuel materials and more biodiversity.”
Louis Nkembi is Founder of the Environmental and Rural Development Foundation (ERuDeF), a Cameroonian NGO established in 1999 to protect the globally important rainforests of the Lebialem Highlands and other montane ecosystems. With mountainous terrain, the area is a challenge to access and has high levels of endemic bird and plant species. It is also a vital area for the cross-river gorilla, the most critically endangered of all African primates – just 300 remain in the wild.

Human pressure on the highlands is a growing threat. “The renewed growth in urban-rural migration and of population in rural areas is causing an increasing rate of conversion of forest to farmland”, warns Louis. As a result, habitat fragmentation and poaching are increasing.

Trained in Agronomy and Forestry, and with an MSc in Resource Economics, Louis’ efforts in S.W.Cameroon have already led to the rediscovery of two internationally threatened birds, the Bannerman’s Turaco and Banded Wattle-eye in 2003. His team completed the first ever birds checklist for Lebialem Highlands in 2005, whilst the discovery of a new gorilla population in 2004 led to ERuDEF’s inclusion in the Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of the Cross River Gorilla and Chimpanzees.

Louis’ proactive approach to halting the causes of habitat loss combines science, education and community involvement, backed by marketing cooperatives. Lack of understanding of forestry and wildlife legislation amongst local communities is being addressed via an Education Resource Centre to help build knowledge and raise interest in conservation. Through these approaches, Louis is helping to build the capacity of local communities whilst securing habitat for the continued survival of the region’s unique biodiversity.
Mathew Akon  
Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinean, Mathew Akon is Senior Project Officer of the Tenkile Conservation Alliance (TCA), an NGO established in 2001 dedicated to the conservation of the remote Torricelli Mountain Range, a 250,000 ha area rich in wildlife.

Many species here occur nowhere else on Earth. One such species is the Tenkile, or Scott’s tree kangaroo, the TCA’s namesake and a critically endangered marsupial first described in 1989.

Recognised as the most threatened of all tree kangaroo species, the tenkile’s range is today restricted to only 150km² of rainforest. Like many marsupials, tenkiles are slow breeding. Growing human population has led to significant increases in the hunting of wild species for food and tenkile have declined dramatically over the past 30 years as a result. Their decline also compromises the wellbeing of local communities who traditionally depend on wildlife for protein, with low levels of nutrition now common.

Mathew was born in the Torricelli Mountains and witnessed first hand the decline in the region’s fauna. In 1999 he led a group of stakeholders from 13 villages from across the region to stop the hunting of tenkile.

“Before the establishment of this program, our grand parents, parents and even my family killed tenkile for meat. But since the signing of the moratorium, tenkile numbers have increased”.

Successful research teams have been established with 18 villages since 2003, with more than 100 people employed each year through TCA’s Tenkile Distance Sampling research. Now the goal is to establish a 96,000 ha protected Conservation Area at the core of the Torricelli range. Mathew and TCA are working directly with the region’s 39 villages to inspire support for the project, using tenkiles and another critically endangered tree kangaroo species, the weimang, as flagship species. Training will then enable the communities to effectively manage the Conservation Area themselves.

TCA, the only NGO in the region, are leading community projects to improve livelihoods and build capacity. The result is some 10,000 people committed to the conservation effort, who have helped complete maps of their land, and identified sites important for food, for wildlife and their cultural beliefs.

“In the beginning, 65% of people were supportive, but now the project results – capacity building, employment opportunities, community development, as well as substitute protein farming – have proven to be positive. This has stimulated the stakeholders who are now 100% behind this program”.

The Tree Kangaroo as a flagship for the legislated conservation of the Torricelli Mountain Range.
Argentine marine biologist Dr. Pablo Borboroglu is President and Founder of the Global Penguin Society (GPS), the world’s first global coalition for the protection of penguins.

The fragile conservation status of most penguin populations mirrors the wider condition of the world’s oceans. At sea, a host of threats including oil pollution, fisheries mismanagement, and climate change all affect penguins. On land, nesting penguins face irresponsible tourism, coastal development, and introduced predators.

Today, 60% of the world’s 18 penguin species are listed as vulnerable or endangered by the IUCN.

However, penguins are uniquely placed to foster public and political support. The aim is clear to Pablo: “People love penguins but they do not know about their fragile conservation status … Increasing awareness internationally is crucial to help not only penguins but also the oceans on which we, and they, rely”.

Pablo has more than 20 years experience in marine conservation and, from 2003 to 2005, led the first management plan for Punta Tombo in Argentina, the world’s largest Magellanic Penguin colony. Pablo coordinated 130 stakeholders in the design and legislation of a 90,000 ha Marine Protected Area – an exceptional democratic event in a country of past dictatorial governments. Pablo has repeated the process at many other sensitive areas along the coast of Patagonia.

Now Pablo is taking his mission global. GPS is promoting the protection of penguin colonies, and creating an alliance-building force with representatives from 16 countries, based on science, management, and education. As well as a global update of penguin status, one of the main outputs will be the design of a global penguin conservation strategy that will be used to inform governments and ensure any conservation interventions are effectively targeted.

Success rests on understanding that penguin conservation begins at the local level. In many countries where penguins occur, a large percentage of the population is impoverished and environmental issues are not considered a priority.

Penguins are one of the main highlights of tourism in Argentina, and thousands of families depend on them. Pablo is now empowering local communities, imparting the skills they need to benefit from penguins without disturbance.

Using the media, Pablo aims to engage larger audiences to catalyze action. “Through penguins we can make a long lasting contribution to the ocean, changing people’s attitude and perception toward the sea”.

The Global Penguin Society: penguin advocacy for the Southern Oceans

Pablo Borboroglu
Argentina

2010 Whitley Awards
Dr. Susana Gonzalez is Director of the Uruguayan NGO, Instituto de Conservacion Neotropical, and Chair of the IUCN Deer Specialist group. A global champion for deer conservation, she has led efforts to conserve the Uruguayan pampas deer and its habitat for over 20 years.

As noted by Darwin, millions of pampas deer once ranged throughout the vast neotropical grasslands of South America. However, following the introduction of agriculture and urbanization, habitat loss has reduced the deer’s range to less than 1% of that found in 1900. Pampas grasslands now represent one of the most critically endangered ecosystems in Latin America, but receive little conservation attention.

In Uruguay, fewer than 1,500 pampas deer still remain, split into two isolated populations of different sub-species. Susana and her team are working to establish a network of reserves that protect the remaining grasslands, utilising the pampas deer as an umbrella species. With a tiny fraction of Uruguay covered by protected areas, it is critical that management strategies integrate privately owned land into the conservation system.

Often dismissed as a nuisance by ranchers, deer play a vital role in the healthy functioning of grassland. Currently, ranchers who share their land with the deer see no benefit. Susana’s project is encouraging sustainable management by helping ranchers willing to accommodate pampas deer herds on their land. Landowners who implement good livestock practices and restore agro-ecosystems are rewarded with assistance in seeking special certification of their products and improved market opportunities. Susana’s research is also providing evidence that the deer play a vital role in seed dispersal – good for the grassland and therefore the cattle.

With Uruguay’s pampas grasslands also being home to charismatic species such as the ostrich-like rhea, Susana is also promoting training in ecotourism which has potential for long-term livelihood benefit for local people.

Susana recognises that engaging local people and stimulating them to take an active role in conservation is vital, especially in regards to children – the future of the pampas deer and their grassland habitat being very much in their hands. “When I began environmental education in this rural school there were only 5 children and none had ever seen a pampas deer. Twenty years later there are 15 students who all regularly see the deer and are deeply involved with their role as “guardians”, taking part as active protagonists”.

The Pampas Deer and Grassland Conservation Management project
Gazelle populations are being monitored and their migration in Russia and East Mongolia tracked. The impact of climatic changes and human activity on the steppe are also being investigated. As a result of Vadim’s efforts, gazelles in Russia have increased forty fold in less than 10 years. Today, over 3,000 individuals occur in the Daursky reserve.

Vadim now aims to enlarge the reserve and establish a 213,000 ha protected area to the east. Beyond Russia, he seeks the trans-boundary conservation of gazelle as they migrate across borders. Daursky makes up the Russian section of the trilateral Dauria International Protected Area, an expanse of connected wetland and steppe habitat crucial to the conservation of the region’s migrant species as well as other mammals such as the Pallas cat. Cooperating with conservationists in China and Mongolia, Vadim is enhancing collaboration and creating corridors in border fencing to ensure historically important migration routes are reopened.

Much as bison once migrated across the vast plains of North America, the Mongolian gazelle is the last mass migrating mammal of the Central Asian Steppe. Also like the bison, Mongolian gazelles have been subject to severe hunting pressure, with dramatic declines in both their numbers and range.

Vadim Kirilyuk, Deputy Director of the Daursky Biosphere Reserve, is combining his official role with leadership of a coalition of NGOs and community members to conserve the gazelle and the Daurian steppe ecoregion. When Vadim first visited the Daursky reserve as a student 20 years ago, not a single gazelle occurred in the whole of Russia. Since then, Vadim and his team have worked tirelessly to restore the species back to its former range.

After creation of the Daursky Reserve in 1987, gazelles slowly started returning to Russia. Then, in 2001, a mass migration event from Mongolia into Russia occurred. Sadly, many gazelles became caught on the barbed wire border fences separating the two countries. “More than a hundred thousand gazelle abandoned their breeding areas in Mongolia because of drought and competition with livestock. The large herds tried to move north. But it was not safe and they did not have free movement here. Many were doomed to death.”

Vadim’s work focuses on reducing the main threats to the gazelles – barbed wire, poaching and habitat degradation. His team are removing barb-wire fences that disrupt migration and trap animals. Local communities play an important role, forming networks of ‘public watchers’ collecting data on gazelle movements and reporting any poaching.

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