**Press release**

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**Conservation leader from Tanzania wins 2016 Whitley Award**

**Prize awarded for community conservation of coastal forests in the greater Selous Ecosystem**

**London, UK: 27 April 2016** – HRH The Princess Royal will today present a Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35,000 in project funding, to Makala Jasper at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, in honour of his work in Tanzania to empower communities to conserve coastal forests and their wildlife through the sustainable management and sale of the high value timber, African Blackwood (also known as mpingo).

As Director of the Mpingo Conservation Development Initiative, Makala has assisted 35 communities to protect over 3,000km2 of forest. The project is Africa’s only Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified programme for community-managed natural forests. Since the programme was established in 2006, prices per log have increased 100-fold providing vital income to people earning less than US$1 per day.

The project is situated between two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Selous Game Reserve, one of the largest protected areas in Africa, and Kilwa Kisiwani. By linking forest fragments, the project is enabling seasonal movements of large mammals such as elephants and lions. Through this initiative, Makala is giving communities an incentive to conserve this important habitat and the biodiversity within it. Makala’s Whitley Award will allow him to bring over 5,000km2 of coastal forest under community protection, benefitting 2,500 Tanzanians.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: “WFN focuses on conservation success stories and the progress that’s being made. The Awards Ceremony is about recognising and celebrating that – winning those small battles which cumulatively add up to significant change at the national level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning an Award, our winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they’re able to communicate what they’re doing to the public and to policy makers.”

Makala is one of seven individuals to have been awarded a share of prize money worth £245,000, winning the Whitley Award donated by WWF-UK. Other winners in the 2016 Whitley Awards are:

**Gilbert Baase Adum** – Ghana

Saving Ghana’s frogs: a giant leap forward for biodiversity conservation

*The Whitley Award donated by Sarah Chenevix-Trench*

**Farwiza Farhan** – Indonesia

Citizen lawsuits: defending local livelihoods and Sumatra’s iconic species in the Leuser Ecosystem

*The Whitley Award for Conservation in Ape Habitats donated by the Arcus Foundation*

**Karau Kuna** – Papa New Guinea

Tree kangaroos as a flagship to protect Papua New Guinea’s spectacular wildlife

*The Whitley Award donated by The William Brake Charitable Trust in memory of William Brake*

**Muhammad Ali Nawaz** – Pakistan

Snow leopard conservation: a landscape-level approach in the mountains of northern Pakistan

*The Whitley Award donated by The Shears Foundation in memory of Trevor Shears*

**Alexander Rukhaia** – Georgia

Magnificent migrants: safeguarding birds-of-prey negotiating the Batumi Flyway, Georgia

*The Whitley Award donated by the Garfield Weston Foundation*

**Juliette Velosoa** – Madagascar

Saving the Critically Endangered side-necked turtle and its freshwater habitat, Madagascar

*The Whitley Award donated by the Garden House School Parents’ Association*

Sir David Attenborough, a Trustee of the Whitley Fund for Nature, added: “Empowering local people, who understand what the problems are, and who have the local knowledge, determination and vested interest to find the solutions is the very best way to ensure long term protection for the natural world.”

HRH The Princess Royal will also present the **2016 Whitley Gold Award** - a prestigious profile and funding prize awarded to a previous Whitley Award winner in recognition of their outstanding contribution to conservation. The Whitley Gold Award is donated by The Friends and Scottish Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature and is worth £50,000.

This year’s recipient is 2011 Whitley Award winner, **Hotlin Ompusunggu** for her project – ‘Dentistry and reforestation: scaling up models to protect orangutans and improve health, Borneo’. Unusually for a conservationist, Hotlin is a dental surgeon. Her NGO, Alam Sehat Lestari (ASRI) is providing healthcare incentives for local people to reduce the need to exploit rainforest habitat in Indonesia.

Since Hotlin won a Whitley Award in 2011, the project has seen a significant decrease in illegal logging whilst improving the health of 24,000 people living around Gunung Palung National Park - home to 10% of the world’s orangutans. Hotlin’s Gold Award will enable her to work with Park authorities to manage this important habitat, as well as establish Indonesia’s first ‘conservation hospital’ and explore expansion of the model to other potential sites across the country. Joining the Judging Panel to assist in winner selection, the Gold Award winner also acts as mentor to the new Whitley Award winners.

Visit [www.whitleyaward.org](http://www.whitleyaward.org) to find out more.

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**Press materials available:**

• Copyright-cleared photographs and video of the award winners, their projects and the awards ceremony will be available to download online via Picasa from 10.00 am on Thursday 28 April: <https://picasaweb.google.com/105548002819098368093>

• Video footage of the awards ceremony and individual films featuring the award winners will be available upon arrangement with Firebird PR: contact Jane Bevan or Susannah Penn at Firebird PR on +00 44 01235 835297 / +00 44 07977 459547 or via email to sp@firebirdpr.co.uk

**Notes to Editors:**

• Contact Firebird PR for further information: Jane Bevan or Susannah Penn at Firebird PR on +00 44 01235 835297 / +00 44 07977 459547 or via email to sp@firebirdpr.co.uk

• The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) is a UK registered charity that champions outstanding grassroots leaders in nature conservation across the developing world.

• The Whitley Awards are prestigious international prizes presented to individuals in recognition of their achievements in nature conservation. Each Award Winner receives a prize worth £35,000 in project funding over one year. The charity’s patron, HRH The Princess Royal, presents the Awards each year at a special ceremony in London.

• The Whitley Awards have been presented annually since 1994. Since then, the Whitley Fund for Nature has given nearly £12 million to conservation and recognised more than 170 conservation leaders in over 70 countries.

• WFN operates a rigorous application process involving expert panel representation from international NGOs including WWF-UK, Fauna and Flora International and the World Land Trust. This year, WFN received over 120 applications which passed through four stages of assessment, reviewed at every step by expert screeners and panellists who kindly offer their expertise voluntarily.

• The Whitley Awards are open to individuals working on wildlife conservation issues in developing countries. Further eligibility criteria are available from Firebird PR.

• During their trip to London to accept their award, winners have the opportunity to meet the judges, WFN trustees, including Sir David Attenborough and WFN’s patron HRH The Princess Royal. In addition they are able to network with the other finalists, attend receptions with leading conservation organisations and academics, meet Whitley Fund for Nature donors and participate in professional media and speech training. Meeting the media is also a significant event since publicity both in the UK and their home countries helps raise the profile of their work.

• Whitley Award winners join an international network of Whitley Award alumni eligible to apply for the Whitley-Segré Conservation Fund. These follow-on grants are awarded competitively to winners seeking to scale up their effective conservation results on the ground over 1-3 years.

• The Whitley Gold Award recognises an outstanding past recipient of a Whitley Award who has gone on to make a significant contribution to conservation. Joining the Judging Panel to assist in selection, the Gold winner also acts as mentor to Whitley Award winners receiving their Awards in the same year.

• WFN is generously supported by: Arcus Foundation; The William Brake Charitable Trust; The Byford Trust; Sarah Chenevix-Trench; The Constance Travis Charitable Trust; Garden House School Parents’ Association; Garfield Weston Foundation; The G D Charitable Trust; HSBC Holdings Plc; Icon Films; Interconnect IT; Lund Trust: a charitable fund of Peter Baldwin and Lisbet Rausing; Montesogno; The Rufford Foundation; The Schroder Foundation; Fondation Segré; The Shears Foundation; The Whitley Animal Protection Trust; WWF-UK; The Friends and Scottish Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature; and many individual and anonymous donors.