



**WHITLEY FUND FOR NATURE
PRESS COVERAGE DOSSIER
2017**

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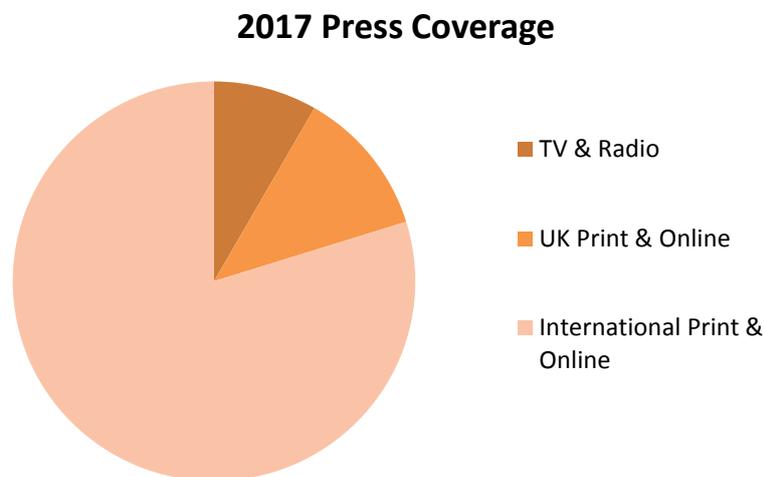
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Part 1: 2017 PR Impact

Press Coverage Summary*:

- 421 items in total
- 35 broadcast features, including TV and radio interviews
- 50 articles in UK print and online
- 336 items in international print and online



*These figures are based on UK and international coverage tracked by WFN and Firebird PR; without a formal media monitoring service in place they represent a conservative estimate. Not all coverage will be captured, especially internationally, and some audience reach figures are unavailable.

Coverage highlights in 2017 include:

- **The Guardian**
- **BBC (television, radio and online)**
 - BBC 2 Natural World *Hotel Armadillo*
 - BBC 2 *Turkey With Simon Reeve*
 - BBC Radio 4 *Costing The Earth*
 - BBC World Service *Outlook*
 - BBC News Website
- **Mongabay**
- **Geographical Magazine**
- **National Geographic**
- **Feature documentary, *A River Below***

As well as providing winners with significant financial support, WFN works to accelerate the career paths of Whitley Award recipients by helping them to raise their profile, expand their network and inspire others.

Through Boffin Media, we provide winners with professional training for radio, TV and print interviews; whilst also offering speech training with speech coach Caroline Black. This ensures winners can communicate the impact of their work and raise awareness of conservation issues at the local and national level. We also work with a specialist environmental PR agency, Firebird, to secure media coverage for winners both in the UK and in their home countries.



Part 2: 2017 Whitley Awards

Overview of Winners

WFN celebrates dynamic local conservation leaders working in biodiversity-rich, resource-poor countries through Whitley Awards of £35,000 in project funding over one year. The Awards are the result of a competitive process and are presented by our patron, HRH The Princess Royal, at an annual ceremony in London. Each year WFN also gives a previous winner the prestigious Whitley Gold Award, a funding and profile prize worth up to £50,000, in recognition of their outstanding contribution to conservation.



Zafer Kizilkaya – Turkey (Gold Award Winner 2017)

The Whitley Gold Award donated by The Friends and Scottish Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature

Guardians of the sea: securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline

www.akdenizkoruma.org.tr



Ximena Velez Liendo - Bolivia

The Whitley Award donated by the Savitri Waney Charitable Trust

An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains

www.prometa.org



Alexander Blanco - Venezuela

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

Nest protectors: conserving Venezuela's magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship

www.fundacionesfera.org



Ian Little – South Africa

The Whitley Award donated by the Garfield Weston Foundation

Custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity

www.ewt.org.za



Purnima Barman - India

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

Inspiring women to protect Assam's greater adjutant and its wetland habitat, India

www.aaranyak.org



Sanjay Gubbi - India

The Whitley Award donated by WWF-UK

Reducing deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors, India

www.ncf-india.org



Indira Lacerna Widmann - Philippines

The Whitley Award donated by Notting Hill Preparatory School

Partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo

www.philippinecockatoo.org



Coverage of the Awards week

BirdWatchingDaily – Online Magazine, UK
09 May 2017

<http://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/blog/2017/05/09/bird-conservation-projects-nominated-whitley-award/>

BirdWatching

www.BirdWatchingDaily.com

Bird conservation projects nominated for Whitley Award



Harpy Eagle in Panama. Photo by Haui Ared/Wikimedia Commons

Each year, the Whitley Fund for Nature, a U.K.-based charitable organization that supports the efforts of conservationists in the developing world, presents the Whitley Award — also referred to as the “Green Oscar” — to recognize individuals for

their outstanding conservation work with local communities in biodiversity-rich, resource-poor countries.

The award ceremony will take place in London on May 18. Six finalists, who were selected from 169 applicants, will each receive more than \$45,000 (£35,000). Three of the six are involved in bird conservation efforts. They are:

- Indira Lacerna-Widmann, head of the Katala Foundation in the Philippines, for her work partnering with prison inmates to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine Cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*).
- Dr. Purnima Barman, wildlife biologist at Aaranyak, a conservation-focused Indian NGO, for inspiring women to protect the Greater Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) and its wetland habitat in the Indian state of Assam.
- Dr. Alexander Pilar Blanco Marquez, a veterinarian in Venezuela, for his work with Programa de Conservación del Águila Harpía in conserving Harpy Eagles (*Harpia harpyja*).

Princess Anne, the daughter of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, will present the awards, as well as an additional honor, the Whitley Gold Award, to Zafer Kizilkaya, for his work on conserving coastlines and marine reserves in Turkey.

Rio Verde – Online Magazine, Venezuela
16 May 2017

<http://rioverde.com.ve/?l=articulo&id=163&categoria=destacado>



We are thrilled to announce the shortlist of six finalists for the Whitley Awards 2017. This prestigious international prize honours exceptional individuals working in grassroots nature conservation in the world's developing countries, and who often face humanitarian, environmental and political challenges in the projects they undertake. Selected from a field of 166 applicants from 66 countries, the six wildlife conservationists shortlisted for the chance to win an award and a share in funding worth are:

Alexander Blanco: Nest protectors: conserving Venezuela's magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship

Ximena Velez-Liendo: An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains

Ian Little: Custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity

Purnima Barman: Inspiring women to protect Assam's greater adjutant and its habitat, India

Sanjay Gubbi: Reducing deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors, India

Indira Lacerna-Widmann: Partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo

The charity's patron HRH The Princess Royal will announce the final results at a special evening ceremony hosted by BBC presenter Tom Heap on Thursday 18th May at the Royal Geographical Society in London. HRH The Princess Royal will also present an additional prize, the Whitley Gold Award, the winner of this will be announced on the night.

During their trip to London, the finalists will have the opportunity to meet WFN Patron, HRH The Princess Royal, network with the other finalists, attend receptions with leading conservation organisations and academics, meet Whitley Fund for Nature donors and participate in professional development training.

The Whitley Awards Ceremony takes place on Thursday May 18th at London's Royal Geographical Society. Please note that attendance at this event is by invitation only, please contact the WFN office for more information: info@whitleyaward.org

The Guardian – Print & Online Newspaper, UK
17 May 2017

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/gallery/2017/may/17/whitley-awards-for-nature-conservation-2017-in-pictures>



Conservation

Whitley Awards for nature conservation 2017 winners – in pictures

f t e ... 2,261

Finalists for his year's prestigious 'green Oscars' include a Turkish conservationist working with fisherman to create a marine reserve and a woman partnering with prisoners to protect the critically endangered Philippine cockatoo

Wednesday 17 May 2017 11.50 BST

Zafer Kizilkaya, Turkey, Gold award winner - securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline

Kizilkaya is founder and president of the Mediterranean Conservation Society, an NGO that aims to conserve Turkey's marine and coastal ecosystems by establishing the country's first community run no-take fishing zones in Gökova bay.

Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners

f t p

Mediterranean monk seal,
Gökova bay, Turkey

Kizilkaya leads a series of projects in the area working with local fishing communities, coastguards and government to promote ocean conservation and sustainable fishing practices that benefit wildlife such as the critically endangered Mediterranean monk seals, sand bar sharks and loggerhead turtles, and boost fishing income.

Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



Marine fishing in Gökova Bay,
Turkey

Early reports suggest fish are starting to return to the no-take zones. With his Whitley Gold award, Kizilkaya will consolidate his efforts in Gökova bay and scale up his successful approach in nearby Fethiye bay. His long-term vision is to replicate his work throughout the Mediterranean.

Photograph: Whitley Award 2017



Ximena Velez-Liendo, finalist, Bolivia - enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains

Velez-Liendo is the principal researcher at the NGO Prometa. With her Whitley award, she will generate the first population estimation for bears in Bolivia, using camera traps, and will quantify human-bear conflict.

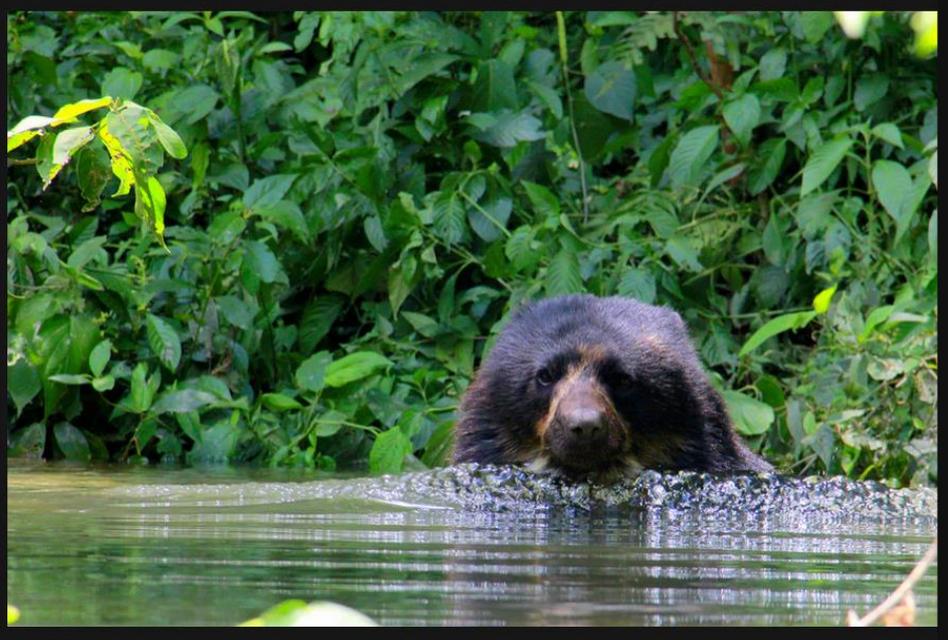
Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



An Andean bear, Bolivia

The inter-Andean dry forests are an important stronghold for South America's only bear species. Due to intensive human activity dating back to Inca times, this mountainous ecosystem is highly fragmented and is considered one of the most endangered tropical forests on Earth. In Tarija, Bolivia, up to 90% of people live in poverty, and predation of precious livestock by Andean bears can sometimes lead to bears being killed in retaliation.

Photograph: Picasa/2017 Whitley award winners



Ximena Velez-Liendo at work
in Bolivia

The results of the project will be used to support a national plan for the Andean bear's recovery and to develop strategies to enable coexistence with farmers.

Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



Alexander Blanco, finalist,
Venezuela - conserving
magnificent harpy eagles as a
rainforest flagship

Wildlife scientist and vet Alexander Blanco prepares to trap a recently fledged seven-month-old wild harpy eagle. He has been working with harpy eagles since 1996, helping to conserve these iconic birds in Brazil and Ecuador as well as in his native Venezuela, where he is president of the Esfera Foundation and leads a national programme to protect the species.

Photograph: Pete Oxford/ Minden Pictures/Alamy



A harpy eagle chick in a kapok tree

Harpy eagles have become rare in many parts of their range because poverty, hunting, political instability and a lack of law enforcement have led to a sharp increase in illegal deforestation. In Venezuela, an area of forest bigger than central London is lost every week.

Photograph: Pete Oxford/ Minden Pictures/Alamy



A seven-month-old fledgling harpy eagle has a GPS attached in Cuyabeno, Ecuador

Alexander wants to work with local people to develop ways to protect the eagle so that conservation is more resilient to economic and political turbulence. With his Whitley award he hopes to protect a greater number of nesting sites by recruiting local people as nest guardians and limiting deforestation by supporting livelihoods in shade-grown coffee and through forest restoration.

Photograph: Pete Oxford/ Minden Pictures/Alamy Stock Photo



Ian Little, finalist, South Africa – custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity

Ian Little of the Endangered Wildlife Trust works with farmers and tribal leaders to champion conservation of grassland habitat. He is building capacity for sustainable farming and introducing improved management practices, such as less intensive grazing and burning regimes to decrease pressure on grasslands and boost productivity.

Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



Demand for fresh water is expected to outstrip supply in South Africa by 2025. The Eastern Great Escarpment provides catchment services for three of the country's largest rivers, making it a vital source of water for cities in one of the world's most arid nations. These grasslands support a plethora of plants and animals found nowhere else. Despite their importance, less than 3% of grasslands in South Africa are protected.

Photograph: Whitley award 2017



Oribi, grassland, South Africa

Little has already secured 60,000 hectares of grassland for conservation purposes, a figure he plans to increase with his Whitley award by creating a corridor of legally protected areas linking with others along the escarpment. In doing so he will safeguard these grasslands and the important source of freshwater they provide.

Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



Purnima Barman, finalist.
India - inspiring women to
protect Assam's greater
adjutant stork and its habitat

India's greater adjutant storks - or hargila in the local language - have long been despised and seen as dirty pests. But these once common birds are endangered by habitat loss, due to landowners felling nesting trees to remove the storks, and wetland destruction. Purnima Barman, of NGO Aarmyak has launched a project to teach villagers to appreciate the birds and provide them with alternative livelihoods.

Photograph: Anupam Nath/AP



Greater adjutants in Dadara village, west of Gauhati

Barman has mobilised an all-female team of conservationists, known as the 'Hargilla Army', dedicated to protecting the greater adjutant, at the same time providing a sustainable livelihood, training and education opportunities for the women. The women pray, sing hymns, weave scarves and other items with the motifs of the bird, to create awareness about the need to protect the species, only 1,200 of which survive in the world.

Photograph: Alamy



A group of women from the 'hargila army' walk to attend an awareness meeting on protecting the greater adjutant in Dadara village

With about 800 birds, Assam has the largest number of greater adjutants, concentrated largely in three villages just northwest of state capital Gauhati. Barman's work has helped to change local perceptions and numbers of stork nests have risen from 30 seven years ago to over 170 today. With her Whitley Award, Purnima will scale up this work, encouraging householders to take pride in the species and protect the birds and their nesting trees.

Photograph: Anupam Nath/AP/2017 Whitley award winners



**Sanjay Gubbi, finalist, India -
reducing deforestation in
Karnataka's tiger corridors**

Nearly two decades ago, Sanjay Gubbi quit his job as an electrical engineer to follow his passion for working with wildlife. Today, he is leading conservation efforts in Karnataka, southern India, home to the highest number of Bengal tigers in the country. He has secured the largest expansion of protected areas in India since 1970 - protected areas in Karnataka have increased by 37% also enhancing connectivity across 23 sites.

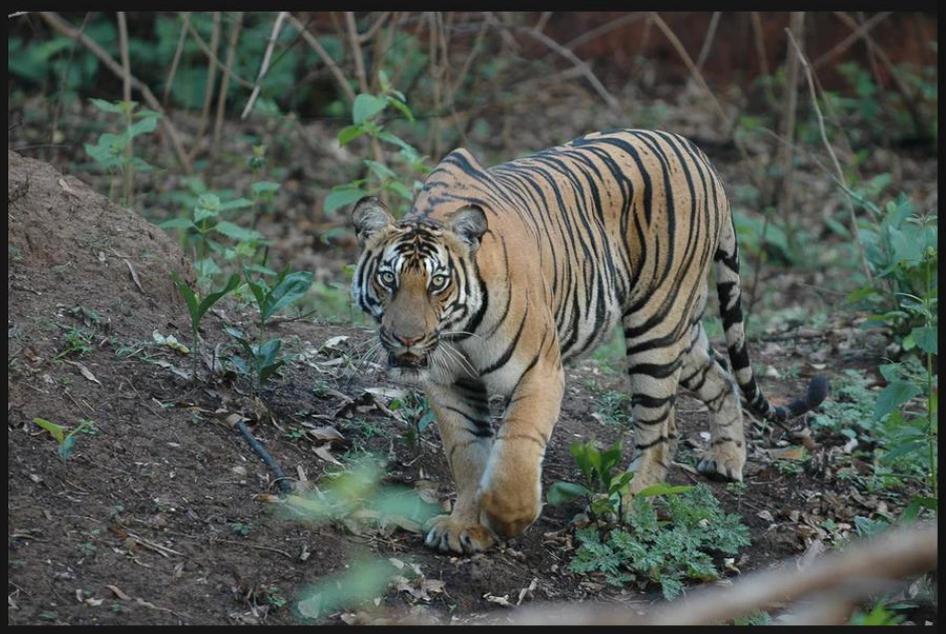
Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



**Begal tiger in Karnataka,
southern India**

With his Whitley Award, Gubbi will be working to reduce deforestation in two important wildlife sanctuaries to create corridors for tigers to move between territories. He will also work with over 1,000 families to provide fuel efficient stoves, reducing the need for firewood collection - protecting them from respiratory diseases caused by smoke inhalation as well as the habitat of the tigers.

Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



Cauvery River, southern India

Gubbi will also speed up compensation payments to farmers whose livestock has been blighted by tiger attacks, boosting support of conservation from those living alongside wildlife.

Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



Indira Lacerna-Widmann, finalist, the Philippines - partnering with prisoners to safeguard the critically endangered Philippine cockatoo

The Philippine cockatoo has declined by 80% over the last 40 years. Decimated by the cage bird trade and habitat loss, it is now extinct in much of its range. In the Filipino city of Puerto Princesa, cockatoos nest in the forested grounds of Iwahig prison - a huge open air penal farm - and forage over military and private land.

Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



A Philippines cockatoo

Indira will use her Whitley Award to work with these novel partners to secure the future of this urban population of cockatoos; training prisoners and the army as wildlife wardens to address poaching in breeding sites and working with landowners to secure feeding corridors under threat from development.

Photograph: Peter Widmann/2017 Whitley award winners



Indira Lacerna Widmann poses with children and a mascot in Iwahig prison, Puerto Princesa

Through her work Lacerna Widmann is building a brighter future for both people and the parrots.

Photograph: 2017 Whitley award winners



Discover Wildlife – BBC Online Magazine, UK
18 May 2017

<http://www.discoverwildlife.com/news/meet-year%E2%80%99s-great-conservation-champions>

DISCOVER Wildlife

Wildlife and photography at its best from BBC Wildlife Magazine

Meet this year's great conservation champions

The 'Green Oscars' celebrate the vital work of six conservationists.

Calum Hill



Ximena Velez-Liendo from Bolivia undertaking fieldwork

The winners of the Whitley Awards have been announced in London.

From 166 applicants, six people have been selected for their outstanding efforts to protect the natural world.



Indira Lacerna-Widmann from the Philippines examining a Philippine Cockatoo hatchling © Whitley Fund for Nature

Their work includes enabling the coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains, reducing deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors and partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo.

They have all been chosen for strong science, community engagement, and the skills and tenacity to highlight and combat challenges such as the exploitation of natural resources and human-wildlife conflict.



Alexander Blanco from Venezuela undertaking fieldwork © Whitley Fund for Nature

Each champion will receive £35,000 in funding to continue their efforts in protecting some of the world's most precious species and habitats.

Each year a previous Whitley Award winner is selected to receive the Whitley Gold Award in recognition of their outstanding contribution to conservation. The award is worth up to £50,000 in project funding over one year.

The winners of the Whitley Awards 2017:

Purnima Barman (India) - Inspiring women to protect Assam's greater adjutant and its habitat



Purnima Barman speaking to local women © Whitley Fund for Nature

Alexander Blanco (Venezuela) - Conserving Venezuela's magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship (*pictured above*)

Sanjay Gubbi (India) - Reducing deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors



Sanjay Gubbi undertaking fieldwork © Whitley Fund for Nature

Indira Lacerna-Widmann (Philippines) - Partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo (*pictured above*)

Ian Little (South Africa) - Custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity



Ian Little undertaking fieldwork © Whitley Fund for Nature

Ximena Velez-Liendo (Bolivia) – Enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains (*pictured above*)

2017 Whitley Gold Award

Zafer Kizilkaya (Turkey) – Securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline



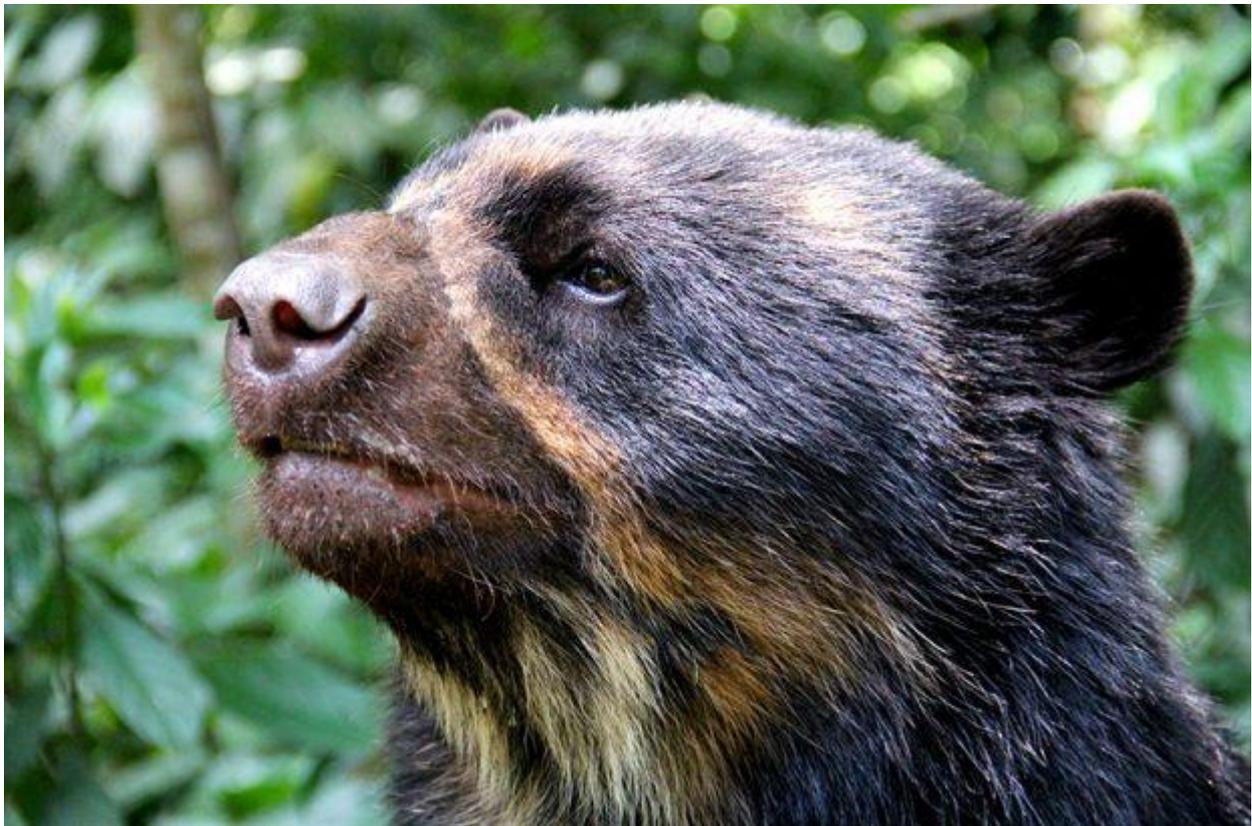
Zafer Kizilkaya with a work team © Whitley Fund for Nature

Wild Planet – Online Photographic Magazine, UK
18 May 2017
(Over 256,000 unique visitors in more than 190 countries)

<http://wildplanetphotomagazine.com/2017/whitley-awards-2017-winners/>



In Pictures: Whitley Awards for Nature Conservation 2017 Winners



Today the Whitley Awards will recognise six inspiring conservation champions who are striving to protect the natural world. HRH The Princess Royal will present these prestigious international awards at a special ceremony held at the Royal Geographic Society in London.

Often referred to as the ‘Green Oscars’, the Whitley Awards have been supported by the Whitley Fund for Nature’s loyal donors for 24 years, leveraging over £13.5 million to fund innovative conservation leaders and their projects to protect endangered wildlife in developing countries.

Strong science and community engagement are the hallmarks of the winning projects. Along with this, each winner needs the skill and tenacity to highlight and combat challenges such as exploitation of natural resources, bureaucratic inertia, human-wildlife conflict and habitat destruction.

As Sir David Attenborough, a Trustee of the Whitley Fund for Nature explains: “Whitley Award winners are simply exceptional people - passionate individuals who are committed to achieving positive environmental impact and long-term conservation and community benefits.”

This year’s winners of the Whitley Awards have been selected from amongst 166 applications from all over the world. They lead varied projects, including working with prisoners to conserve the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo, promoting the coexistence of Spectacled bears and people in Bolivia, reducing deforestation in India’s Bengal tiger corridors and working with farmers to conserve grasslands threatened by fracking in South Africa.

The winners will each receive £35,000 in project funding to scale up their work to conserve some of the planet’s most endangered species and spectacular places. The 2017 Whitley Award winners are:

Purnima Barman - India

Inspiring women to protect Assam’s greater adjutant and its habitat, India



Greater adjutant storks - or Hargila in the local language - have an image problem as these giant scavenger birds have a reputation as unwelcome neighbours with their noisy, messy and smelly nesting habits. With a global population of less than 1,200, 75% of which are found in Assam in North East India, the greater adjutant needs help to prevent the felling of nesting trees by landowners wishing to rid themselves of the storks and the threat of wetland destruction. To tackle this issue, Purnima Barman, of NGO Aaranyak has developed alternative livelihoods for villagers engaging them with the project and turning bird haters into bird lovers.



Purnima has mobilised followers into the ‘Hargila Army’ an all-female team of conservationists dedicated to protecting the greater adjutant who through this programme are offered sustainable livelihood, training and education opportunities. Together they are changing local perceptions and numbers of stork nests have risen from 30 seven years ago to over 170 today. With her Whitley Award, Purnima will scale up this work, encouraging householders to take pride in the species and protect the birds and their nesting trees.

Alexander Blanco - Venezuela

Nest protectors: conserving Venezuela’s magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship



Wildlife scientist and veterinarian Alexander Blanco has been working with harpy eagles since 1996. Some may remember him from the BBC wildlife documentary “The Hunt” where he was filmed climbing 40 metre high trees to tag eagle chicks – a hazardous occupation leaving little room for error. He has helped to conserve these iconic birds in Brazil and Ecuador as well as in his native Venezuela, where he is President of the Esfera Foundation and leads a national programme to protect the species.



Harpy eagles have become rare in many parts of their range where poverty, hunting, the country's political instability and a resulting lack of law enforcement have led to a sharp increase in illegal deforestation. In Venezuela, an area of forest bigger than central London is lost every week. Alexander wants to work local people to develop ways of protecting the eagle that they deliver, so that conservation is more resilient to economic and political turbulence. His Whitley Award will cement the harpy eagle as a flagship species and he hopes to protect a greater number of nesting sites, recruiting local people as nest guardians and limiting deforestation by supporting livelihoods in shade-coffee and through forest restoration.

Sanjay Gubbi - India

Reducing deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors, India



Sanjay quit his job as an electrical engineer to follow his passion for working with wildlife. Nearly two decades later he is spearheading conservation efforts in Karnataka, southern India, home to the highest number of Bengal tigers in the country where he has secured the largest expansion of protected areas in India since 1970 – increasing the size of protected areas in Karnataka by 37% and enhancing connectivity across 23 sites.



With his Whitley Award, Sanjay will be working to reduce deforestation in two important wildlife sanctuaries to create corridors for tigers to move between territories. He will also work with over 1,000 families to provide fuel efficient stoves, reducing the need for firewood collection, protecting them from respiratory diseases caused by smoke inhalation as well as the habitat of the tigers. He will also speed up compensation payments to farmers whose livestock has been blighted by tiger attacks boosting support of conservation from those living alongside wildlife.

Indira Lacerna-Widmann - Philippines

Partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo



The Philippine cockatoo has declined by a staggering 80% over the last 40 years. Decimated by the cage bird trade and habitat loss it is now extinct in much of its range.



In the Filipino city of Puerto Princesa, cockatoos nest in the forested grounds of Iwahig prison – a huge open air penal farm - and forage over military and private land. Indira

will use her Whitley Award to work with these novel partners to secure the future of this urban population of cockatoos; training prisoners and the army as wildlife wardens to address poaching in breeding sites and working with landowners to secure feeding corridors under threat from development - building a brighter future for both people and parrots.

Ian Little – South Africa

Custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity



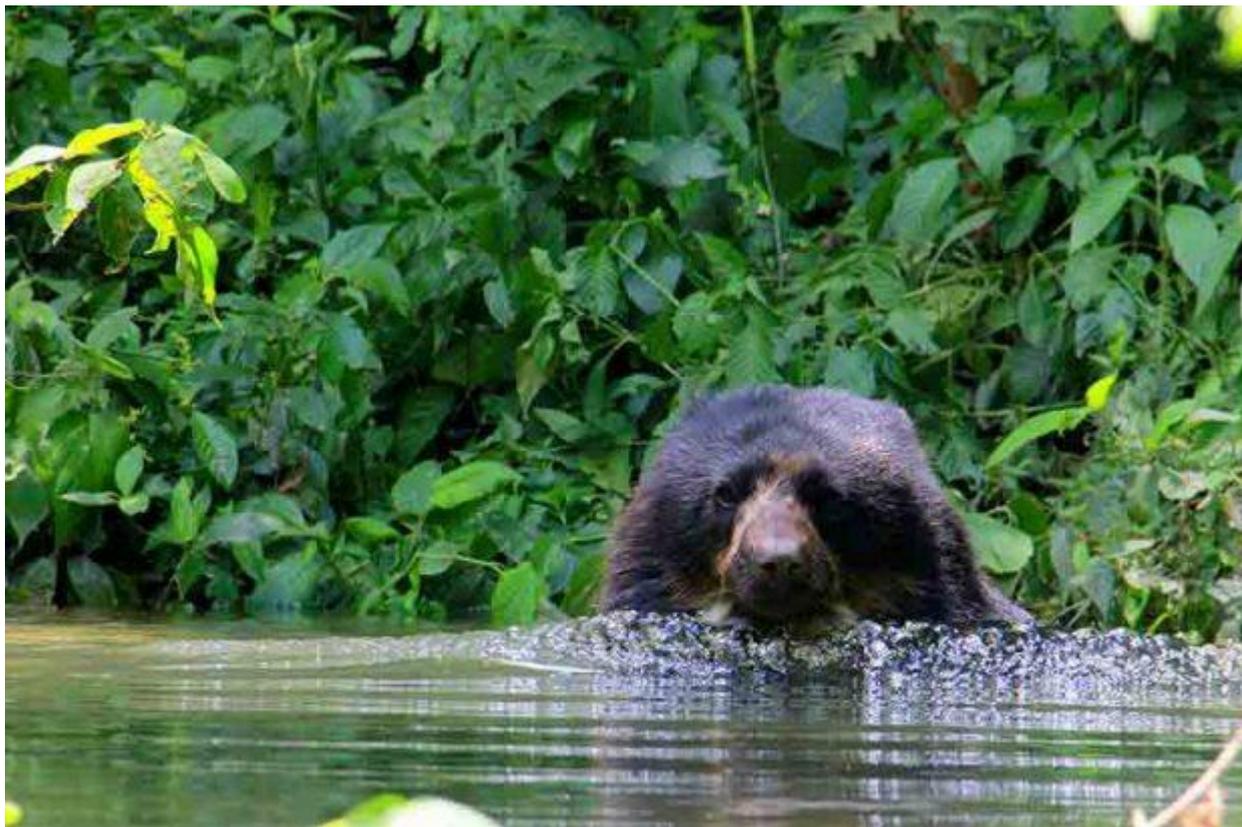
Demand for fresh water is expected to outstrip supply in South Africa by 2025. The Eastern Great Escarpment of South Africa provides catchment services for three of the country's largest rivers, making it a vital source of water for cities in one of the world's most arid nations. These grasslands support a plethora of plants and animals found nowhere else, including golden moles and the sungazer lizard. Despite their importance, less than 3% of grasslands in South Africa are protected.



Ian Little of the Endangered Wildlife Trust works with farmers to champion conservation of grassland habitat. Working with farmers and tribal leaders, Ian is building capacity for sustainable farming and introducing improved management practices, such as less intensive grazing and burning regimes to decrease pressure on grasslands and boost productivity. He has already secured 60,000 hectares of grassland for conservation purposes; a figure Ian plans to increase with his Whitley Award by creating a corridor of legally protected areas linking with others along the escarpment. In doing so he will safeguard these grasslands and the important source of freshwater they provide.

Ximena Velez-Liendo - Bolivia

An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains



The Inter Andean Dry Forests represent an important stronghold for South America's only bear species. Due to intensive human activity dating back to Inca times, this mountainous ecosystem is highly fragmented and is considered the most endangered tropical forest on Earth. In Tarija, Bolivia, up to 90% of people live in poverty and predation of precious livestock by native carnivores can sometimes lead to the killing of Andean bears in retaliation.



Ximena Velez-Liendo is Principal Researcher at the NGO PROMETA. With her Whitley Award, she will generate the first population estimation for bears in the country using camera traps, and quantify human-bear conflict. The results will be used to support a national plan for the Andean bear recovery and develop strategies to enable coexistence with farmers.

The 2017 Whitley Gold Award goes to Zafer Kizilkaya
Turkey – Securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline



The Gold Award is WFN's top profile prize and provides £50,000 in further project funding, donated by the Friends and Scottish Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature. This year the Gold Award goes to Zafer Kizilkaya, a 2013 Whitley Award winner, engineer, underwater photographer and marine conservationist from Turkey.



The Gold Award is given in recognition of Zafer's conservation project 'Guardians of the sea: securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline'. Zafer is the President of the Mediterranean Conservation Society, an NGO which aims to conserve and restore degraded coastal ecosystems in Turkey. He leads a series of projects working with local fishing communities, coastguards and government to promote ocean conservation and sustainable fishing practices that boost fisher income and benefit wildlife such as Mediterranean monk seals, sand bar sharks and loggerhead turtles.

Visit www.whitleyaward.org to find out more.

International Business Times – Online Newspaper
19 May 2017
(5 million visitors per month)

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/green-oscars-how-indian-women-are-boosting-numbers-human-sized-carnivorous-storks-1622105>

International Business Times

Green Oscars: How Indian women are boosting numbers of human-sized carnivorous storks

Women have been defending the stork and encouraging the community to respect and preserve the unusual bird.

By [Martha Henriques](#)

Huge meat-eating storks are among the rare and fascinating creatures to benefit from the prize-winning projects at this year's Whitley Awards, known as the 'Green Oscars'.

The competition awards some of the brightest success stories in conservation. This year, giant meat-eating [storks](#) and tigers of India, harpy eagles of Venezuela, singing and dancing cockatoos of the Philippines, sungazer lizards of South Africa and spectacled bears of Bolivia were among the species to be given a boost in projects awarded £35,000 prizes from the Whitley Fund for Nature.

Giant flesh-eating storks

Some of this work involves turning around a much-reviled species into one that local people can take pride in and gain a livelihood from protecting. This was no small task when it came to the 5ft-tall greater adjutant, a stork that eats meat – dead or alive – in vast quantities.

But now women in the Assam region of India are working to protect the once common and now [endangered species](#). The great adjutant has historically been hated, and considered ugly, by the local community.

Purnima Devi Barman of the NGO Aaranyak is working to change that. She now wears a white and red scarf of a material highly valued in the Brahmaputra valley region of Assam, embroidered with an image of the stork. In 2008 there were just 28 nests of the greater adjutant in Assam. There are now well over a hundred of the large, dishevelled-looking grey birds.

Barman, who did her PhD on the great adjutant, has been working to make sure that the women in the project – known as the Hargila Army in the area, from the name of the bird in the local language – are invested in protecting the birds.

Their efforts are paying back. About a thousand marginalised people in the Brahmaputra valley are now gaining skills and livelihoods through the project to conserve the unique and underappreciated storks.



Women of the 'Hargila army' in Assam, India, walk with masks in the image of the Greater Adjutant stork, an endangered species they are working to conserve and protect. Purnima Barman / Whitley Fund for Nature



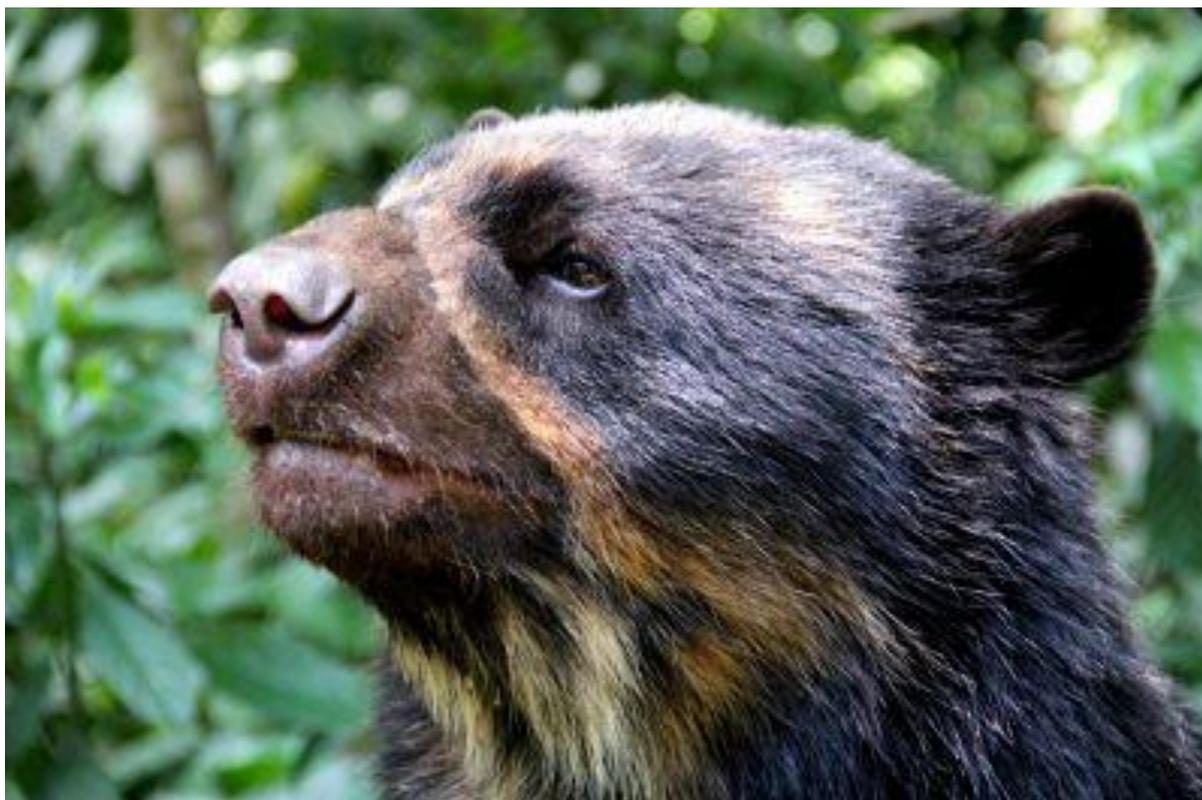
Greater adjutant storks in Assam, India. Purnima Barman / Whitley Fund for Nature

Searching for the spectacled bear

Not all of the winners of the Green Oscars are about boosting the numbers of a threatened species. Sometimes a species is so rare that it's incredibly hard to determine if it is still there at all or if it has [gone locally extinct](#).

The spectacled bear is one such species, which used to be common in Bolivia. They live in the dry forests of the Andes and are the only bear in South America. The animal gets its name from the characteristic markings around its eyes. It was listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as vulnerable to extinction.

Twenty years ago, men in the villages of Tarija, Bolivia, would see spectacled bears very often, said Ximena Velez-Liendo of the conservation organisation Prometa, and another Whitley Award winner.



The spectacled bear of Bolivia. Ximena Velez-Liendo

"Men would say, two years ago they killed a bear, or last month there was a bear in their field," she said.

But scientific efforts to capture pictures of the bears didn't manage to take any pictures of the bears.

"We started setting up the [camera traps](#) following a very scientific strategy. But then for several months we got nothing."

It was a very frustrating process, Velez-Liendo said, as the team didn't know if they were looking in the wrong places, or if there really were no bears to be found. The women of the village would refer to legends of the bears that they knew, but told the scientists that they did not often go to the fields near where the bears were said to be.



The dry forests of Bolivia are some of the most threatened ecosystems in South America. Ximena Velez-Liendo

After going back to the drawing board with her colleagues, Velez-Liendo decided to give the cameras to the local people who said they had seen the bears. She hired them as field assistants and they put the cameras in what they thought would be the best spot.

Within a few weeks, the team had their first images of the elusive bear. They soon had tens of images of cubs, females and male bears, and their first 10-second video clip of the bears.

With the Whitley Prize, Velez-Liendo intends to take on the field assistants for longer and work with them to document the whereabouts and habits of the spectacled bears in the region.

Replenishing the Mediterranean Sea

The project – given a £50,000 Gold Award at the ceremony – has helped Turkish fishermen in one area quadruple their incomes while helping rare species of fish to skyrocket. How to do it? No-fishing zones.

Far from fishing less, the no-fishing zones are helping small-scale fishermen to taken in many more fish. Allowing the fish a safe space to breed and mature has meant that the recovering species have overflowed their safe havens back into commercial fishing areas.

Local fishermen have seen their income increase by 400% in just five years thanks to the no-fishing zones, said leader of the project Zafer Kizilkaya of the Mediterranean Conservation Society.



Policing the Turkish coast for illegal fishing in no-fishing zones. Zafer Kizilkaya / Whitley Fund for Nature

"In our area, fish stocks are skyrocketing. Fishing makes up the vast majority of the local community's income," said Kizilkaya.

The key to the success of the no-fishing zones is strict enforcement, he said. About 6.5% of the Mediterranean Sea is under some protection, but this is only on paper. In reality, both small-scale and large industrial fishing boats travel freely throughout much of the sea, with negligible penalties for being caught working where they shouldn't be.

But a group of rangers working with the Turkish Coast Guard have been effectively enforcing a no-fishing zone now since 2010.

"In the beginning, if local people would see illegal fishing activity, they didn't care," Kizilkaya said. "But now they don't tolerate people coming in the no-fishing zones, because they know it is going to hurt them."



Rare monk seal returns to the Turkish coast as its prey return in greater numbers thanks to the enforced no-fishing zones. Zafer Kizilkaya / Whitley Fund for Nature

If similar enforcement were carried out in protected areas of the world's oceans, it could dramatically increase declining fish stocks. As well as being a big boost for the fishing industries, it is also helping the return of endangered fish species, and the larger mammals and birds that feed on them.

Each of the conservationists to win a Whitley Award will officially be given their prizes at by Princess Ann at a ceremony tonight, using the money to develop their projects and further the prospects of the species they are working to protect.

Mongabay – Online Global Environmental News
19 May 2017
(Over 20 million visitors per year)

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/05/meet-the-2017-green-oscars-winners/>

MONGABAY

Meet the 2017 ‘Green Oscars’ winners

19 May 2017 / [Shreya Dasgupta](#)

This year, the award recipients include six conservationists chosen from a pool of over 166 applicants from all over the world.



- *The winners include Purnima Barman from India, Sanjay Gubbi from India, Alexander Blanco from Venezuela, Indira Lacerna-Widmann from Philippines, Ian Little from South Africa and Ximena Velez-Liendo from Bolivia.*
- *At an awards ceremony held last evening at the Royal Geographic Society in London, each of the six winners received £35,000 (~\$46,000) in project funding to help scale up their work.*
- *Zafer Kizilkaya, a 2013 Whitley Award winner from Turkey, received this year's Gold Award (£50,000) for his conservation project "Guardians of the sea: securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline".*

The “Green Oscars” are back.

Every year since 1994, the Whitley Fund for Nature, a UK-based charity, has been presenting the Whitley Award — popularly called the Green Oscars — to individuals in recognition of “their achievements in nature conservation.”

This year, the award recipients include six conservationists chosen from a pool of over 166 applicants from all over the world. Each of these conservationists have spent years trying to devise innovative ways of protecting species at risk of extinction and securing critical habitats.

At an awards ceremony held last evening at the Royal Geographic Society in London, each of the six winners received £35,000 (~\$46,000) in project funding to help scale up their work.

“I never imagined I would receive such an honour,” award finalist Ximena Velez-Liendo, Chester Zoo Conservation Fellow and Research Associate of WildCRU, said in a statement. “The Whitley Awards are very prestigious and only the best of the best of conservation scientists receive them. It’s a dream come true! Thanks to the Whitley Award, the funding will help us to get the research equipment we need to improve our understanding of the bears’ distribution and we will be able to work with more communities and expand our project.”

Zafer Kizilkaya, a 2013 Whitley Award winner from Turkey, received this year’s Whitley Gold Award for his conservation project “Guardians of the sea: securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline”. The Whitley Gold Award is given to an “exceptional Whitley Award alumnus for outstanding contribution”. The Gold Award includes £50,000 (~\$65,000) in project funding, donated by the Friends and Scottish Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature.



The Princess Royal and 2017 Whitley Gold Award recipient Zafer Kizilkaya, Turkey, at The Royal Geographical Society, London, 18th May 2017. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.



Kizilkaya works with local fishing communities, coastguards and government to protect oceans and conserve marine biodiversity. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.

Meet the 2017 Whitley Award winners:

Purnima Barman – India

Purnima Barman of NGO Aaranyak based in Assam, India, has launched a one-woman campaign to protect the Greater Adjutant stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) — a giant bird that feeds on carrion, is frequently spotted on garbage dumps in Assam, and is often considered “ugly”. She works with local communities in Assam to inject a sense of pride and “ownership” in the once-common, but now endangered storks.

Read Mongabay’s coverage of Barman’s work [here](#).



The Princess Royal and 2017 Whitley Awards recipient Purnima Barman, India, at The Royal Geographical Society, London, 18th May 2017. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.



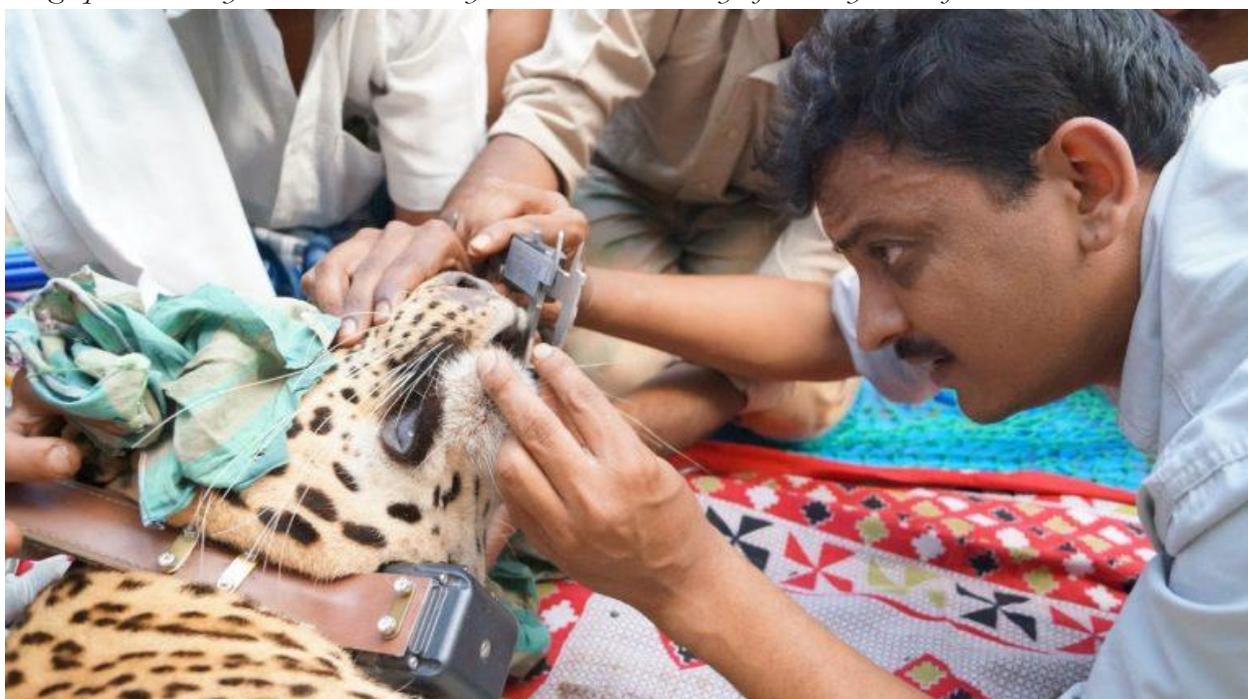
Greater Adjutant stork is endangered due to habitat loss. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.

Sanjay Gubbi – India

Sanjay Gubbi, a scientist with the Nature Conservation Foundation in India, has helped expand the protected area network in Karnataka, India, a state that is home to the highest number of Royal Bengal Tigers in India. He has also worked with the Forest Department to reduce habitat fragmentation and increase connectivity between forests, and has helped institute social security and welfare measures for forest watchers and guards.



The Princess Royal and 2017 Whitley Awards recipient Sanjay Gubbi, India, at The Royal Geographical Society, London, 18th May 2017. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.



Sanjay Gubbi has worked to expand protected areas in Karnataka, India. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.

Alexander Blanco – Venezuela

Blanco is a wildlife scientist and veterinarian who has been working to protect one of the world's largest and fiercest eagles — the Harpy eagle (*Harpia harpyja*) — in Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela since 1996. Harpy eagle were once widespread, but are now declining, primarily due to habitat loss from logging, agriculture and livestock grazing.

Read Mongabay's interview with Blanco [here](#).



The Princess Royal and 2017 Whitley Awards recipient Alexander Blanco, Venezuela, at The Royal

Geographical Society, London, 18th May 2017. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.



Harpy eagle is one of the largest and most powerful eagles in the world. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.

Indira Lacerna-Widmann – Philippines

Indira Lacerna-Widmann, the Chief Operating Officer of the Katala Foundation, a Philippines-based organisation, works to protect the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*). The bird nests within the grounds of Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm in Puerto Princesa City, and Lacerna-Widmann has successfully implemented the Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Programme (PCCP) that involves educating and training prisoners to act as wildlife wardens for the birds.



The Princess Royal and 2017 Whitley Awards recipient Indira Lacerna-Widmann, Philippines, at The Royal Geographical Society, London, 18th May 2017. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.



The Philippine cockatoo is critically endangered. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.

Ian Little – South Africa

Ian Little of the Endangered Wildlife Trust works with farmers and tribal leaders in South Africa to protect grasslands, one of the most threatened habitats in the country. He has been involved in introducing simple changes in management practices, such as altering burning and livestock grazing regimes to decrease pressure on grasslands.



The Princess Royal and 2017 Whitley Awards recipient Ian Little, South Africa, at The Royal Geographical Society, London, 18th May 2017. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.



Grasslands are one of the most threatened habitats in South Africa. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.

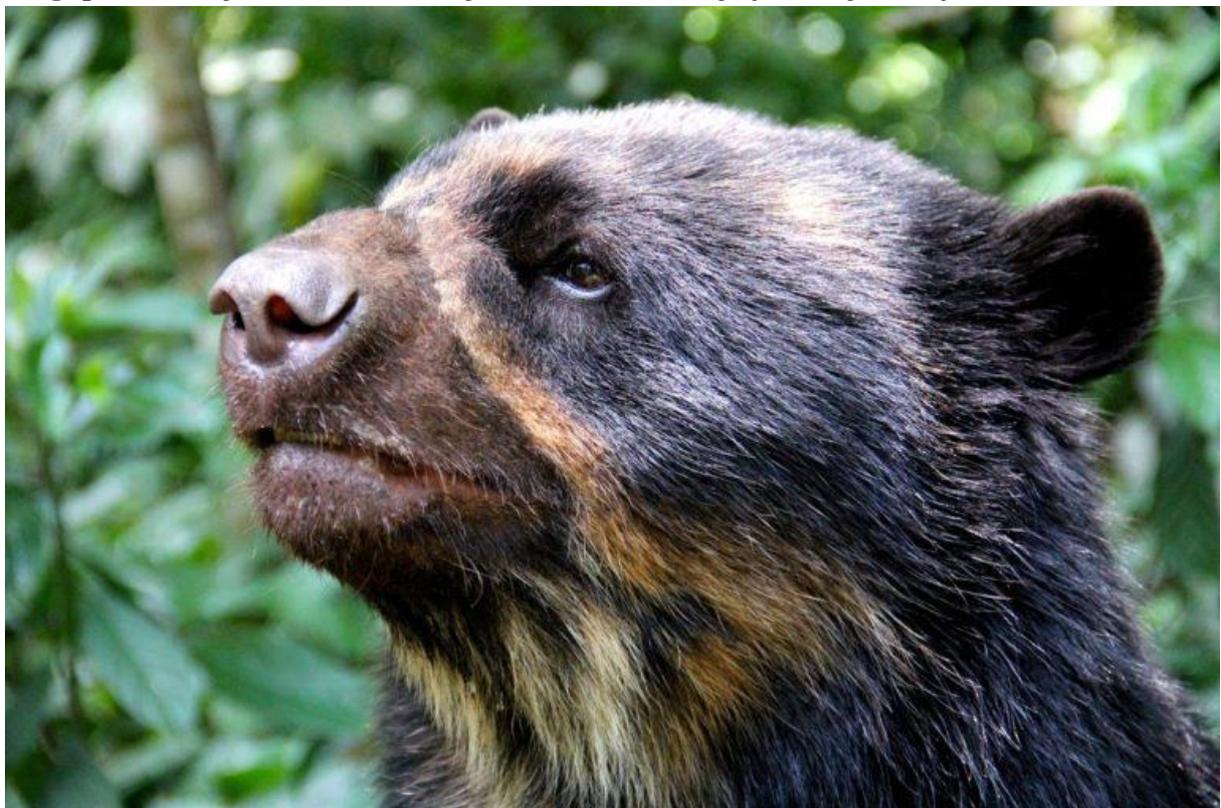
Ximena Velez-Liendo – Bolivia

Ximena Velez-Liendo, a Chester Zoo Conservation Fellow and Research Associate of WildCRU, works to help Bolivia's communities co-exist with the Andean or Spectacles bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*), the only bear native to South America. Velez-Liendo's project is introducing interventions to reduce conflict, developing alternate livelihoods to local communities, and monitoring the Andean bear populations in the region.

Read Mongabay's coverage of Velez-Liendo's work [here](#).



The Princess Royal and 2017 Whitley Awards recipient Ximena Velez-Liendo, Bolivia, at The Royal Geographical Society, London, 18th May 2017. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.



The Andean bear is the only native bear in South America. Photo courtesy of Whitley Fund for Nature.

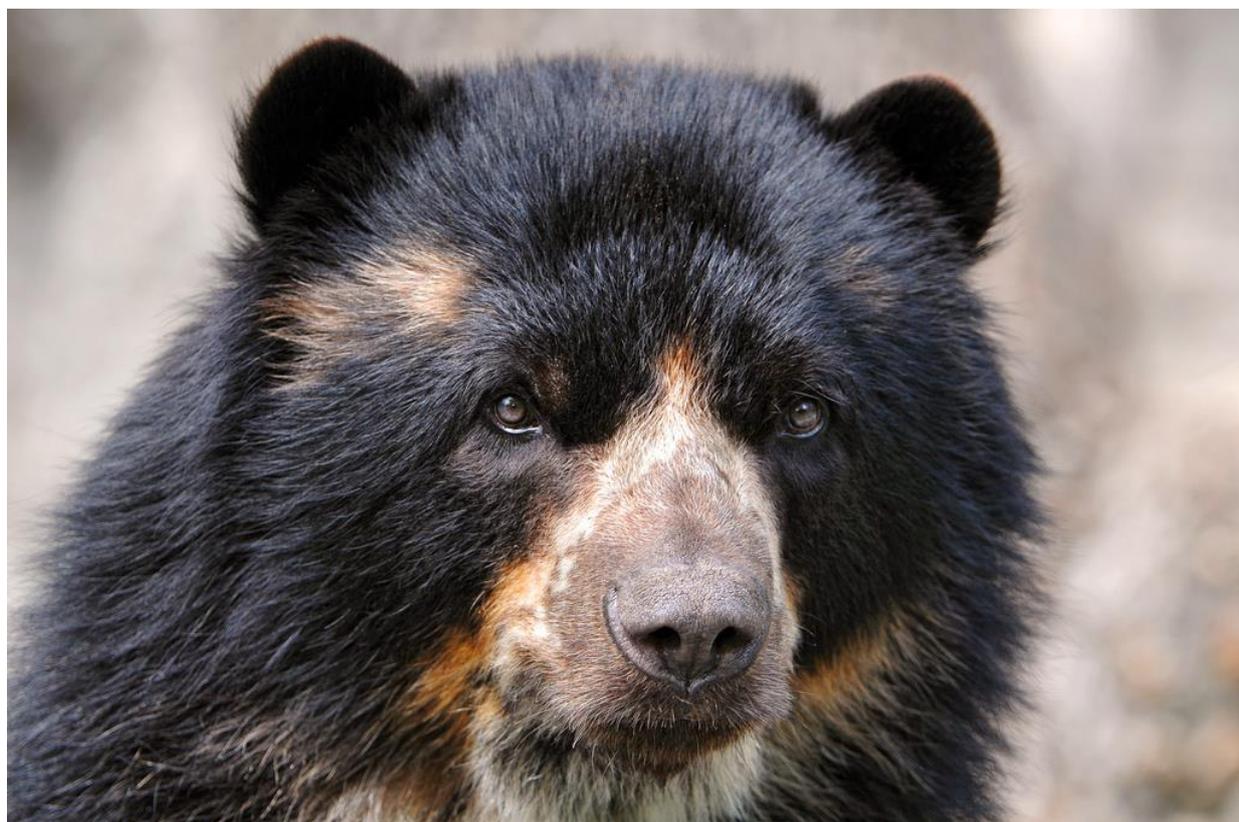
Natursidan – Environmental Website, Sweden
21 May 2017

<http://www.natursidan.se/nyheter/vinnare-av-naturvardens-oscars-2017/>



Winner of the "Natural World Oscars' in 2017

May 21, 2017



Efforts to protect the Spectacled Bear has been rewarded. Photo: Tambako The Jaguar, CC2.0 via Flickr

Whitley Fund for Nature is a charity based in the UK since 1994 has awarded [Whitley Awards](#) , known as the "Green Oscars". The award goes to individuals who have made outstanding conservation measures for nature.

This year, the special price "Whitley Gold Award", at over 600 000 in project funding to:

Zafer Kizilkaya, Turkey

for its efforts to secure and expand marine reserves along the coast of Turkey.

The six other winners of "Whitley Award" everyone gets over 400 000 to its projects:

Purnima Barman, India

has worked with local communities in India to create a sense of pride and will to protect the endangered greater adjutant stork, who often live in the mountains of rubbish in Assam in India.

Sanjay Gubbi, India

Researchers in Nature Conservation Foundation in India, which helped to expand the protected natural areas and provide security for the forester in Karnataka which houses the highest number of Bengal tigers in India.

Alexander Blanco, Venezuela

has since 1996 worked to protect the world's largest eagles. Raptor, which lives in South America, are declining in number because their habitats are shrinking as a result of deforestation, increased agriculture and animal husbandry.

Indira Lacerna-Widmann, the Philippines

Indira Lacerna-Widmann at Katala Foundation, working to save the endangered cockatoo. The method used is to educate and train the people who are in prison to protect the birds and their nests sensitive land.

Ian Little, South Africa

rewarded for his work with the farmers and tribal leaders in South Africa to rescue grasslands, one of the most endangered habitats.

Ximena Velez-Liendo, Bolivia.

Having managed to get Bolivian communities coexist with spectacled bear, South America's only bear. Using Ximena Velez-Liendo's work conflicts decreased and developed alternative ways to earn a living in the people living in the vicinity of the bears.

Speaking Tree – Online Blog, India
27 May 2017

<http://www.speakingtree.in/blog/the-green-oscars-2017>



May 27, 2017 06:34am

The Green Oscars 2017



The 2017 Whitley Awards Ceremony was held on 18th May at The Royal Geographical Society in London. The Ceremony was hosted by celebrity BBC presenter Thomas “Tom” Heap with the Whitley Awards presented to the winners by the Whitley Fund for Nature Patron, HRH The Princess Royal, Princess Anne.

The annual Whitley Awards are a celebration of successful conservation leadership from across the globe and each of the winners receive £35,000 in project funding to help scale up their work. The prestigious ‘Green Oscars’ recognize effective local conservationists from bio-diversity rich, resource-poor countries spearheading innovative work to save endangered wildlife and benefit local communities.

This year, the award recipients include two Indians among six conservationists chosen from 169 applicants from around the world.

The awardees this year have been chosen for their exemplary leadership in conservation projects, ranging from saving the Greater Adjutants in Assam, extending the protected area network of Royal Bengal Tigers in Karnataka, protecting the Harpy Eagle across South America, protecting the nesting grounds of the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo, grassland conservation with local communities in South Africa and promoting coexistence of the Spectacles Bear and people in Bolivia.

The Whitley Gold Award for 2017 was won by Zafer Kizilkaya, a 2013 Whitley Award winner from Turkey, for his conservation project “Guardians of the sea: securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline”. The Whitley Gold Award is given to an “exceptional Whitley Award alumnus for outstanding contribution” and includes £50,000 in project funding donated by The Friends and Scottish Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature.

Ms Purnima Barman from Aaranyak, a NGO based out of Assam, India was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by The Shears Foundation in memory of Trevor Shears, for “Inspiring women to protect Assam’s Greater Adjutant and its wetland habitat.” Mr. Sanjay Gubbi from the Nature Conservation Foundation was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by WWF-UK, for “Reducing deforestation in Karnataka’s tiger corridors, India.”

Ms Indira Lacerna-Widmann from the Katala Foundation was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by Notting Hill Preparatory School, for “Partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo.”

Ms. Ximena Velez-Liendo from WildCRU and a Chester Zoo Conservation Fellow was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Savitri Waney Charitable Trust, for her project “An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains.”

Mr. Ian Little from the Endangered Wildlife Trust was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Garfield Weston Foundation, for his project “Custodians of South Africa’s threatened grassland biodiversity.”

Mr. Alexander Blanco from the Harpy Eagle Conservation Program was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by the William Brake Charitable Trust in memory of William Brake for his project “Nest protectors: conserving Venezuela’s magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship.”

National Geographic Kids – Print Magazine, UK
5 June 2017

THE GREEN 'OSCARS'!

Six award-winning conservation champions tell us all about the special species and habitats they're trying to save...



Indira Lorenz-Widmann is helping PHILIPPINE COCKATOOS in the Philippines

More than 3,000 of these distinctive cockatoos are now left in the wild, with 72% found on Palawan Island, where Indira is from. Their numbers have plummeted in recent decades due to habitat destruction, and they are poached and sold for the illegal pet trade. Indira explains why they're so popular...

Our cockatoos are tame, if you dance, and it can sing! It also has a long life, of around 60 years. There are 28 cockatoos species all over the world, but this one is distinctly ours, with colourful red wings on its tail. My project will ensure that its breeding grounds and nesting areas are protected.

How she's helping: Indira has some amazing recruits helping her save the Philippine cockatoos - partners! The cockatoos' main nesting sites are on the grounds of a huge open prison in Palawan, and so Indira trains the inmates there to help her protect the breeding grounds, monitor the nests and ring the hatchlings. Through this work, she's launched the 'Red Bird' project - the prisoners earn qualifications, give them and the cockatoos a brighter future!

These inspirational projects all won a 2017 Whitley Award from the Whitley Fund for Nature, a charity that funds vital conservation projects around the world. The £25,000 prize money will allow the winners to do even more great work!

Philippine cockatoos can be identified by the red 'wings' on their tails.

Sadly, this critically endangered bird has declined by 90% in the last 20 years.

18 **NATURE CONSERVATION**

Rare species, such as the giant reed...

Tim Little is restoring GRASSLAND HABITAT in South Africa



South Africa is in real danger of losing out on crucial fresh water by 2020. The grasslands of The Eastern Great Karoo region are a vital source of water for the country - the rain that falls here flows into rivers and supplies the cities. But the critical habitat is in trouble...

The grasslands we need to protect are roughly 1.5 times the size of Ireland! But before farming on the 200km stretch that makes up 2% of the total, it's a wilderness area with over 7,000 plant species - that's more than in the whole of the UK! Many animals live, such as rare grasses and yellow-bellied plovers, you can't find anywhere else on earth. If the grassland is damaged, those species will disappear.

How he's helping: Tim is working with local farmers to get their land turned into protected nature reserves, so they're no longer exploited by coal mining or fracking. He's helping farmers manage their land sustainably, allowing them that if they use cow sheds and toilets, it's a sign that the grasslands are doing well - good news for the whole country!

...and he's been awarded a Whitley Award...

...the Award puts in the ground...

So far, Phoenix has exceeded the amount of birds in the region from 28 to over 100!

Patricia Barman is saving GREATER ADJUTANT STORKS (AKA HARGREAS) in India



These giant mud-eating waders have an image problem in Assam, where more than 75% of the storks live. They're considered a bad omen and a disease-carrying pest, so their nesting sites are often cut down and their food sources poisoned. Today, only 1,200 remain in the wild. Luckily, Patricia has always seen their hidden beauty...

The flying bird change people from being bad omens to beautiful creatures, so that everyone can accept this lesser stork - which is the same stork as well - as part of their society. Because they moved to protected grasslands, old government farms, I have to convince leaders even to look after them. And that too - people can be more willing to work with their animals.

How she's helping: Patricia works with local women in Assam to educate them about the storks, known as the Shangkha Army. This all-female team are now dedicated to protecting the greater adjutant! They put on plays to spread the word about the bird, and create beautiful handbills featuring images of storks, which they can then sell to raise money.

There's never to need more conservation heroes...



Part 3: Media Coverage of the 2017 Whitley Award Winners

Zafer Kizilkaya

Turkey

2017 GOLD AWARD WINNER

2013 Whitley Award winner

Guardians of the sea: securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline

Winner of the Whitley Gold Award donated by the Friends and Scottish
Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature

Zafer has been very successful in receiving media coverage, with six in-depth pieces about his work, including an article in Geographical magazine and a video on BBC World Service.

To see Zafer's WFN profile follow this [link](#).

- WFN Press Release 72
- Print and Online 74
- TV & Radio 99

WFN's Press release

Turkish marine researcher and conservationist wins the 2017 Whitley Gold Award for his innovative work to protect Turkey's coastline

London, UK: 17 May 2017 – HRH The Princess Royal will tomorrow present the prestigious Whitley Gold Award worth £50,000, to Zafer Kizilkaya; a 2013 Whitley Award winner, engineer, underwater photographer and marine conservationist from Turkey. The Gold Award is donated by The Friends and Scottish Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature, and given in recognition of Zafer's outstanding work to protect Turkey's marine environment. This work is taking place against the backdrop of mass immigration of over four million refugees from Syria and Iraq and under challenging political and economic circumstances.

Zafer is President of the Mediterranean Conservation Society, an NGO which aims to conserve Turkey's marine and coastal ecosystems. He leads a series of projects working with local fishing communities, coastguards and government to promote conservation and sustainable fishing practices. Gökova Bay is one of the most spectacular marine-scapes in the Aegean Sea. Over 200 small scale fishermen depend on the Bay for their livelihood, but the depletion of fish stocks had imposed a serious impact on the local economy. In 2010, following a successful community conservation project led by Zafer and his team, the Turkish government declared six No Fishing Zones (NFZs) to protect fish breeding and nursery grounds. These no-take zones represented the country's first network of community-managed marine reserves; however, due to the size of the area proper enforcement by the coastguard was difficult and illegal activities commonplace.

Since Zafer won a Whitley Award in 2013, the project has had a profound effect on biodiversity and the local people in the Bay. The coastguard and the Ministry are now actively cooperating and effectively patrolling the reserves. New technology is at the heart of Gökova's transformation. Zafer and his team have employed a new monitoring system – the first of its kind used in the marine environment.

Patrol boats are equipped with specialist police cameras and GPS, allowing illegal activity to be live streamed to the coastguard so they can respond immediately. The community now keep detailed reports on numbers and species of fish caught – the only Bay to do so in Turkey. They even have a mobile app for recording data!

Zafer has partnered with fishermen to implement more sustainable fishing practices and trawling has been banned in sensitive sites. As a result, fish stocks have recovered and biomass has risen by 800%. Following a campaign promoting the consumption of invasive species, demand and subsequent fisher income has risen by 400%! Critically Endangered monk seals have recently returned the Bay and sandbar sharks and loggerhead turtles are being regularly sighted – a sign that this once damaged ecosystem is on the road to recovery. With his Whitley Gold Award Zafer will consolidate efforts in Gökova Bay and scale up his successful approach in nearby Fethiye Bay with his project 'Guardians of the sea: securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline'. Zafer's long term vision is to replicate his work throughout the Mediterranean.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "Zafer is spearheading novel approaches to marine conservation in Turkey that if brought to scale could deliver benefits across the Mediterranean. It is this vision, Zafer's application of the best available science, and implementation of practical conservation methods rooted in community and political engagement that make him deserving of the Gold Award."

Zafer joins an elite group of conservationists that have won the coveted Whitley Gold Award for grassroots conservationists working against tremendous odds in developing countries. After winning a Whitley Award in 2013, Zafer went on to receive additional WFN funding in 2015. The Gold Award celebrates outstanding people achieving significant conservation impact and recognises them with WFN's top profile and PR prize. Zafer will join the Whitley Award Judging Panel to assist in winner selection and act as mentor to the new Whitley Award winners.

**Blue Marine Foundation – Conservation Organisation Website, UK
18 May 2017**

<http://www.blumarinefoundation.com/2017/05/18/ocean-conservationist-wins-the-whitley-gold-award/>



TURKISH MARINE RESEARCHER AND CONSERVATIONIST WINS THE 2017 WHITLEY GOLD AWARD FOR HIS INNOVATIVE WORK TO PROTECT TURKEY'S COASTLINE

May 18, 2017

BLUE is delighted to see that The Whitley Awards is acknowledging an ocean conservationist with its Gold Award.

Zafer Kizilkaya's achievements are outstanding and should be an example to other marine conservation initiatives in Europe. The Mediterranean Sea is chronically overfished and poorly managed. Mr Kizilkaya has successfully created no-fishing zones around areas crucial for fish reproduction. He has also promoted local, sustainable fisheries and this in turn has led to community management of these marine reserves. BLUE commends Zafer's hard work and effective approach towards marine conservation.

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The 2017 Whitley Award winners will be announced at the Ceremony and each receive £35,000 in project funding. The six finalists are:

- Sanjay Gubbi – Reducing deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors, India

- Indira Lacerna-Widmann – Partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo
- Ian Little – Custodians of South Africa’s threatened grassland biodiversity
- Purnima Barman – Inspiring women to protect Assam’s greater adjutant and its wetland habitat, India
- Alexander Blanco – Nest protectors: conserving Venezuela’s magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship
- Ximena Velez-Liendo – An uphill climb: enabling coexistence Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains

Fauna & Flora International – Conservation Organisation Website, UK
19 May 2017

<http://www.fauna-flora.org/seals-sharks-and-stunning-sea-life-recollections-from-a-whitley-award-winner/>



Seals, sharks and stunning sea life: recollections from a Whitley Award winner

Posted on: 19.05.17

Whitley Gold Award winner Zafer Kizilkaya shares his experiences from over 20 years in conservation...

At an illustrious awards ceremony last night, HRH The Princess Royal presented Zafer Kizilkaya with the highly prestigious Whitley Gold Award, worth £50,000, for his outstanding work to protect Turkey's marine environment.

Zafer is President of *Akdeniz Koruma Derneği* (The Mediterranean Conservation Society – Fauna & Flora International's partner in Turkey) and, together with his team, has been working with local fishing communities, coastguards and the government to promote conservation and sustainable fishing practices in Gökova Bay.

Listen to Sir David Attenborough describing Zafer's work in Gökova Bay (video courtesy of [Whitley Fund for Nature](#)).

Here, we share an interview with Zafer, originally published in the June 2013 issue of *Fauna & Flora* magazine...

How did you get started in conservation?

At university I studied civil engineering. While learning about the coastal and harbour aspect, I began to understand the importance of coastal resources, and decided to take a Masters degree in coastal zone management. While I was at university we established a sub aqua society and did the very first loggerhead turtle and Mediterranean monk seal

awareness and conservation work in Turkey. After graduation, I worked as a volunteer for a tropical marine survey project in Indonesia and spent a long time in the tropical Pacific, documenting conservation issues.

Did you have to make sacrifices?

Sure I did – in fact I still do! I quit my engineering career in order to work in conservation; I have never had a day job.

What has been your most memorable wildlife encounter?

I get more excited about diversity than a single species encounter. The rainforest in the Sierra Madre Mountains of Luzon Island, Philippines, is a magical place for biodiversity. Similarly, the reefs surrounding Coron Island (also in the Philippines) have spectacular invertebrate and fish life that is extremely memorable for me. And every single patch of reef in Indonesia is a treasure.

How about closer to home?

I began working at the Underwater Research Society in Turkey in 2006. That year, a Mediterranean monk seal pup was found close by. She was only four weeks old and severely dehydrated. We went to pick her up immediately and set up a rehabilitation centre in Foça where we kept her for five months until she was ready to be released back into Gökova Bay. We called her Badem.



Badem. Credit: Zafer Kızılkaya.

How did people in Gökova Bay react?

She is a very curious and playful seal, and while she made a unique and interesting encounter for scuba divers, she made life quite difficult for skin divers and spear-fishers because it's hard to hold your breath when a seal is playing rough with you!

When she was a juvenile, the only problem for fishers was that she was sleeping on their boats and soiling them. But unfortunately, when she got bigger, she started capsizing boats as she climbed in and also stole fish from nets, causing further damage. In these cases we paid for the damages, and once we even translocated her back to the bay when she was causing problems in an aquaculture area.

The good news is that, since she was so famous, no fishers ever dared to harm her – some of them even went fishing while she was sleeping on the boat!

Where is she now?

A year after she was released, we were doing an underwater survey when suddenly Badem appeared. She played with us for hours and later followed our boat, crossing the entire bay to the north. She must have been tired because she slept on the boat's deck for the rest of the day! In April 2012, she disappeared from Gökova Bay, and for a while there was no news. But then we heard that a female monk seal with very similar markings had been sighted in Croatia – we're pretty sure it is Badem.

What makes her so special?

She is a messenger for her kind. It is normally very difficult to see monk seals in the wild, but thanks to her presence in Gökova Bay thousands of people are now aware of these seals and how endangered they are. Today, fewer than 400 of these beautiful animals are left in the wild, so every single one is important. Gökova Bay is one of the last remaining sanctuaries for the species, because it has lots of remote cliffs, caverns and secluded coves, which make ideal habitat for monk seals.

What is the best and worst thing about your job?

The best thing is the satisfaction of helping to conserve natural resources that most people don't know or care about. The most frustrating thing is dealing with bureaucracy, which can really slow things down a lot of the time.

What advice would you give to young conservationists starting out?

The conservation world is full of battles, so it requires dedication to see a positive result. Conservation often means raising awareness at the government level, where historically it has not been a high priority, and you need a lot of patience while you wait for things to

be officially declared. Specialising in a certain subject or species helps a lot for accomplishment, but really every single person lending a hand in conservation counts.

What are your hopes and fears for the future?

Growth is the most frightening thing for me, globally. Natural resources cannot resist the growth planned for the next decade; we need to change people's mindsets and redefine the word 'growth'.

More people and politicians are aware that we are losing our natural resources, but we need powerful people to stand as our allies. We need to put more pressure on rule-makers to make responsible over-arching policies, rather than different rules spread out over lots of different projects here and there. One single act or law with proper enforcement would change a lot.

Geographical – Official Magazine of the Royal Geographical Society, UK
19 May 2017

<http://geographical.co.uk/nature/oceans/item/2238-turkish-delight-restoring-mediterranean-marine-life>

Geographical

Turkish delight: restoring Mediterranean marine life

- Written by **Chris Fitch**
- Published in **Oceans**



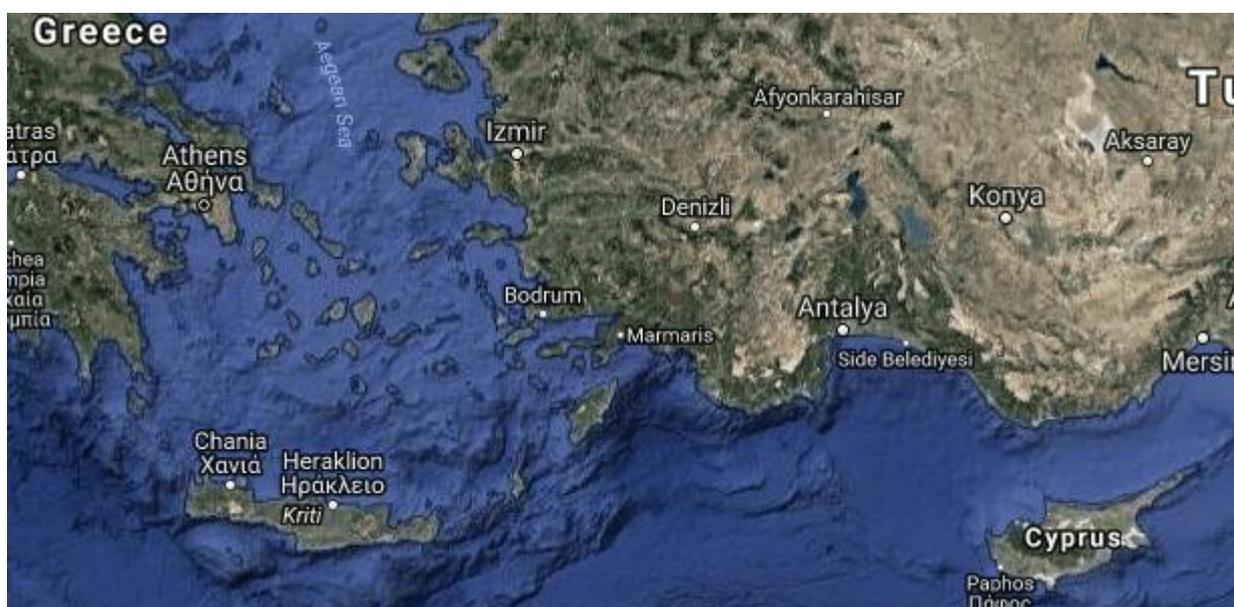
Zafer Kizilkaya *Whitley Fund for Nature*

19 May 2017

Zafer Kizilkaya has been awarded the 2017 Whitley Gold Award for his continued efforts in creating and monitoring marine protected zones off Turkey's Mediterranean coastline. Despite its relatively diminutive size, the Mediterranean may well be considered one of the world's most pivotal bodies of water (its name literally translates as 'sea in the middle of the world'). Yet marine conservation has not been a high priority for authorities overseeing human activities in this part of the world's oceans. Alongside the presence of **vast quantities of plastic** and **invasive species** – not to mention the **humanitarian crises** unfolding between the iconic shores – has been the severe ramifications of

widespread overfishing. Many once prosperous fishing communities, such as the residents of Gökova Bay in Turkey, found themselves pulling up empty nets, as the marine species they once relied upon for their diet and income continue to plummet to ever lower numbers.

In 2013, Turkish marine researcher, engineer and underwater photographer **Zafer Kizilkaya** was awarded a **Whitley Award** in recognition of the work by his organisation, the **Mediterranean Conservation Society**, in creating six new ‘no fishing zones’ (NFZs) covering Gökova Bay. These new no-take reserves, managed and rigorously protected by the local community, became prosperous breeding grounds and nurseries for many fish species, whose numbers since grew by as much as 800 per cent, spilling over into surrounding waters. Through the funding and publicity from the award, Kizilkaya and his team were subsequently able to expand the size of the NFZs by 25 per cent, creating a total protected area of over 3,000km².



‘Marine protected areas have so many benefits,’ insists Kizilkaya. ‘They support local people, they support culture, and more importantly, they protect biodiversity. Nobody comes, nobody disturbs. Nobody anchors, nobody fishes. They just give an amazing amount of benefits.’

As Kizilkaya repeatedly outlines, however, creating the NFZs was only the start of the solution. The key has been enforcement, since increasingly healthy fish populations create ever-increasing interest from aspiring illegal fishermen. ‘If there is no enforcement, forget about the protected area,’ he explains. ‘The coastguard is so busy with so many other important things; stopping illegal human trafficking, all these humanitarian crises, helping people dropping in the ocean. They said, “We cannot help you at all, or do any kind of enforcement in no fishing zones”. So we decided to set up our own model for enforcement.’

Instead of relying on the over-worked coastguards, the Mediterranean Conservation Society employed local community volunteers, trained them, equipped them with boats,

uniforms, badges, radios and the latest real-time tracking technology, and sent them out to sea to operate alongside the official authorities. ‘They work with the coastguards,’ he continues. ‘They are the extension of the coastguards. They have no authority at all, for fining or confiscating anything.’



Proper enforcement of the ‘no fishing zones’ has been key to success in Gökova Bay, Turkey (Image: Whitley Fund for Nature)

This success in restoring local fish stocks gained the overwhelming backing from local residents, who began to profit economically from the significantly larger stocks of fish they were able to sell, by up to 400 per cent. Distant communities began to recognise the benefits of the NFZs, meaning Kizilkaya has repeatedly been asked to create similar projects in other regions of the Mediterranean. ‘We have already had requests from other communities,’ he recalls, ‘because they hear of amazing fishing in Gökova, that people are making a crazy amounts of money from fishing – while they’re starving over there. So they call us, “Why don't you come and establish no fishing zones here?”’ Kizilkaya has helped several fishing communities eliminate some of the most destruction fishing practices, such as trawling, and helping reduce by-catch, which also help protect the sensitive fish stocks.

As well as the financial and development benefits, much of the rest of the natural environment has returned to Gökova as well, such as sandbar sharks, loggerhead turtles, and monk seals – a critically endangered species which is down to less than an estimated 400 individuals in the world. Utilising underwater cameras has shown a steady recovery of the marine ecosystem. ‘The numbers are just skyrocketing, because nobody disturbs them, nobody is going fishing. There are no people around,’ says Kizilkaya.



Monk seals are one species returning to the waters around Gökova Bay following the establishment of the 'no fishing zones' (Image: Whitley Fund for Nature)

All of the above have been key factors in the awarding of the **2017 Gold Award to Kizilkaya**, which comes with a £50,000 grant to continue the success of Gökova Bay and the Mediterranean Conservation Society's other projects. One core goal going forward is to attempt replications of the NFZs in other parts of Turkey's waters – such as Fethiye Bay, to the southeast of Gökova – but also further afield. 'We have a big network, not only in the Mediterranean,' he explains. 'Last month we had a meeting with the North American and Caribbean marine protected areas. So it's going to snowball, we are exchanging ideas and strategies.'

Other winners at the **2017 Whitley Awards** were Purnima Barman for helping protect India's greater adjutant, Alexander Blanco for conserving Venezuela's harpy eagles, Sanjay Gubbi for reducing deforestation in India's tiger corridors, Indira Lacerna-Widmann for safeguarding the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo, Ian Little for protecting South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity, and Ximena Velez-Liendo for enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains.

iNews – Online Newspaper, UK
19 May 2017
(Over 2 million visitors per year)

<https://iNews.co.uk/essentials/news/environment/zaferkizilkaya/>

i News The Essential Daily Briefing

Meet Zafer Kizilkaya, the conservationist saving Turkey’s coastal ecosystem



Marine conservationist Zafer Kizilkaya (Picture: BBC)

Conrad Landin Friday May 19th 2017

Turkish delight?

You might say so. Zafer Kizilkaya has won the gold medal at the Whitley Awards – the “Green Oscars” – at the Royal Geographical Society in London. He was rewarded for his role in creating protected zones off Turkey’s Mediterranean coast.

He likes fish, then?

And they like him. “Fish loved me, but people didn’t,” said the marine research engineer and underwater photographer. Mr Kizilkaya (below) cut his teeth cave diving in Turkey’s Taurus mountains before working on tropical reefs in Indonesia. He is a director of the Mediterranean Conservation Society (MCS), which works to preserve the Mediterranean

ecosystem and supports communities to develop sustainable livelihoods through “locally appropriate” projects.

But the Med always looks pristine...

On the outside, maybe. Illegal fishing had led to the collapse of fish stocks, destroying the livelihoods of many people in Turkey’s Gökova Bay.

So how did Mr Kizilkaya fix it?

By establishing six no-fishing zones which became booming breeding grounds and nurseries for large numbers of fish, which then spilled into surrounding waters. Some species saw an eight-fold rise in numbers. “Nobody comes, nobody disturbs,” Mr Kizilkaya said. “Nobody anchors, nobody fishes. They just give an amazing amount of benefits.”

I bet that went down well with the fishermen...

“When we started this project, people definitely hate you,” Mr Kizilkaya added. But the zones received enthusiastic backing from residents once they started profiting from increased fish stocks. The MCS now has a large body of trained volunteers equipped with boats and real-time tracking gadgets.

What’s so special about Gökova?

Turkey’s coast is home to the Mediterranean monk seal, two of the eight global sea turtle species and the seagrass *Posidonia oceanica*. Now other places want to share the success. Mr Kizilkaya said: “Other communities have heard of the amazing fishing in Gökova, and that people are making crazy amounts of money from fishing while they are starving over there.”

OurBlueHeart – Marine Conservation Website
19 May 2017

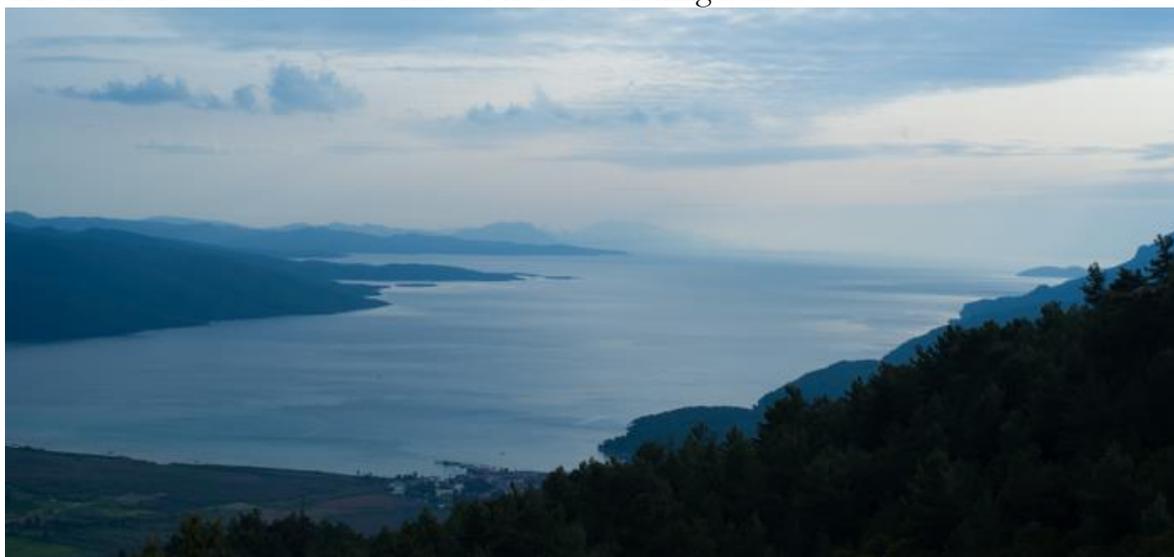
<http://ourblueheart.org/2017/05/19/interview-with-zafer-kizilkaya-gokova-marine-protected-area-turkey/>



MAY 19, 2017

INTERVIEW WITH ZAFER KIZILKAYA – GÖKOVA MPA, TURKEY

Gökova Marine Protected Area is located in Gökova Bay, on the Turkish Aegean coast. The MPA has an area of 830 km² with six no-fishing zones.



Gökova Bay, Mugla Province, Turkey.

In April 2017, I visited Gökova MPA and talked to Zafer Kizilkaya, the MPA manager. Zafer is a civil engineer, with an amazing knowledge of marine species and a passion for marine conservation. His very special hobby are wild orchids. He has worked in various projects for National Geographic as a science photographer before very special coincidences in Gökova Bay let him establish the NGO “Mediterranean Conservation Society”. He recently won the Whitley Fund for Nature Gold Award for his work protecting Turkey’s marine environment.

My curiosity to visit this MPA was high, because the combination of (1) an engineer who works in (2) marine conservation in a Mediterranean MPA where you can find (3) monk

seals (4) sandbar sharks, (5) marine turtles and (6) fishermen that are happy with no-fishing zones and even help to protect them was in my eyes very rare.

Zafer, if you had three wishes for the future of marine conservation, what would it be?

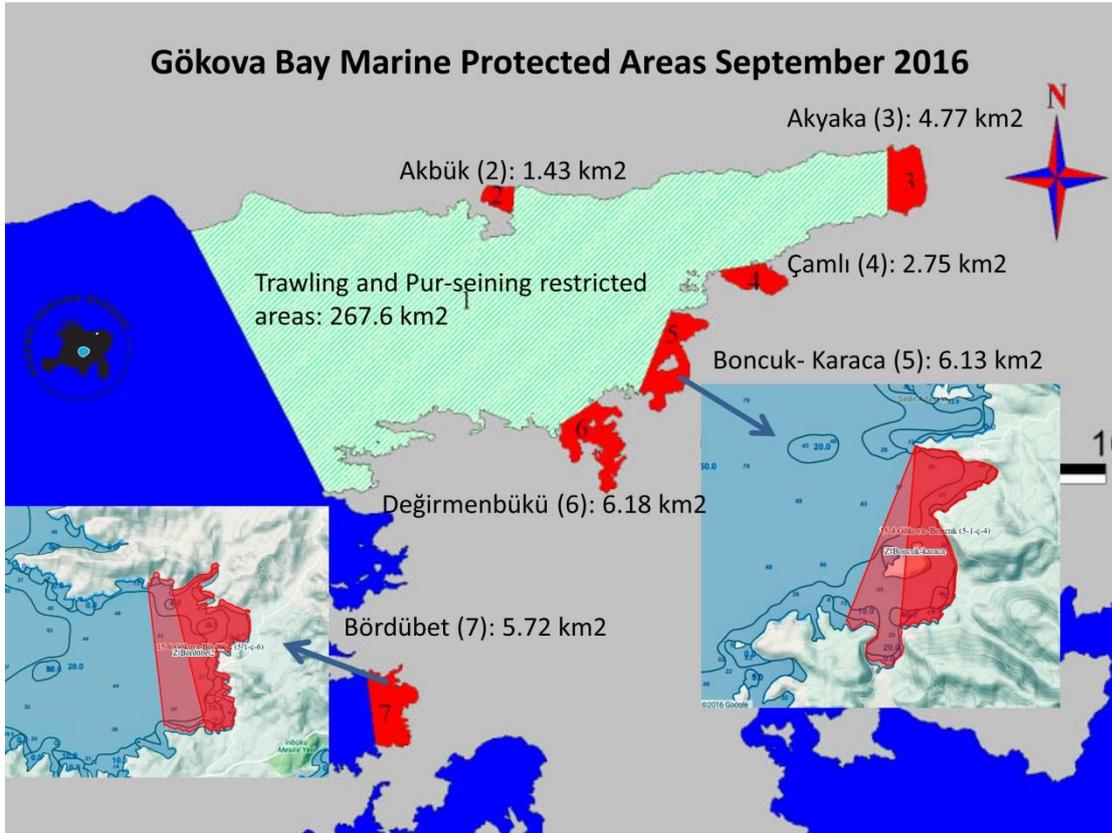
“I only need one single wish. World fisheries are subsidized with about 35 billion US dollars each year! About 16 billion US dollars would be needed to create no-fishing MPAs in 20% of our oceans. My wish would be to cut about half of the fisheries subsidies and use the money to establish those MPAs. In this way we would not only save our marine environment and our problem of depleting fish stocks and increasing seafood demand, but we would also create millions of new jobs.”



Zafer Kızılkaya with fisherman Atif in Gökova Bay.

Restrictions in Gökova MPA

Purse seining is prohibited in the MPA and trawling in most of the area. Diving and snorkelling are prohibited in the entire MPA. The reason is that otherwise it would be difficult to control illegal spear-fishing activities, especially with respect to the protection of sandbar sharks and groupers.



The six no-fishing zones and trawling and purse-seining restricted area of Gökova MPA.

How did you get the idea to establish an MPA in Gökova Bay?

“The whole story started with Badem, an orphaned Mediterranean monk seal pup whom we found in 2007. (The author uses *whom* here as Badem and seals in general seem to have human-like personalities). Because there was no seal rehabilitation center in Turkey at that time, I decided to establish one on my own, in Foça, near Izmir. My dear friend Mustafa Koc helped me to fund this project. When it was time to release Badem, I decided to release her in Gökova Bay, because it was the only place on the Turkish coast which I found on the map that has a minimum of human settlement in a large area.

[more..](#)



Zafer and Mediterranean Monk Seal Badem, Source: Zafer Kizilkaya, www.akdenizkoruma.org.tr

During all the time when I was in Gökova Bay, busy with Badem, I realized how beautiful this place is, but underwater there is nothing left! In 2008 I organized a quick assessment study for the entire Mediterranean in terms of environmental health, and it came out that Gökova had the smallest fish population of the entire Mediterranean. Coincidentally in the same year, fishery in Gökova Bay collapsed. At that point I decided to found our NGO “Mediterranean Conservation Society” and I started to convince people that the only solution to the problem is to establish no-fishing zones.

I explained the principle and benefit of no-fishing zones to the fishermen with the example of a bank account: “I you have money on your bank account, you will get some interest. If you don’t have any money in your account there will be no interest to benefit from”. In the beginning the discussions were very difficult, but after a year the fishermen agreed on six no-fishing zones. They government agreed to the plan, and in 2010 Turkey’s first six no-fishing zones were established.”

How is enforcement managed for the no-fishing zones?



No-fishing zone information board.

“Illegal fishing has been and still is our biggest problem. Officially it is the responsibility of the coast guard to prevent and fine any illegal fishing activities. However the coast guard was in the beginning very busy to deal with the refugee situation and there was not



Zafer with ranger Iskender on one of the speed boats used for patrolling.

enough capacity to look after the no-fishing zones. As a consequence we decided to set up our own ranger team. However the ministry told us that this was against Turkish law. But when I read the constitution I found out that every citizen has the right to stop or record any illegal activity. So we went to the coast guard and offered to them to be their helping hand by collecting evidence, by documenting and that they would only need to issue the fines. For our ranger team we had selected a group of local fishermen, because

they are the ones who know best where illegal fishing takes place. Based on these conditions, the coast guard agreed to our offer and over the years, we have been able to establish a very good collaboration with them.”



One of the six no-fishing zones.

What kind of people are involved in illegal fishing and how do you deal with them?

“We most frequently find private people, who look like amateurs but use professional equipment, which is totally illegal, followed by fishermen from other villages who know that there are a lot of fish inside the restricted areas and who just want to try their luck. We usually approach people with our boats and if they are new in the area and might just not know that they are in a restricted area, we inform them very friendly and politely and we give them educational brochures. A lot of these people later on call our rangers if they see any illegal activities, so this is becoming a big network of people looking after Gökova MPA. For people who are repeatedly trying to fish in the no-fishing areas, the coast guard will fine them and confiscate their gear.”

Have you started any Pescatourism activities in Gökova Bay?



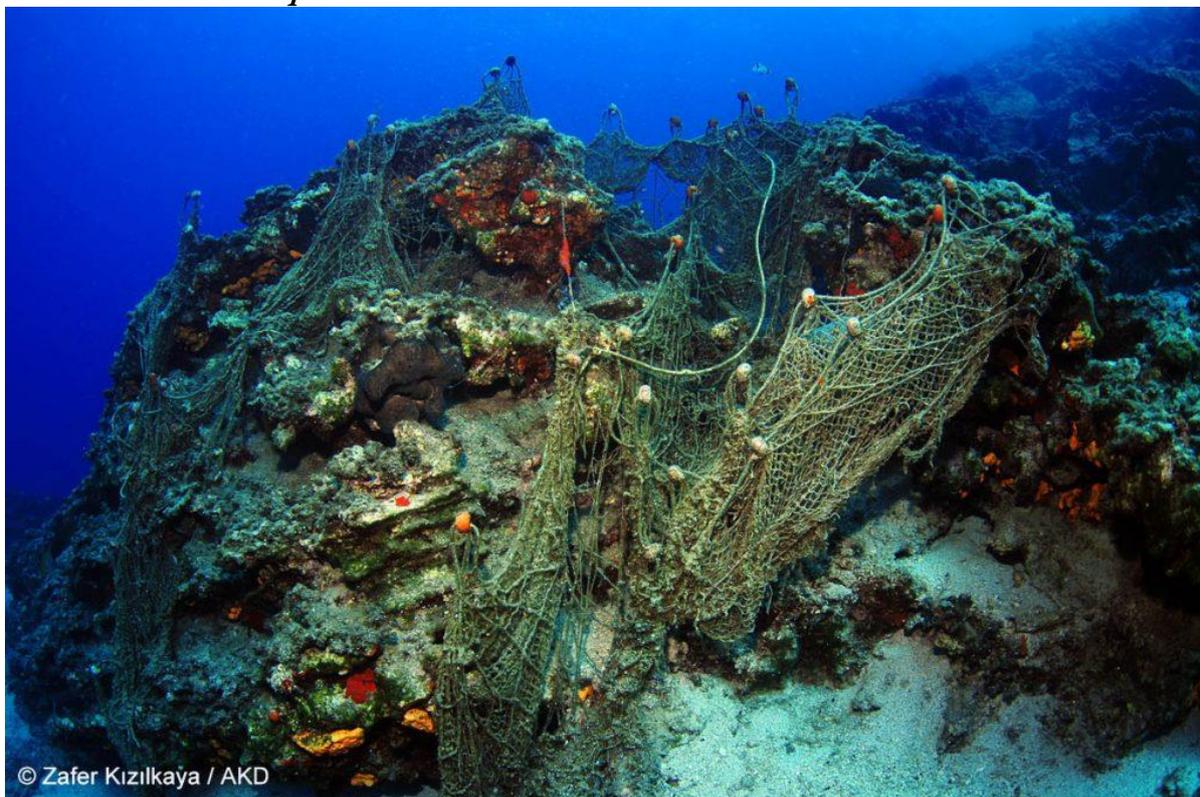
Reporters of German TV Deutsche Welle interviewing pescatourists participating the inauguration trip in Gökova Bay. Photo: Ozkan Anil

“Yes, we suggested to the Ministry of Fishery and Agriculture to run an experiment and to give pescatourism a try for a year with only one boat and to send them an evaluation report in the end. We used a boat that was donated by the Municipality of Akyaka and prepared it for pescatourism excursions. We trained 12 fishermen to do the tour and three UK tourism agencies agreed to sell the tour. Six tours could be successfully run with a good return, however, when the Municipality of Akyaka was integrated into the Municipality of Mugla, the latter did not want to continue with the project and confiscated the boat. We had to stop the project because of that. Fortunately the fishermen have and good and increasing revenues from their fishing activity since the establishment of the no-fishing areas.

What other projects have you initiated in Gökova MPA?

“We have various other projects including research projects, socioeconomic activities and ghost net clean-ups.”

Ghost Net Clean-Ups



Ghost nets covering the reefs in Gökova MPA. Photo: Zafer Kızılkaya

“There are kilometers of discarded fishing nets in Gökova Bay, even in the no-fishing zones. We do the cleaning all year around because there is a lot of gear left. There is maybe a 50 to 60 year history of discarded fishing gear down there. I can show you before-and-after videos of our cleaning activities.”

“Fisherwomen of the Aegean Sea”



Fisherwoman in Gökova Bay. Photo: Zafer Kızılkaya,

“In another project we support the fisherwomen in the bay. There are over 120 fisherwomen in Gökova, professional fisherwomen who spend over 300 days per year at the sea. They started in fishing activities to support their husbands, who most often could not afford to hire staff. In this way they became professional fisherwomen and they all have a fishing license. However they do not have social security, they do not know to swim and they do not know their rights. They work under very hard conditions with no toilets on the boats, and often they have to take their small children on the boat with them.

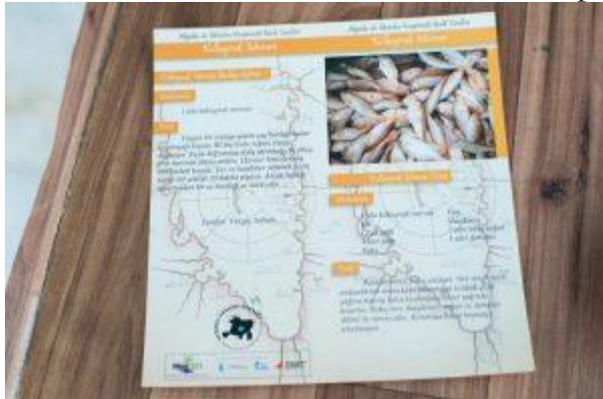
Invasive Species



Invasive Randall sea bream for sale at Akyaka's fishing cooperative.

“Also in Gökova Bay, like many other places in the world, we discovered rising water temperatures due to climate change in the last years. Two or three years ago, a new tropical fish species, Randall's threadfin bream appeared in the bay, together with two other invasive species. All in all we had five invasive species in the fishing nets which people did not want to buy because they do not know them. For that reason we decided to invite a couple of famous chefs who created recipes for these fish species. These species are actually very tasty, much better than the local fish. We organized a big fish

festival where we cooked 200 fish of these invasive species and we let people taste the dishes and ran a survey afterwards to get people’s feedback. In the week after the festival there was a massive demand for invasive fish species and right now, 35% of the fishermen’s income comes from invasive species.”



Leaflet with recipes for invasive fish species.

(Zafer laughs) “This became one of the most successful climate change adaption projects in the Mediterranean and we would like to replicate it in some other parts of Turkey, because it is so easy. In the entire world there is no successful example of an eradication of an invasive species. Once they come in, you have to learn how to adapt to them. I do not like the principle of trying to eradicate invasive species. It is not their fault and we have to realize that we are an invasive species as well.

Ecosystem restoration

“In addition, we have two other EU projects going on, one of them is about ecosystem restoration. There are 26 countries taking part in this project. In our MPA, the focus is on restoration of sea grass, certain sponge species and algae species. The rabbit fish represents a huge problem, as it is eating all the algae, so we have bare rocks, where we would normally have algae. In this project we work on the restoration of these three groups and measure our success over a four-year-period.”

Further success stories

“We created a What’s App group for the communications between us, our rangers and the coast guard. The coast guard people became so motivated for the work they are helping us with, that even after they are transferred to other areas every two years, they want to stay in our What’s App group and they want stay informed about what’s currently going on in Gökova MPA.”

How did you motivate fishermen for conservation and what is the secret of Gökova MPA’s success??

“In the beginning it was very difficult to motivate the fishermen for environmental protection. But once people see positive results, their motivation changes.



Zafer with fisherman Atif.

If you do the same steps as we did to establish our MPA, carefully and with the community, you can have the same success everywhere in Turkey. It is so easy! But of course, you need the government's support first, because the restricted areas have to be legally declared.

We always made sure to include the community. We educate people, we listen to them and we help them with their problems. Our rangers and fishermen are very happy to be part of the system, to have this responsibility to contribute to the protection of the environment and to the protection and improvement of their own and other fishermen's livelihoods."



Zafer talking to fishermen Samir and Taner.

What are the most important factors for the success of an MPA?

"Enforcement is very important. If we cannot ensure proper enforcement, the principle of no-fishing zones, to enhance the growth of fish populations, does not work, which is bad for our environment and for our fishermen. Additionally the situation becomes very unfair for our fishermen, because you let other people fish in their "bank account", which they are not allowed to touch.

The other crucial factor is to include the community, make them a part of the project, educate them, give them responsibilities, let them contribute, talk to them, listen to them and not to ignore their questions, doubts or problems.”

Sandbar shark conservation

With Boncuk Cove, Gökova MPA has one of the most important nursery grounds for sandbar sharks in the world. Sandbar sharks have a low reproduction rate and are therefore very vulnerable to overfishing, which can be in the form of direct fishing or as bycatch. Their global conservation status is Vulnerable (VU) and Endangered (EN) in the Mediterranean Sea.

“In our research projects, we are monitoring the sandbar shark population size and their behavior. The fishermen help us to determine bycatch ratios and we educate them in handling and releasing the sharks in bycatch situations to increase bycatch survival rates. The nursing grounds in Boncuk Cove are inside one of our no-fishing areas and our rangers patrol the area daily in cooperation with the coast guard to prevent illegal fishing.”



Sandbar shark in Gökova Bay.

Mediterranean monk seal

The Mediterranean Monk Seal is globally Endangered (EN). Deliberate killing of Monk Seals mainly by fishermen was responsible for one-third of all mortalities of 79 stranded animals in Greece (1991-1995) and is considered the single most important source of mortality for this species in the eastern Mediterranean (Androukaki *et al.* 1999). Deliberate killing, hunting, and capturing live animals for exhibition purposes were the main cause for the population reduction of the species in Turkey until 1980 (Kıraç *et al.* 2013). Other important threats for this species are habitat destruction due to coastal development and tourist activities (boat trips or scuba diving) to visit the caves where the seals are breeding.

“In Gökova MPA, monk seals are frequently seen on the underwater cameras which have been installed for the monitoring of sandbar sharks. The MPA is an attractive place for them because they find two important things: Lots of fish in the no-fishing zones and caves.”

BBC World Service – Website
19 May 2017

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/science-environment-39965535/2017-whitley-gold-award-winner-fish-loved-me-but-people-didn-t>



Ximena Velez Liendo

Bolivia

An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Savitri Waney Charitable Trust



Ximena received five pieces of press coverage, including an article in The Science Times. She also featured in two further articles alongside Indira Lacerna-Widmann. The following is a selection of her coverage.

Follow this [link](#) to see Ximena's WFN profile.

- WFN Press Release 101
- Print and Online 102

WFN's Press Release

Conservation leader from Bolivia wins 2017 Whitley Award

Prize awarded for enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains

London, UK: 17 May 2017 – HRH The Princess Royal will tomorrow present a Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35,000 in project funding, to Ximena Velez-Liendo at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, in honour of her work to enable the coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains.

Andean bears are also known as spectacled bears due to their facial markings. The Inter Andean Dry Forests represent an important stronghold for them as South America's only bear. Due to intensive human activity dating back to Inca times, this mountainous ecosystem is highly fragmented and is considered one of the most endangered tropical forests on Earth. In Tarija, Bolivia, up to 90% of people live in poverty and predation of precious livestock by native carnivores can sometimes lead to the killing of Andean bears in retaliation.

Ximena Velez-Liendo is Principal Researcher at the NGO PROMETA. With her Whitley Award she will generate the first population estimation for bears in the country using camera traps, and quantify human-bear conflict. The results will be used to support a national plan for the Andean bear recovery and develop strategies to enable coexistence with farmers.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "WFN focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for optimism. The Awards Ceremony is about recognising progress – winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning an Award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they are able to communicate effectively with the public and inform change at the political level."

<http://www.sciencetimes.com/articles/12239/20170412/bolivian-biologist-works-for-peaceful-co-existence-between-humans-and-bears.htm>

Bolivian Biologist Works For Peaceful Co-Existence Between Humans And Bears

R. Siva Kumar Apr 12, 2017 10:33 AM EDT



(Photo : YouTube.com) Andean spectacled bears are a threatened species.

One Bolivian biologist has an interesting task to promote harmony and co-existence between humans and spectacled or Andean bears, in Bolivia. It was Ximena Velez-Liendo, the Bolivian biologist, who spearheaded the "Conservation through Co-existence: Andean Bears and People" project. This was among the six finalists for Britain's Whitley Award. Some people even look at this as the "Oscars" of conservation. The top Whitley Award winner will be announced on May 18.

This interesting project by the Bolivian biologist explores issues and conflicts between Andean bears, called the Jucumari in Bolivia and humans, according to EFE. The Andean bears are consumers of plants, fruit, mammals, birds and insects. However, they even attack cattle and hence might be in danger of being put to death by farmers. The bears have been blamed for the loss of livestock in the various farms in countries such as Bolivia and other places in South America, according to Bearbiology. Scientists, such as the Bolivian biologist, say that even small populations of bears can cause conflicts.

"What the project is doing is evaluating the level of conflict, how much cattle people lose and determining how to reduce (the losses) based on the analysis," the Bolivian biologist Velez-Liendo told EFE.

In 1999, she spotted one of the spectacled bears when she was busy working on her thesis at Carrasco National Park in Cochabamba. This was a region situated in the central part of Bolivia. "It was the first time I was in the field and the first time I saw a bear. That was and is the most beautiful memory I have up to now," the Bolivian biologist told EFE.

These strange and rare animals are the only bears of the species that live in South America. They are said to be threatened, as the number of their population is very low, as the Bolivian biologist found. Other bears that live in tropical Andean areas in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru include the Spectacled bears. They sport light fur around their eyes. This makes them look as if they are wearing eyeglasses.

<http://www.laprensa.com.bo/medio-ambiente/20170519/boliviana-gana-premio-whitley-su-trabajo-osos-andinos>



Catherine Camacho

Boliviana gana el Premio Whitley por su trabajo con osos andinos

19 Mayo 2017

La boliviana Ximena Velez Liendo ganó el Premio Whitley 2017 otorgado por la Fundación Whitley para la Naturaleza (WFN, por sus siglas en inglés) por su trabajo de investigación sobre los osos andinos en nuestro país.

La orureña Velez Liendo, Ph.D. en biología, junto a otros cinco finalistas —de diferentes países— recibieron ayer el reconocimiento y el premio de manos de la Princesa Real Ana en la sede del Royal Geographical Society, en Londres (Reino Unido).

WFN les otorgó cerca de 50.000 dólares a cada uno para financiar sus respectivos proyectos.

Los premios Whitley apoyan proyectos enfocados en la conservación de la naturaleza.

"Estoy muy feliz, por mis poros ya no puede brotar más alegría", expresa Velez mediante un breve contacto por Facebook.

"Conservación a través de la coexistencia: Osos andinos y gente en Bolivia" es el nombre del proyecto ganador que viene desarrollando junto a la ONG Prometa, el Zoológico de Chester

(Inglaterra) y la Unidad de Investigación para la Conservación de la Fauna Silvestre de la Universidad de Oxford (WildCRU).

"Este premio nos va a permitir seguir investigando por un años más, podremos hacer el plan de acción para la conservación del oso andino e incluir en el estudio la parte sud de Chuquisaca", comenta emocionada la experta que por 17 años estudia a esta especie en Bolivia y Sudamérica.

Explica que al oso andino (*Tremarctos ornatus*) se lo conoce como el jardinero de los Andes porque su principal función es ser dispersor de semillas. Es una especie en peligro de extinción, está en la categoría de "vulnerable".

Su pasión por los osos nació en 1999, cuando realizaba su tesis en el Parque Nacional Carrasco (en Cochabamba) vio por primera vez un oso. "Ahí empezó mi fascinación y más cuando aprendí sobre su ecología y su rol en el ecosistema. Es una especie clave y donde hay osos, en teoría, el ecosistema está saludable", dice.

"Estos premios son los más prestigiosos y competitivos dentro el mundo de la conservación porque se dan a personas que trabajan en proyectos que tienen un impacto fuerte en sus regiones", dice la investigadora asociada de WildCRU.

"Es un premio bien importante no sólo por la parte económica que ayuda a desarrollar el proyecto como tal, sino que como es considerado una especie de 'Oscar Verde' te da mucha visibilidad, mucha credibilidad ante futuros proyectos que uno pueda presentar (...), te abre muchas puertas", comenta Luis Aguirre, uno de los ganadores de este premio en 2007.

En esta versión, se presentaron 166 proyectos (de 76 países) al Premio Whitley, de los cuales eligieron 15 y de estos últimos, seis proyectos pasaron a la ronda de los finalistas, los cuales resultaron ganadores.

Alexander Blanco (de Venezuela), Ian Little (de Sud África), Purnima Barman y Sanjay Gubbi (ambos de India) e Indira Lacerna-Widmann (de Filipinas) son los otros ganadores de los Premios Whitley 2017.

Otros ganadores en Bolivia

Anteriormente, la investigación en Bolivia se benefició en cinco oportunidades del Premio Whitley. Cuatro bolivianos y una británica realizaron estudios en el país apoyados por WFN. En 1997, la británica Susanna Paisley. En 2003, Inés Hinojosa, y en 2007, Luis Aguirre, Lizette Siles y Ericka Cuellar, con estudios independientes.

Shropshire Star – Local Print & Online Newspaper, UK
24 June 2017

<https://www.shropshirestar.com/entertainment/attractions/2017/06/24/bear-emerges-from-its-den-at-zoo/>

Shropshire Star

Bear emerges from its den at zoo

Published: Jun 24, 2017

This adorable bear is the first of its kind to be born in mainland Great Britain.



Andean bear

The rare cub which is yet to be sexed, arrived to parents Lima, five, and Bernardo, seven, in January and, after spending months snuggled away in its den, has now started to venture out and explore for the first time.

Made famous in the UK through the classic children's character Paddington Bear, the Andean bear is the only bear to inhabit South America. They are found in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

The species is listed as vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and conservation experts from the zoo say the birth of the cub is especially significant given how threatened the species is.

Tim Rowlands, curator of mammals at the zoo, said: “The cub was tiny when it was born but Lima is doing a fantastic job, particularly given that she’s a first time mum, and the cub is developing quickly. Lima is keeping her new charge close and she certainly has her paws full. But even though she’s not letting it stray too from her side, we can already see that her cub has a real playful side.

“This is a momentous breeding success for us. To become the first zoo in mainland Great Britain to ever breed the species is an amazing achievement – one that has taken years of careful planning, dedication and skill.

“Andean bears are still something of mystery to conservationists and not a huge amount is known about them. But by working closely with the bears here, breaking new ground with this breeding, we’re constantly learning about this amazing species. We’re able to relay much of this information to our field conservation teams and partners in the wild, and it’s information that could be very important in terms of ensuring a long-term future for the bears.”

Population estimates for the species were last made a decade ago, placing wild numbers at just 20,000. Conservation scientists are convinced that their numbers have since continued to decrease but are currently unsure of exactly how many remain in the wild.

The main threat to the Andean bear is habitat loss, with some 30% of the forests that contain sufficient food having disappeared in the past 20 years. Hundreds of bears are also illegally killed by farmers and business owners every year, largely to prevent them raiding crops and livestock - believed to be a result of climate change which has created a food shortage in the bears’ natural habitat.

Mike Jordan, collections director at the zoo, added: “Scientists and conservation experts from Chester Zoo are currently working with Oxford University’s Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU) to study bear-human conflict for the very first time in an area of dry forest in Bolivia.

“Given the ever increasing threats to its long-term survival, we must take action for the Andean bear and further its conservation and this is a hugely important first step.”

Chester Zoo field conservationist, Dr Ximena Velez-Liendo, who leads the project in Bolivia, was recently celebrated at the prestigious Whitley Awards, often referred to as the Green Oscars.

Alexander Blanco

Venezuela

Nest protectors: conserving Venezuela’s magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by the William Brake Charitable Trust in memory of William Brake

Alexander received four pieces of press coverage, including two articles on the prestigious environmental website Mongabay.com and a slot on BBC radio programme, Outlook.. He also featured in a joint article with Ximena Velez-Liendo.

To see Alexander’s WFN profile, please follow this [link](#):

- **WFN Press Release** **109**
- **Print and Online** **111**
- **TV & Radio** **120**

Conservation leader from Venezuela wins 2017 Whitley Award

Prize awarded for conserving Venezuela's magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship

London, UK: 17 May 2017 – HRH The Princess Royal will tomorrow present a Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35,000 in project funding, to Alexander Blanco at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, in honour of his work to conserve the Venezuelan harpy eagle.

Wildlife scientist and veterinarian Alexander Blanco has been working with harpy eagles since 1996. Some may remember him from the BBC wildlife documentary "The Hunt" where he was filmed climbing 40 metre high trees to tag eagle chicks - a hazardous occupation as the episode highlights when Alexander's equipment fails and he falls from a great height. Alexander has helped to conserve these iconic birds in Brazil and Ecuador as well as in his native Venezuela, where he is President of the Esfera Foundation and leads a national programme to protect these raptors.

Harpy eagles have become rare in many parts of their range where poverty, hunting, the country's political instability and a resulting lack of law enforcement have led to a sharp increase in illegal deforestation. In Venezuela, an area of forest bigger than central London is lost every week. Alexander's long term vision is to develop protection strategies delivered by local people so that conservation is more resilient to economic and political turbulence. His Whitley Award will cement the harpy eagle as a flagship species. In doing so, Alexander hopes to protect a greater number of nesting sites, recruiting local people as nest guardians and limit deforestation by supporting livelihoods in shade-coffee and through forest restoration.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "WFN focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for optimism. The Awards Ceremony is about recognising progress –

winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning an Award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they are able to communicate effectively with the public and inform change at the political level."

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/05/a-whitley-award-winners-20-year-battle-to-save-the-worlds-largest-eagle-in-venezuela/>

MONGABAY

A Whitley Award winner's 20-year battle to save the world's largest eagle in Venezuela

18 May 2017 / **Bruno Moraes**

A love for biodiversity and a life dedicated to caring for nature has earned Alexander Blanco the honor of receiving the 2017 Whitley Award.



- *The Whitley, which has been nicknamed “the Green Oscars,” is one of the biggest and most important awards in the conservation world.*
- *Alexander says he is honored to have received such recognition for his work: “I have devoted my entire life as a student and, after that, in the professional field, to the conservation of the biological diversity and to the dissemination of its importance and role as an essential element of the planet.”*
- *Alexander studied veterinary medicine and was determined to specialize in working with wild animals. It was while rehabilitating harpy eagles at a Venezuelan zoo that he had his first contact with these magnificent birds of prey.*

When Fábio Olmos talks about a “civilizing leap” in his article titled “The country in which feeding birds is a crime” (in Portuguese), he’s talking about a coming age when all forms of life will be seen as fellows on our journey through the cosmos, with the same right to existence. He’s talking about old ideas of so-called “environmental philosophy.” But, as many other good innovations proposed by the “hippie dream” of the 60s, we are still waiting for this ethical expansion to happen for a big portion of humankind. This does not apply to Alexander Blanco, however.

Just like his mentor Eduardo Álvarez Cordero (read more about Eduardo in part one of this two-part series), Alexander grew up in close relationship with wild things and natural phenomena. “I was raised in the field, and my parents always encouraged an active care for nature,” he says. A life dedicated to this care fits perfectly a person with a great love for biodiversity, and the combination of this passion with decades of hard work has earned Alexander the honor of receiving the 2017 Whitley Award.

The Whitley, which has been nicknamed “the Green Oscars,” is one of the biggest and most important awards in the conservation world. Alexander says he is honored to have received such recognition for his work: “I have devoted my entire life as a student and, after that, in the professional field, to the conservation of the biological diversity and to the dissemination of its importance and role as an essential element of the planet.”

Driven by this personal philosophy, Alexander studied veterinary medicine, determined to specialize in working with wild animals. It was while rehabilitating harpy eagles at a Venezuelan zoo that he had his first contact with these magnificent birds of prey. Interested in learning more about the biology, ecology, and behavior of the species, Alexander learned that the main authority and pioneer researcher on the topic of harpy eagles was his fellow countryman, Eduardo Álvarez. When Eduardo gave a lecture at Simon Bolívar University, Alexander had the opportunity to meet the renowned biologist, and shortly after joined the staff of the Harpy Eagle Conservation Program.

A few months later, an invitation came from Eduardo, Alexander says: “They found an active nest with a young animal [that] was at the ideal age for banding and for the attachment of a satellite transmitter. It was the opportunity to band my first wild eagle and evaluate the habitat where it lived. We were able to stop the deforestation close to the nest, preserve the forest, and attach a satellite-based monitoring device on the chick. And we also created a small, protected area close to the nest, inside a logging concession. From this moment on, with the satisfaction of accomplishing all of these goals, I was inspired to keep working. It’s been more than twenty years dedicated to protecting this eagle and its environment.”



Doctors Eduardo Álvarez Cordero (left) and Alexander Blanco (right) in the field. Photo courtesy of Eduardo Álvarez Cordero and Alexander Blanco.

Alexander summarizes what he learned about working close to these nests over the past twenty years: “The first platforms we built were situated between thirty to forty meters away from the nesting tree. As the years passed, we kept shortening the distance and we managed to build platforms in trees and towers only fifteen meters away from the nest, with no harm to the activities of the eagles on their kingdom of heights.”

In the kingdom of heights

“The twenty nests which are open to visits already had students, locals, researchers, photographers, filmmakers, and ecotourists. Always silent and respectful, observing the eagles in their nests, from platforms installed between 15 and 25 meters away from the nesting tree, at the same height. In none of those twenty nests we’ve seen any sign of discomfort for the eagles, and there was no case of nest abandonment,” Alexander explains.

In fact, as Eduardo had already highlighted, more extreme cases exist. “For making his first harpy eagle movie, Neil Rettig — the award-winning nature filmmaker and author of the world’s second scientific paper on harpy eagles — had built a platform right on the nesting tree, and he got the whole movie done. This was during the 70s, and it’s still one of the best footage of harpy eagles we have. And the eagles didn’t get stressed, nothing happened.”

Neil Rettig became a kind of mentor to Eduardo, taking the then-young biologist to nests and imparting everything he knew about monitoring harpy eagles. The platform used in Rettig's film was actually a mere 8.5 meters away from a nest with a chick. Thanks to this, it was possible to observe in detail the aspects of parental care and the process that turns a young eagle to a mature individual. Obviously, no one is suggesting that tourists should get this close to the eagles, but the fact that it's possible to come so close while carrying old filming equipment without bothering the animals is really exciting. Compared to that, a group of silent birders observing the nest 20 meters away wouldn't mean anything for the eagles.

Still, caution is needed. Alexander confirms what Eduardo has said in the past: "We don't approach nests which are on the phases of building and rebuilding, or when the female is about to lay or in the process of incubating the eggs. When we find a nest which is not going through any of those phases, the first thing we do is to assess the adaptability degree of the eagles. We do this by performing small tests, like the approach of only one person at a large distance like 100 to 150 meters. This allows us to monitor them for our research and for the activities of controlled and sustainable ecotourism activities."

Alexander takes this to a bigger scale. The possible results are unbelievable. "Each well-managed nest can receive hundreds of people a year. Having a lot of located nests which are also protected and monitored, to be sure there aren't any negative effects to the eagles' behavior, some thousands of people a year could observe nests from minimal distances of 20 to 30 meters. It is likely there are enough nests to create a new green industry which could help the protection of the forests."



A juvenile harpy eagle who's starting to explore the neighborhood of its nest. Photo courtesy of Bruno Moraes.

The eagle that resists

When I ask Alexander what impresses him most about harpy eagles, I have no idea what he will say. Harpy eagles, also called “goddesses of the wind” in the Imataca region, are more than simply gigantic eagles. Something as majestic as seeing one of these adult eagles arriving at the nest with prey for its young is a unique experience in the life of a birder or photographer. The eagles specialize in sudden and powerful dives, and is capable of plucking heavy prey like sloths and big monkeys right off of tree branches. This caught the attention of the Swiss naturalist Carl Linnaeus, who christened the species with a mythological reference: the harpies, winged specters of ancient Greek mythology, who suddenly captured people and punished them in the name of Zeus. We don’t know exactly what the sloths and capuchin monkeys did to upset Zeus this much, but harpy eagles have flown over South and Central American forests for over a million years, hunting these animals way before human arrival.

“What impresses me the most about the harpy eagles is the capacity they have to resist and adapt to changes on their habitat,” Alexander says. “In spite of all the hardships they face, these eagles have the capacity of keeping their unconquerable spirit intact, giving them a reason to survive.”

In the course of his work, Alexander once suffered a serious, near-fatal fall from 35 meters high — a fall that was caught on film during the shoot of the BBC documentary ‘The Hunt.’ “It was a fluke accident, but against all odds, I somehow survived and have bounced back,” he says. “Of course the probability of surviving a fall of 35 meters is very small, but I was very lucky.

“The fall was caused by human error on the ground, when someone outside my own ropes team foolishly untied a critical rope without checking with me, and I fell all the way from the nest to the forest floor while trying to hold a baby harpy eagle in my arms. I suffered fractures of my femur, my radius, and my ulna, as well as serious bruises and a bad concussion. The eagle that I was cradling in my arms popped free during my fall and flapped its partially-grown wings enough to land softly next to me without experiencing any injuries whatsoever.

“This kind of accident never should occur, but despite all precautions, bad things sometimes happen.”

There is also another kind of risk when you’re climbing up to harpy eagle nests. A kind that is much harder to avoid. “The first time I was attacked was in the 90s, and I was climbing a tree. The nest was active, with a really small chick born just a few days before. I had already climbed three-quarters of the way up to the nest when the mother eagle, who had been sitting on her nestling to keep it warm, flew off the nest and attacked me.

On the first and second passes, I managed to avoid her talons, but by then, I was spinning on the rope and she took advantage of my vulnerability to hit me hard with one foot, tearing a 3-inch-long gash in my back, even puncturing one of my lungs. Fortunately, I recovered without serious problems.” Over the years, Alexander has suffered two further attacks by harpies, but without significant injuries.

Real conservation



Alexander Blanco climbing a tree to access a nest. Photo courtesy of Eduardo Álvarez Cordero and Alexander Blanco.

This resistance to human presence is what allowed the Harpy Eagle Conservation Program to monitor the animals with observation platforms. It is also what allowed the flourishing of a tourism industry that shifted the desperate scenario Eduardo saw in the 80s.

“After so many years telling people about the project, everybody in town knows where the harpy eagles are and where the harpy eagle people are,” says Eduardo. Having in mind the former rate of eagle killings, which alarmed him so much it became the basis for his PhD dissertation, Eduardo says the transition has been incredible. “So now people come to report any problem, and the discovery of a new nest. And that’s how we find nests, and it’s the best way of finding more of them. So, eventually, everyone is protecting the eagles, and everyone knows that if you mess with the eagles, you’re going to get into trouble. This is real conservation.”

Alexander Blanco, after working in a project with such impressive positive results for biodiversity and people, articulates a beautiful call to action:

“The forces of destruction are huge, gigantic, and there are a lot of private and public economic interests which are based on exploring natural resources (gold, diamonds, coltan, wood, among others). A lot of those, under the premise of sustainable development, are actually destroying primary forests. We have to do something... By

combining scientific inquiry, environmental education, local communities, and ecotourism, among other measures, we can make a positive change on the collective thinking, directed to the conservation of the ecosystems.”

One of the most iconic stories about harpy eagles, hardship, and survival is that of the orphaned juvenile harpy eagle Pancho, who thrived even after the loggers who chopped down the tree holding his nest went away, taking with them the plucked chickens they once fed him as a sort of atonement for having destroyed his home. Like other harpy eagles transitioning between the juvenile and adult ages, he had no option but to catch his own food. But he had no harpy eagles to teach him the proper way to hunt.

“I have a photograph somewhere of Eduardo, the logger, next to Pancho on the ground,” says Eduardo, the scientist. “It seems that he survived for a while by hitting the ground and hunting lizards, snakes, whatever he could find there. That was the way he fed himself to survive. His feathers and tail feathers were muddy and all broken up. He turned into a roadrunner, hunting on the ground.”

The small harpy eagle who survived the fall of a tree and was rehabilitated by loggers took some time before becoming a “wind goddess” and starting to capture the prey for which those talons were made. But Pancho did it, reinforcing the point that these eagles can tolerate even this kind of situation.

“That bird is somewhere in the forest, with a big band on his leg. It is the furthest place from Imataca that I ever went, and it’s not an easy place to go anymore, because the bridges are gone. But Pancho is out there, making a living as an adult, I’m sure. And he was completely saved and hacked by the loggers,” says the man who started, with courage and bold ideas, the project that reconciled harpy eagles and people.

<http://rioverde.com.ve/?l=articulo&id=164&categoria=destacado>



Alexander Blanco Gana el Premio WHITLEY 2017

Rio Verde

Alexander Blanco y su equipo de Fundación Esfera, resultaron ganadores del premio Whitley 2017 y recibieron por su gran labor un merecido reconocimiento a los años dedicados a la protección y conservación del Aguila Harpia en Venezuela.

Alexander graduado de medicina veterinaria, decidido desde muy joven especializarse en el trabajo con animales salvajes. En un programa de rehabilitación de águilas arpías en un zoológico venezolano descubrió cuál sería su camino para proteger estas magníficas aves.

Hoy muchos años de trabajo dedicados a esta loable labor, desde golpes y caídas, falta de recursos y mucho esfuerzo, Alexander y la Fundación Esfera reciben un espaldarazo a su Proyecto. compartimos para ustedes el link de la entrega de premios en su idioma original.

Outlook, BBC World Service – Radio Programme, UK
15 August 2017

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05cggfr>

BBC WORLD SERVICE Outlook

On Now: World Update
LISTEN Trump Blames Charlottesville Violence on Bot

Outlook Home More



02:02 / 08:13

The bullet-proof vet protecting harpy eagles

Alexander Blanco has spent the last two decades trying to protect harpy eagles in Venezuela. They make their nest high up in the trees and occasionally attack adventurous humans, like Alexander, who've climbed up into the canopy to check on their nests.

Image: Alexander Blanco holding a harpy eagle whilst trying doing a health check.
Credit: Alexander Blanco/Fundación Esfera

This clip is from



Ian Little

South Africa

Custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Garfield Weston Foundation



Garfield Weston
FOUNDATION

Ian received 11 pieces of press coverage, including several South African newspapers and radio interviews with South African station, Cape Talk and Classic FM South Africa. He also featured in a joint article with Indira Lacerna Widmann. The following is a selection of Ian's coverage.

To see Ian's Whitley profile follow this [link](#):

- **WFN Press Release** 122
- **Print and Online** 124
- **TV & Radio** 137

Conservation leader from South Africa wins 2017 Whitley Award

Prize awarded for protecting South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity

London, UK: 17 May 2017 – HRH The Princess Royal will tomorrow present a Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35,000 in project funding, to Ian Little at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, in honour of his work to protect South Africa's threatened grasslands.

Demand for fresh water is expected to outstrip supply in South Africa by 2025. The Eastern Great Escarpment of South Africa provides catchment services for three of the country's largest rivers, making it a vital source of water for cities such as Durban and Johannesburg in one of the world's most arid nations. As the world's third most biodiverse country, these grasslands support a plethora of plants and animals found nowhere else, including golden moles and the sungazer lizard. Despite their importance, less than 3% of grasslands in South Africa are protected. Intensive livestock farming, coal mining and gas exploration are inflicting untold damage – with fracking now an imminent threat.

Ian Little of the Endangered Wildlife Trust works with farmers to champion conservation of grassland habitat. Working with farmers and tribal leaders, Ian is building capacity for sustainable farming and introducing improved management practices, such as less intensive grazing and burning regimes to decrease pressure on grasslands and boost productivity. He has already secured 60,000 hectares of grassland for conservation purposes; a figure Ian plans to increase with his Whitley Award by creating a corridor of legally protected areas linking with others along the escarpment. In doing so he will safeguard these grasslands and the important source of freshwater they provide.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "WFN focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for optimism. The Awards Ceremony is about recognising progress –

winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning an Award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they are able to communicate effectively with the public and inform change at the political level."

Times Live – Online Newspaper, South Africa
7 May 2017

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/scitech/2017/05/07/South-African-shortlisted-for-%E2%80%98green-oscar%E2%80%99-award>



South African shortlisted for ‘green oscar’ award

07 May, 2017 13:01



Rhino. File photo.

Image by: CHRISTIAN HARTMANN / REUTERS

A South African has been shortlisted for the world’s most high profile conservation award.

Commonly known as the “Green Oscars”, Dr Ian Little of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) stands to win £35,000 in project funding from the Whitley Fund for Nature at a ceremony in London later this month. Little, senior manager of the habitats programme at the EWT, was one of six selected from 169 applicants worldwide.

The six nominees include a Philippines project that entails partnering with prisoners to safeguard the critically endangered Philippine cockatoo; and an Indian project working on reducing deforestation in Karnataka’s tiger corridors.

Little has been selected for his work as a custodian of South Africa’s threatened grassland biodiversity. Should he not take home an award, Little will not return empty handed. Whitley will present him with a documentary on the work of the EWT, narrated by veteran broadcaster and naturalist Sir David Attenborough. The documentary will be available on Youtube following the award ceremony.

Sir David is a Trustee of the organisation.

The awards are presented by the organisation’s patron, Britain’s Princess Anne.

Little said that although he felt he was “standing on the shoulders” of the many others who had worked alongside him, the prize was an opportunity to meet influential people in the world of conservation. “Even if I don’t win, the link to the Whitley network will help us find key donors and give us more clout at home.”

The Whitley Fund for Nature gives ongoing support to outstanding nature conservationists around the developing world. The charity aims to find and fund the most effective grassroots conservation leaders committed to precipitating long-lasting conservation benefits on the ground and who have a track record of success.

The project being assessed by Whitley for the award is the EWT’s biodiversity stewardship programme where landowners with intact habitat voluntarily enter their land into a protected area network which will be managed for biodiversity. The process is a legally binding agreement with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

“The award money will be used to help create a corridor joining the existing protected areas along the Drakensberg escarpment all the way to the Maluti in the Free State,” said Little.

The event takes place at an evening ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society in London on Thursday May 18.

<http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/princess-anne-crowns-south-african-conservationist-a-winner-2017-05-18>



Princess Anne crowns South African conservationist a winner

18TH MAY 2017

BY: AFRICAN NEWS AGENCY

HRH The Princess Royal, Princess Anne on Thursday presented a Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35 000 in project funding, to Ian Little at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, in honour of his work to protect South Africa's threatened grasslands.

Demand for fresh water is expected to outstrip supply in South Africa by 2025.

The Eastern Great Escarpment of South Africa provides catchment services for three of the country's largest rivers, making it a vital source of water for cities such as Durban and Johannesburg in one of the world's most arid nations.

As the world's third most bio-diverse country, these grasslands support a plethora of plants and animals found nowhere else, including golden moles and the sungazer lizard.

Despite their importance, less than 3% of grasslands in South Africa are protected.

Intensive livestock farming, coal mining and gas exploration are inflicting untold damage – with fracking now an imminent threat.

Little – of the Endangered Wildlife Trust – works with farmers to champion conservation of grassland habitat.

Working with farmers and tribal leaders, Little is building capacity for sustainable farming and introducing improved management practices, such as less intensive grazing and burning regimes to decrease pressure on grasslands and boost productivity.

He has already secured 60 000 ha of grassland for conservation purposes; a figure Little plans to increase with his Whitley Award by creating a corridor of legally protected areas linking with others along the escarpment.

In doing so he will safeguard these grasslands and the important source of fresh water they provide.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: “WFN focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for optimism. The Awards Ceremony is about recognising progress – winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level.

“In addition to the financial benefit of winning an award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they are able to communicate effectively with the public and inform change at the political level,” added Whitley.

Little is one of six individuals to have been awarded a share of the prize money worth £210 000, winning the Whitley Award donated by the Garfield Weston Foundation.

Independent Online – Online Newspaper, South Africa
18 May 2017

<http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/sa-conservationist-wins-prestigious-international-award-9204409>



SA conservationist wins prestigious international award

South Africa | 18 May 2017, 11:33am

Mel Frykberg

Johannesburg – HRH The Princess Royal, Princess Anne on Thursday presented a Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35 000 (about R612 000) in project funding, to Ian Little at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, in honour of his work to protect South Africa's threatened grasslands.

Demand for fresh water is expected to outstrip supply in South Africa by 2025.

The Eastern Great Escarpment of South Africa provides catchment services for three of the country's largest rivers, making it a vital source of water for cities such as Durban and Johannesburg in one of the world's most arid nations.



HRH The Princess Royal, Princess Anne presented a prestigious international nature conservation prize to South African conservation Ian Little. Picture: Reuters / Matthew Childs

As the world's third most bio-diverse country, these grasslands support a plethora of plants and animals found nowhere else, including golden moles and the sungazer lizard.

Despite their importance, less than 3 percent of grasslands in South Africa are protected. Intensive livestock farming, coal mining and gas exploration are inflicting untold damage – with fracking now an imminent threat.

Little – of the Endangered Wildlife Trust – works with farmers to champion conservation of grassland habitat.

Working with farmers and tribal leaders, Little is building capacity for sustainable farming and introducing improved management practices, such as less intensive grazing and burning regimes to decrease pressure on grasslands and boost productivity.

He has already secured 60 000 hectares (about 600km squared) of grassland for conservation purposes; a figure Little plans to increase with his Whitley Award by creating a corridor of legally protected areas linking with others along the escarpment.

In doing so he will safeguard these grasslands and the important source of freshwater they provide.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "WFN focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for optimism."

The Awards Ceremony is about recognising progress – winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level.

“In addition to the financial benefit of winning an award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they are able to communicate effectively with the public and inform change at the political level,” added Whitley.

Little is one of six individuals to have been awarded a share of the prize money worth £210,000 (about R3million), winning the Whitley Award donated by the Garfield Weston Foundation.

<http://www.sapeople.com/2017/05/20/south-africas-dr-ian-little-wins-green-oscars-award-london/>

SA people news

Your Worldwide South African Community

South Africa's Dr Ian Little WINS 'Green Oscars' Award in London

May 20, 2017

Congratulations to Dr Ian Little of South Africa's Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), who won an international Whitley Award in London this week. The Awards are popularly known as the Green Oscars as they are presented to individuals who've achieved excellent results in nature conservation.



Winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Garfield Weston Foundation, Ian Little: Custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity. Presented by Princess Anne. Source: whitleyaward.org

Through EWT, Ian works with farmers and tribal leaders in South Africa to protect grasslands, one of the most threatened habitats in the country.

He has been involved in introducing simple changes in management practices, such as altering burning and livestock grazing regimes to decrease pressure on grasslands.

UK-based charity, the Whitley Fund for Nature, has been presenting the Whitley Award/Green Oscars since 1984.

This year, the award recipients included six conservationists chosen from a pool of over 166 applicants from all over the world. Each of these conservationists have spent years trying to devise innovative ways of protecting species at risk of extinction and securing critical habitats.

At an awards ceremony held this week at the Royal Geographic Society in London, each winner – including Ian – received £35,000 in project funding to help scale up their work.

Watch the video below, narrated by Sir David Attenborough, which highlights the important work Ian has been doing. As Sir Attenborough says “the world faces a growing shortage of fresh water” and nowhere is this issue more acute than in South Africa where demand for fresh water is expected to outstrip supply by 2025.

Ian was born and brought up on SA’s Great Escarpment – which is one of the country’s vital sources of fresh water, distributed to urban areas like Joburg and Cape Town. As a biologist he now strives to conserve the area which is threatened by poaching, fracking exploration, livestock farming and coal mining.

His fieldwork is already changing the fortunes of endangered wildlife in the area, and with his Whitley Award prize, Ian is determined to establish an extensive system of legally protected grassland, defending its water from the threats of industrial pollution.

University of Cape Town News – University Website, South Africa
26 May 2017

<https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2017-05-24-dr-ian-little-receives-a-green-oscar>



Dr Ian Little receives a ‘Green Oscar’

26 MAY 2017 | STORY LOUZEL LOMBARD STEYN



Dr Ian Little receiving his Whitley Award. Photo James Finlay for the Whitley Awards.

University of Cape Town alumnus Dr Ian Little is flying the flag for South Africa as he has recently been awarded as one of the winners of the 2017 Whitley Awards, or global ‘Green Oscars’.

The ceremony was held on 18 May at The Royal Geographical Society in London. Hosted by Tom Heap, the Whitley Awards were presented to the winners by Whitley Fund for Nature patron HRH The Princess Royal, in front of over 500 guests.

Dr Little was awarded alongside six other international conservationists, working on projects like the reduction of deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors in India, and securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline.

For his conservation project titled 'Custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity', Dr Little was awarded £35 000, or nearly R600 000, in funding to help upscale his project.

According to Sir David Attenborough, a Trustee of the Whitley Fund for Nature, "It is now more important than ever to invest in those working to protect our planet." And this is exactly what Dr Little's work is dedicated to.

Custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity

The project has seen Dr Little working on securing a legally protected grassland habitat corridor across the Drakensberg escarpment in order to conserve strategic water sources and grassland wildlife.

He works as the senior manager of habitats for the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), interacting with farmers and tribal leaders to build capacity for sustainable farming and introduces improved management practices, such as less intensive grazing and burning regimes to decrease pressure on grasslands and boost productivity.



Dr Little works with farmers and tribal leaders to improve management practices and build capacity for sustainable farming. Photo Ian Little.

According to EWT, Dr Little "has already secured 60 000 hectares of grassland for conservation purposes, a figure he plans to increase with his Whitley Award by creating a corridor of legally protected areas linking with others along the escarpment.

“In doing so, he will safeguard these grasslands and the important source of freshwater they provide.

“Demand for fresh water is expected to outstrip supply in South Africa by 2025.” The Eastern Great Escarpment of South Africa provides catchment services for three of the country’s largest rivers, making it a vital source of water for cities such as Durban and Johannesburg in one of the world’s most arid nations. As the world’s third most biodiverse country, these grasslands support a plethora of plants and animals found nowhere else, including golden moles and the sungazer lizard.



The sungazer lizard is a threatened species that is endemic to the highveld grasslands in the South African interior. Photo Shivan Parusnath.

“Despite their importance, less than 3% of grasslands in South Africa are protected,” according to the EWT.

Intensive livestock farming, coal mining and gas exploration are inflicting untold damage – with fracking now an imminent threat.

Green Oscars

The Whitley Awards are awarded annually by the Whitley Fund for Nature to recognise and celebrate effective national and regional conservation leaders across the globe. The awards are among the most high profile of conservation prizes, and are affectionately known as the ‘Green Oscars’.



The Yellow-breasted Pipit is found in the high-altitude grasslands of Lesotho and South Africa. The species is threatened by habitat loss. Photo Warwick Tarboton.

According to Edward Whitley, founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, it is the organisation’s “focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for optimism. The awards ceremony is about recognising progress – winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level.

“In addition to the financial benefit of winning an award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they are able to communicate effectively with the public and inform change at the political level.”

Cape Talk – Radio Programme, South Africa
21 May 2017

<http://www.947.co.za/articles/2017/05/23/south-african-wins-world-s-most-venerated-conservation-award-the-green-oscar>



South African wins world's most venerated conservation award, the Green Oscar

Veteran broadcaster and naturalist, Sir David Attenborough, has narrated a documentary on the work of Dr Ian Little of the Endangered Wildlife Trust.

Little, a senior manager of the habitats programme at the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), has been doing work to secure a legally protected grassland habitat corridor across the Drakensburg escarpment to conserve strategic water sources and grassland wildlife.

From 169 applicants across the globe, Little was one of six selected for The Whitley Fund for Nature.

Little explains that the awards are for mid-career conservationists around the world so that they may kick-start the second phase of their careers. "We as humans, especially those living in urban areas, really underestimate how important the conservation of natural resources is for our core survival."

Little says the award is an absolute honour and acknowledges a great deal of work is done in the area. He realises the need for future work towards critically threatened species in the grasslands and provision of freshwater for the people of South Africa.

Little receives £35,000 in project funding and links to an invaluable network of donors and influential supporters in the United Kingdom.

Listen to the interview here:

An audio player interface for a podcast. On the left is a portrait of a man with braided hair, smiling, wearing a light blue shirt. Below the portrait is the text "CAPE TALK AFRICA MELANE". To the right of the portrait is a play button icon. Further right, the text reads "The John Maytham Show" and "The Green Oscars". To the right of this text are "Info" and "Share" icons. Below the text is a waveform visualization of the audio. At the bottom left, it shows "00:00 / 05:15". At the bottom right, it says "OmnyStudio".

Purmina Barman

India

Inspiring women to protect Assam's greater adjutant and its wetland habitat, India

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Shears Foundation in
memory of Trevor Shears



Purnima has had extensive media coverage across newspapers, television and radio, with highlights including a radio interview on Big FM, a television interview on Channel 18, and being nominated one of the top 10 women in conservation in India's Woman Times. In total she has received forty pieces of coverage plus three additional pieces alongside Sanjay Gubbi. The following is a selection of her coverage.

To see Purnima's WFN profile please follow this [link](#).

- **WFN Press Release** 139
- **Print and Online** 141
- **TV & Radio** 183

Conservation leader from India wins 2017 Whitley Award

Prize awarded for inspiring women to protect Assam's greater adjutant and its habitat

London, UK: 17 May 2017 – HRH The Princess Royal will tomorrow present a Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35,000 in project funding, to Purnima Barman at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, in honour of her work to protect Assam's greater adjutant and its wetland habitat.

Greater adjutant storks - or Hargila in the local language - have an image problem. These giant scavenger birds have a reputation as unwelcome neighbours with their noisy, messy and smelly nesting habits. With a global population of less than 1,200 mature individuals, 75% of which are found in Assam in North East India, the greater adjutant needs help to prevent the felling of nesting trees by landowners wishing to rid themselves of the storks and the threat of wetland destruction. To tackle this issue, Purnima Barman, of NGO Aaranyak has developed alternative livelihoods for villagers engaging them with the project and turning bird haters into bird lovers.

Purnima has mobilised followers into the 'Hargilla Army' an all-female team of conservationists dedicated to protecting the greater adjutant who through this programme are offered sustainable livelihood, training and education opportunities. The project is giving marginalised women a voice. Together they are changing local perceptions and numbers of stork nests have risen from 30 seven years ago to over 150 today. With her Whitley Award, Purnima will scale up this work, encouraging householders to take pride in the species and protect the birds and their nesting trees. She will conduct research into the impact of pollution and garbage consumption on the stork's reproduction and undertake work to secure legal protection of wetland habitat, home to the largest nesting colony of greater adjutants.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: “WFN focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for optimism. The Awards Ceremony is about recognising progress – winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning an Award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they are able to communicate effectively with the public and inform change at the political level.”

<https://www.northeasttoday.in/biologist-purnima-devi-barman-nominated-for-green-oscars/>



Biologist Purnima Devi Barman Nominated for Green Oscars



Making Assam proud yet again, noted wildlife biologist and conservationist Purnima Devi Barman has been nominated for the prestigious Whitley Awards also known as the Green Oscars.

From last few years, Purnima is continuously campaigning for the conservation of the Greater Adjutant Stork locally known as 'Haargila' in Assam. She has been working with the Dadara, Pachariya and Hingimari villages of Kamrup district to save the Greater Adjutant Stork and is associated with Aaranyak, a Guwahati based NGO which works for wildlife conservation.

Barman has been nominated from among 166 researchers of 66 countries for this award. It is to be mentioned here that, the Whitley awards are made annually by the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) to recognize and celebrate effective national and regional conservation leaders across the globe.

The awards particularly seek to recognize contributions to wildlife conservation made from outside the developed world, and to bring to international attention the work of deserving individuals committed to precipitating long-lasting conservation benefits on the ground.

<https://eclecticnortheast.in/renowned-biologist-dr-purnima-devi-barman-nominated-for-whitley-awards-this-year/>



Renowned Biologist Dr Purnima Devi Barman Nominated for Whitley Awards aka Green Oscars

May 15, 2017

Dr. Purnima Devi Barman, renowned wildlife biologist and conservationist of Assam, have been nominated for the prestigious Whitley Awards also known as the Green Oscars.

She has been nominated for her relentless efforts and campaigns for the conservation of the Greater Adjutant Stork locally known as 'Haargila' in Assam. She has been working

with the Dadara, Pachariya and Hingimari villages of Kamrup district to save the Greater Adjutant Stork and is associated with Aaranyak, a Guwahati based NGO which works for wildlife conservation.

Barman has been nominated from among 166 researchers of 66 countries for this award. The Whitley Awards are made annually by the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) to recognize and celebrate effective national and regional conservation leaders across the globe. The awards are worth £35,000 (2016) and are now amongst the most high profile of conservation prizes. The awards particularly seek to recognize contributions to wildlife conservation made from outside the developed world, and to bring to international attention the work of deserving individuals committed to precipitating long-lasting conservation benefits on the ground.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/assam-conservationist-nominated-for-whitley-awards-117051601056_1.html

Business Standard

Assam conservationist nominated for Whitley Awards

Guwahati May 16, 2017

Assam's Purnima Barman, known for her efforts for the conservation of the Greater Adjutant Stork and its habitat, has been nominated for the prestigious Whitley Awards 2017, also called the Green Oscar, it was announced on Tuesday.

This prestigious international prize honours exceptional individuals working in grassroots nature conservation in the world's developing countries, and who often face humanitarian, environmental and political challenges in the projects they undertake.

The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN), a Britain-registered charity, has announced the shortlist of six finalists for the Whitley Awards 2017.

There is another Indian in the list - Sanjay Gubbi who has been nominated for his efforts to reduce deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors.

The others contenders are Ximena Velez-Liendo, who has been enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains, Alexander Blanco for conserving Venezuela's magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship, Ian Little for contribution towards conserving South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity, and Indira Lacerna Widmann, who has partnered with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo.

The final results will be announced at a special evening ceremony May 18 this year at the Royal Geographical Society in London.

Barman, 37, a native of Assam's Kamrup district, has been engaged in conservation of the Greater Adjutant Storks, popularly known as Hargila in Assamese, and their habitats for several years now. Her success can be gauged by the name she has earned - "Hargila

Baideu" (Stork sister) in Dadara village where there is a huge colony of the species living without any disturbance from the humans.

The village has over 1,000 storks now and the credit goes to Barman and the hard work and dedication she has put in all these years. She had even quit her job as a college teacher so that she could devote herself to its conservation.

"It all started in early 2009 when Aaranyak, a society for biodiversity conservation, took up an initiative for the conservation of the bird and entrusted me to create awareness among the locals," said a happy Barman.

She regularly visits the villages and organizes awareness campaigns relentlessly among the locals, through posters, banners, street plays etc. Roads in Dadara, Pacharia and Singimari are all spruced up with posters and banners with messages to save the bird. She motivates the locals saying the bird is their asset and as such, they should protect it.

<http://zeenews.india.com/assam/assam-conservationist-nominated-for-whitley-awards-2005901.html?pfrom=article-next-story>



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<http://www.easternmirrornagaland.com/assam-conservationist-nominated-for-whitley-awards/>



EASTERN MIRROR

More News, More Truth

Assam conservationist nominated for Whitley Awards

May 16, 2017

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In 120 Words – Online Magazine, India
17 May 2017

<http://www.in120words.com/2017/05/17/conservationist-purnima-barman-nominated-for-whitley-awards/>



Conservationist Purnima Barman nominated for Whitley Awards

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<http://www.freepressjournal.in/india/assam-conservationist-bags-whitley-award-nomination/1069033>



Assam conservationist bags Whitley Award nomination

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<http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/may/17/assam-environmentalist-wins-green-oscar-for-efforts-to-serve-greater-adjutant-storks-1605922.html>

THE  NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

Assam environmentalist wins Green Oscar for efforts to conserve greater adjutant storks

By Express News Service | Published: 17th May 2017 10:30 PM |

GUWAHATI: Assam environmentalist Purnima Devi Barman has been selected for the prestigious Whitley Awards, also known as the Green Oscars, for her efforts and campaigns for the conservation of greater adjutant storks.



The award will be conferred on her in London on Thursday. Barman was selected from among 166 researchers from 66 countries and will receive 35,000 pounds prize money in project funding over one year.

Purnima Devi Barman has been instrumental in creating an all-female network in three villages of Kamrup district to save the greater adjutant storks, which are scavengers locally called “hargila”.

The bird’s global population is between 1,200 and 1,800. Around 800 of them are found in Assam and is also found in Bihar, numbering around 150.

“I am happy our work has been recognised. It was only made possible with cooperation from everyone. I want to share my happiness with everybody associated with the work,” Barman, who is associated with Aaranyak, a NGO that works for wildlife conservation, said from London.

<http://english.ainnews.in/index.php/english/india/news/renowned-environmentalist-purnima-devi-barman-wins-green-oscars>



Renowned environmentalist Purnima Devi Barman wins Green Oscars

[Jhumadas](#) | Thursday, May 18, 2017 5:43 PM IST



Environmentalist Purnima Devi Barman has won the prestigious Whitley Awards, which also known as the Green Oscars, for her efforts and campaigns for the conservation of greater adjutant storks. From last few years, Purnima Devi is continuously campaigning for the conservation of the Greater Adjutant Stork locally known as 'Haargila' in Assam. She has been working with the Dadara, Pachariya and Hingimari villages of Kamrup district to save the Greater Adjutant Stork and is associated with Aaranyak, a Guwahati based NGO which works for wildlife conservation.

She regularly visits the villages and organises awareness campaigns relentlessly among the locals. It is to be noted, the total number of this endangered animal is only 1200-1800 in the whole world. And in Assam only more than 800 Hargila exist.

There is another Indian in the list, Sanjay Gubbi, has won the award for his efforts to reduce deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors. The final result has been announced at a special ceremony on May 18 at the Royal Geographical Society in London. Total 166 conservationists from 66 countries were nominated for Green Oscar this year.

http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/05/17/assam-conservationist-purnima-barman-has-won-the-green-oscars_a_22096493/



Assam Conservationist Purnima Barman Has Won The 'Green Oscars'

She won the Whitley Awards for the conservation of the Greater Adjutant Stork and its habitat.

18/05/2017 9:40 Rohini Chatterji, General Assignment Editor, HuffPost India



Assam's Purnima Barman, who known as the force behind the 'Hargila Army' and for her efforts for the conservation of the Greater Adjutant Stork and its habitat, has won the Whitley Awards 2017.

This award is also know as the 'Green Oscars'.

The Telegraph quoted a statement issued by the Whitley Fund as saying, "Purnima has mobilised followers into the 'Hargila Army', an all-female team of conservationists dedicated to protecting the greater adjutant stork which, through this programme, are offered sustainable livelihood, training and education opportunities. The project is giving

marginalised women a voice. Together they are changing local perceptions and numbers of stork nests have risen from 30 seven years ago to over 150 today."

The report says that £35,000 in project funding will be given to Purnima during a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society in London.

As IANS had reported, the award is presented to those who work in the grassroots in developing countries. The Whitley Fund for Nature is a Britain registered charity. The report said that Barman has been involved in the conservation Greater Adjutant Storks -- called Hargila is Assamese -- for seven year which even earned her the name of 'Hargila Baideu' meaning stork sister in the Dadara village.

Speaking to *The Telegraph*, Burman said, "Getting the Whitley Award is the dream of every conservationist. I am honoured and humbled to be recognised in this way. Working with people is not always easy, but it's rewarding to see the impact we can make when we all work collaboratively to protect the fantastic species that the greater adjutant stork is. I want to dedicate this award to the communities of Kamrup district in Assam who are working with me to make a difference."

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/environmentalist-purnima-devi-barman-wins-green-oscars/articleshow/58733055.cms>

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Environmentalist Purnima Devi Barman wins Green Oscars

Ei Samay | May 18, 2017, 03.45 PM IST



Guwahati: Renowned environmentalist Purnima Devi Barman has won the prestigious Whitley Awards, also known as the Green Oscars, for her efforts and campaigns for the conservation of greater adjutant storks.

From last few years, Purnima is continuously campaigning for the conservation of the Greater Adjutant Stork locally known as

'Haargila' in Assam. She has been working with the Dadara, Pachariya and Hingimari villages of Kamrup district to save the Greater Adjutant Stork and is associated with Aaranyak, a Guwahati based NGO which works for wildlife conservation.

She regularly visits the villages and organises awareness campaigns relentlessly among the locals, through posters, banners, street plays etc. The total number of this endangered animal is only 1200-1800 in the whole world. In Assam only more than 800 Hargila exist.

Another Indian in the list, Sanjay Gubbi, has won the award for his efforts to reduce deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors. The final result has been announced at a special ceremony on May 18 at the Royal Geographical Society in London. Total 166 conservationists from 66 countries were nominated for Green Oscar this year.

Hindustan Times – Print and Online Newspaper, India
19 May 2017

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/assam-activist-receives-green-oscar-for-conservation-of-endangered-stork-species/story-EYVV4FVALqLmpPPqamtoyK.html>



Assam activist receives Green Oscar for conservation of endangered stork species

Princess Anne presented the award, worth £35,000 in project funding, to 37-year-old Purnima Barman at London's Royal Geographical Society on Thursday evening.

INDIA Updated: May 19, 2017 21:36 IST

Rahul Karmakar
Hindustan Times, Guwahati



Wildlife activist Purnima Barman receives the Whitley Award from Princess Anne in London on Thursday evening. (HT Photo)

A woman from Assam has received the coveted Whitley Award, also known as the Green Oscar, for her efforts towards protecting the greater adjutant stork (*leptoptilos dubius*) and the wetlands it inhabits.

Princess Anne presented the award, worth £35,000 in project funding, to 37-year-old Purnima Barman at London’s Royal Geographical Society on Thursday evening. A statement issued by Whitley Fund for Nature on Wednesday said Barman was selected for the prestigious award from a list of 166 researchers across 66 countries.

Another Indian – Sanjay Gubbi – also figured among the six picked for the honour. He received the award for his efforts at curbing deforestation in Karnataka’s tiger corridors.



Over 380 students take out a rally for conservation of the once-reviled bargila in Assam. (HT Photo)

Incidentally, hargila – as the greater adjutant is called in Assam – is also used to refer to lanky people in local parlance. It currently holds the unenviable ‘endangered’ status in the IUCN red list of threatened species.

“Purnima mobilised the Hargila Army, an all-female team of conservationists dedicated to protecting the greater adjutant stork. They are offered sustainable livelihood, training and education opportunities through this programme. The project is giving marginalised

women a voice, helping them change local perceptions. The number of stork nests has risen to over 150 from just 30 seven years ago,” the Whitley statement said.

Barman will use the award to scale up her work, encouraging householders to protect the birds and their nesting trees, the statement said. “She will conduct research on the impact of pollution and garbage consumption on the stork’s reproduction, and undertake work to secure legal protection of its wetland habitat – which is home to the largest nesting colony of greater adjutants,” it added.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Assam has about 800 of the world’s estimated population of 1,800 greater adjutants. Bihar has around 160 of these storks.



A greater adjutant nursing its chicks. The number of these storks in Assam has risen to over 800 in recent years. (HT Photo)

Barman, a member of Assam-based NGO Aaranyak, had faced several challenges when she launched her campaign at three villages near Guwahati in 2008. Today, the people of Dadara, Pachariya and Hingimari take pride in preserving the hargila as well as its nesting trees – which they once wanted to chop off to get rid of the “irritating birds”.

The conservation efforts are monitored by the Hargila Army, which observes February 2 as Greater Adjutant Day to spread the good word. The conservationists’ attempts to

embed the bird into the local culture have also succeeded, with the hargila finding its way into local handloom products as a popular motif as well as hymns sung at namghars (Vaishnav prayer halls) in the region.

“I dedicate the Whitley Award, the dream of every conservationist, to the villagers who have been working with me to make the world a better place for the greater adjutant. A 19th century ornithologist called the bird a prodigy of ugliness, but few are as beautiful as it is,” Purnima said in an email after receiving the award.

The United Kingdom-based Whitley Fund for Nature gives away monetary awards annually to support pioneers in national and regional wildlife conservation across the globe. Princess Anne, the daughter of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, serves as a patron of over 200 social and animal welfare organisations across the globe.

<https://www.assamtimes.org/node/19065>



Biologist Purnima Barman among ‘Green Oscar’ winners

Submitted by Rituraj Phukan on Sun, 21/05/2017 - 11:29



The 2017 Whitley Awards Ceremony was held on 18th May at The Royal Geographical Society in London. The Ceremony was hosted by celebrity BBC presenter Thomas “Tom” Heap with the Whitley Awards presented to the winners by the Whitley Fund for Nature Patron, HRH The Princess Royal, Princess Anne. The annual Whitley Awards are a celebration of successful conservation leadership from across the globe and each of the winners receive £35,000 in project funding to help scale up their work. The prestigious ‘Green Oscars’ recognize effective local conservationists from bio-diversity rich, resource-poor countries spearheading innovative work to save endangered wildlife and benefit local communities.

This year, the award recipients include two Indians among six conservationists chosen from 169 applicants from around the world. The awardees this year have been chosen for their exemplary leadership in conservation projects, ranging from saving the Greater Adjutants in Assam, extending the protected area network of Royal Bengal Tigers in Karnataka, protecting the Harpy Eagle across South America, protecting the nesting grounds of the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo, grassland conservation with local communities in South Africa and promoting coexistence of the Spectacles Bear and people in Bolivia.

The Whitley Gold Award for 2017 was won by Zafer Kizilkaya, a 2013 Whitley Award winner from Turkey, for his conservation project “Guardians of the sea: securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline”. The Whitley Gold Award is given to an “exceptional Whitley Award alumnus for outstanding contribution” and includes £50,000 in project funding donated by The Friends and Scottish Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature.

Ms Purnima Barman from Aaranyak, a NGO based out of Assam, India was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by The Shears Foundation in memory of Trevor Shears, for “Inspiring women to protect Assam’s Greater Adjutant and its wetland habitat.” Mr. Sanjay Gubbi from the Nature Conservation Foundation was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by WWF-UK, for “Reducing deforestation in Karnataka’s tiger corridors, India.”

Ms Indira Lacerna-Widmann from the Katala Foundation was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by Notting Hill Preparatory School, for “Partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo.”

Ms. Ximena Velez-Liendo from WildCRU and a Chester Zoo Conservation Fellow was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Savitri Waney Charitable Trust, for her project “An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains.”

Mr. Ian Little from the Endangered Wildlife Trust was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Garfield Weston Foundation, for his project “Custodians of South Africa’s threatened grassland biodiversity.”

Mr. Alexander Blanco from the Harpy Eagle Conservation Program was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by the William Brake Charitable Trust in memory of William Brake for his project “Nest protectors: conserving Venezuela’s magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship.”

<http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2017/05/21/environmentalist-from-assam-wins-green-oscar/>

The Shillong Times

ESTABLISHED 1945

Environmentalist From Assam Wins Green Oscar

May 21, 2017

Guwahati: Assam's renowned environmentalist Purnima Devi Barman has won the prestigious Whitley Awards, also known as the Green Oscars, for her efforts in conserving greater adjutant storks.

"I am happy that our work has been recognised. It was only made possible with the cooperation from everyone. I want to share my happiness with everybody associated with the work," Barman said from London after receiving the award there.

Barman had received the award on May 18 from Princess Royal Anne, who is the patron of the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN).

Barman is associated with Aaranyak NGO that works for wildlife conservation. She has been working with Dadara, Pachariya and Hingimari villages of Kamrup district to save the greater adjutant stork, locally known as 'Haargila' in Assam.

The global population of greater adjutant storks is estimated between 1200-1800 and around 800 of them are found in Assam, and another 150 in Bihar.

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jun0117/city062>

The Assam Tribune

Noted environmentalist feted

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, May 31 - Members of Women's Hub, a body of woman professionals today felicitated environmentalist Purnima Devi Barman for bagging the prestigious Whitley Award, also known as the Green Oscar, for her efforts in conserving greater adjutant storks.

Barman had received the award on May 18 from Princess Royal Anne, who is the patron of the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN).

The members of Women's Hub met her at her Guwahati residence and congratulated her and tried to learn about her work. Barman shared her experiences at the award function and thereafter.

"I was awestruck by the clothes woven by the women of her group which had the symbol of the greater adjutant storks in it. It's inspiring to meet such a woman who believes that conservation is a part of our Assamese tradition," journalist Teresa Rehman said. Barman has been working with the women of Dadara, Pachariya and Singimari villages of Kamrup district to save the greater adjutant stork, locally known as hargila, in Assam. Barman is now a role model for community conservation and is popularly known as 'Hargila Baideo'.

Filmmaker Tinat Atifa Masood said, "I had much to learn from the humble and earthy nature of Purnima Devi Barman when we went to felicitate her. A woman who ideates innovatively when it comes to conservation, the Whitley Award is truly befitting for her. We wish more awards to come her way."

Conservation of the hargila is impossible without the cooperation of the local people who own the trees where the bird builds its nests. Salma Hussain, a human rights activist says, "She is a role model for young students like us. We have a lot to learn from her."

Outlook India – Online Newspaper, India
1 June 2017

<http://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/ample-opportunity-for-students-to-pursue-studies-in/1065113>

Outlook

THE NEWS SCROLL

01 JUNE 2017

"There is enough opportunity to take up studies and consequently a profession in the field of bio-diversity so that the mission to foster conservation of biodiversity through research and environmental education can be sustained", Talukdar said

Guwahati, Jun 1 There is ample opportunity for students in Assam to pursue studies and seek employment in the state's biodiversity sector, a Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation said today.

At the same, they can help protect and preserve the region's environment, secretary general of 'Aaranyak' Bibhab Kumar Talukdar said.

Environmental education and capacity building initiatives have been developed by 'Aaranyak', a registered Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (SIRO), to promote awareness among the younger generation and the community in general, he told reporters.

"There is enough opportunity to take up studies and consequently a profession in the field of bio-diversity so that the mission to foster conservation of biodiversity through research and environmental education can be sustained", Talukdar said.

It is not necessary that one has to be a biologist to join the biodiversity field but there are capacity building and advocacy for legal and policy reforms and if more youngsters join these areas, they can play a proactive role in ensuring ecological security, he said.

"We support several Self Help Groups by providing livestock and assisting them in farm constructions as well as provide market linkages to mitigate human elephant conflict in several areas of Assam and maanagement and commerce students can help in marketing the products", he added.

Aaranyak's two biolgists Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar and Purnima Devi Barman received international recognition with their awards 'Heritage Heroes Award 2016' of

the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the **Whitley Awards** (Green Oscars) respectively.

"These awards are an inspiration for the younger generation and both are examples that people from the state can compete globally if they follow their interests with hard work and dedication", he added.

The Thumb Print – Online Magazine, India
1 June 2017

<http://www.thethumbprintmag.com/womens-hub-felicitates-purnima-devi-barman/>



Women’s Hub felicitates Purnima Devi Barman

June 1, 2017

Members of Women’s Hub, a collective of women professionals today felicitated environmentalist Purnima Devi Barman for bagging the prestigious Whitley Awards, also known as the Green Oscars for her efforts in conserving greater adjutant storks. Barman had received the award on May 18 from Princess Royal Anne, who is the patron of the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN).



They met her at her Guwahati residence and congratulated her and tried to learn about her work. Barman shared her experiences at the award function and thereafter. Managing Editor of *The Thumb Print*, Teresa Rehman said, “I was awestruck by the clothes woven by the women of her group which had the symbol of the greater adjutant storks in it. It’s inspiring to meet such a woman who believes that conservation is a part of our Assamese tradition.” Barman has been working with the women of Dadara, Pachariya and Hingimari villages of Kamrup district to save the greater adjutant stork, locally known as ‘Haargila’ in Assam.



Barman is now a role model for community conservation and is popularly known as ‘hargila baideo’ or Stork Sister. Filmmaker Tinat Atifa Masood said, “I have much to learn from the humble and earthy nature of Purnima Devi Barman when we went to felicitate her. A woman who ideates innovatively when it comes to conservation, the Whitley Award is truly befitting for her. We wish more awards to come her way.”

The conservation of the hargila is impossible without the cooperation of the local people who own the trees where it builds its nest. Salma Hussain, a young human rights activist says, “She is a role model for young students like us.”

<http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/interview-to-keep-the-storks-flying-2459811>

DNA
DAILY NEWS & ANALYSIS



To keep the storks flying

POOJA PATEL | Sun, 4 Jun 2017-07:10am , DNA

In a chat with Pooja Patel, Barman, an alumnus of the acclaimed Conservation Leadership Programme who lives in Guwahati with her 12-year-old twin daughters and conservationist husband, shares her battle to save the greater adjutant stork.

Wildlife biologist Purnima Devi Barman was one of six conservationists chosen for this year's Whitley Award, popularly called the Green Oscars. The award was in recognition of her efforts to conserve the Greater Adjutant Stork, listed as 'endangered' on IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species. There are only around 1,200 of these storks surviving today in India and Cambodia, the two countries where they are found. Assam accounts for 75% of the birds' population - Kamrup district alone has some 600. Locally known as hargila - Assamese for 'swallower of bones' - the Greater Adjutant Stork was traditionally looked down upon by villagers in Kamrup. So Barman, who is associated with the NGO Aaranyak, had to convince them of the need to conserve these birds. A decade later, the

same villagers have become an ‘army’ of foot soldiers who are fiercely protective of the hargila.

What motivated you to conserve the greater adjutant stork?

Everyone is interested in the ‘mega animals’ like rhinos and tigers, but I felt that other species such as the greater adjutant storks, who need conservation efforts equally, are neglected. After completing my masters, I had decided to pursue a PhD in ‘breeding biology of the greater adjutant storks’. But one day, I received a distress call about a man cutting down a tree where nine greater adjutant storks were nesting. When I reached the spot, I saw the tiny chicks had fallen on the ground, while the man, blissfully ignorant, went on cutting the tree. After talking to the man, I realised that he was unaware of the importance of these birds. That’s when I realised that the villagers were not at fault. I decided to put my PhD on hold and educate the villagers.

What are the primary reasons of the reducing population of these birds?

Greater adjutant storks are scavengers and feed on carcasses, leaving rotten leftovers all over the place, much to the annoyance of the villagers. The birds are tagged as dirty, and people cut the trees where they nested. The shrinking wetlands in Assam has also affected the population, as these birds depend on it for food. The cutting down of timber trees to construct houses is also a major contributor to their decline. To top it, these birds are time and again poached for their meat.

How difficult was it to convince the villagers in Kamrup to save these birds?

These birds live in close proximity of humans. So it was extremely difficult to reason with the villagers. But I explained the grim scenario and motivated the villagers not to cut trees and save these birds. Since they cut down timber trees and sold them for a living, we showed them alternate means of earning. The community in Kamrup is good at weaving, so we helped them with textile equipment to make them self-reliant.

How did you create awareness about the importance of the greater adjutant storks?

We have been working with the community in Kamrup – individuals, households and schools. It was a challenge to integrate the birds into the daily lives of villagers, to create an emotional connect between them and the birds. For this, each year, I conduct baby shower ceremonies for the incubating greater adjutant stork just like it is done traditionally for pregnant Assamese women. We organised events with cooking, singing and other activities to involve people, clubbing it with information about the greater adjutant stork. I initiated a feeling of ownership of the birds, and made them understand that saving these birds was their responsibility.

You have been working for a decade to conserve the greater adjutant stork. What are your future plans?

I am hoping our work in Kamrup, which has become a model for the conservation of the greater adjutant stork, will be replicated in other areas of Assam too. This is now my agenda for the next few years.

<http://www.womantimes.co.in/2017/06/04/top-10-women-environmentalist-of-india-and-their-contribution/>



04
06
17

Top 10 Women Environmentalist of India and their contributions

Purnima Barman – Purnima, is from Assam, has mobilised followers into the 'Hargila Army', an all-female team of conservationists dedicated to protecting the greater adjutant stork which, through this programme, are offered sustainable livelihood, training and education opportunities. The project is giving marginalised women a voice. Together they are changing local perceptions and numbers of stork nests have risen from 30 seven years ago to over 150 today.



PURNIMA BARMAN

The Assam Tribune

GU to felicitate environmentalists

Correspondent

JALUKBARI, June 23 - The Gauhati University Wing for International Relations in association with the Zoological Society of Assam (ZSA), Gauhati University Workmen's Union (GUWU), Gauhati University Research Scholars' Association (GURSA) and Alumni Association of Zoology Department, GU will felicitate noted personalities as well as GU alumni Purnima Devi Barman and Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar at a function to be held on June 30 in the PD Seminar Hall, GU, with Vice Chancellor Dr Mridul Hazarika as the chief guest.

While Barman was recently awarded the prestigious Whitley Award, 2017 (also known as Green Oskar) for her efforts towards protection of the globally endangered greater adjutant storks in Assam, Dr Lahkar was awarded the prestigious IUCN Heritage Hero Award in 2016 at the World Conservation Congress in Honolulu, Hawaii for his enormous contributions towards conservation of Nature and natural resources and his commendable work on conservation of biodiversity.

The Assam Tribune

GU fraternity felicitates two conservationists

JALUKBARI, June 30 - The Gauhati University Wing for International Relations, Gauhati University Workmen's Union, Gauhati University Research Scholars' Association, Zoological Society of Assam and Alumni Association of Zoology Department, GU jointly felicitated two conservationists Purnima Devi Barman and Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar today.

Purnima Devi Barman was honoured with the prestigious Whitley Award, 2017 (also known as Green Oscar) for efforts towards protecting the globally endangered greater adjutant stork and also for her initiatives towards conservation of birds of Assam. Associated with Aaranyak, she has been working in Dadara, Pachariya and Shingimari villages to save the endangered bird locally known as hargila.

Dr Lahkar was honoured as IUCN's Heritage Hero. He is the first Asian to be given this prestigious honour for enormous contributions towards conservation of Nature and natural resources. He has been working to save the grasslands, flora and fauna of the Manas National Park for the past 20 years and is at present engaged as the Manas Landscape Administrator for Aaranyak.

Talking about her untiring journey in the last several years for the cause of conservation of a very precious species of bird on this part of the Earth, Barman expressed her gratitude to the more than ten thousand people of Dadara and its surrounding areas for her success. She said people's participation is a must to save Nature. She talked about the menace of use of pesticides and pleaded for organic practices.

Describing his challenging journey for the last 20 years in the Manas National Park, Dr Lahkar said only hard work, dedication and motivation can help achieve one's goal.

Chief guest Ajit Kumar Bhuyan, Editor-in-Chief of Prag News, expressed his appreciation to the two achievers who have brought laurels to India and could create a sensation in the world platform through their unique work in Assam in the field of conservation of Nature.

GU Vice Chancellor Dr Mridul Hazarika inaugurated the function and congratulated the two alumni of the university and wished them more success in life.

Earlier, a minute's silence was observed in honour of Dr Balit Ch Deka, former Vice Principal of Cotton College and Tilottama Baruah, ex-Director of Higher Education, both of whom expired on June 29.

WILDLIFE WARRIORS

Poaching, habitat loss and climate change are just some of the threats pushing the planet's most iconic wildlife – and many more lesser-known species – to the brink of extinction. But in remote communities across the world women are coming together to say 'enough'. We travel to South Africa and India to meet some of them...



© WHITLEY AWARDS

ON A WING AND A PRAYER THE HARGILLA ARMY

The day's searing heat is beginning to rise as children at the Sankardev Sisu Niketan school in the Indian state of Assam gather to offer prayers to Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge, and sing 'Shanti Path', to pray for peace and prosperity for all people. These customs are as old as the hills, rituals and ceremonies inscribed in Sanskrit in the Vedas, ancient Hindu scriptures revered across the Indian subcontinent.

But in recent times, the children have added a new prayer to their traditions. Bowed before an earthen statue, their invocations now also call for the divine protection of a giant bird: the greater adjutant stork.

'I wept when I saw them do this for the first time,' admits Purnima Devi Barman, a wildlife biologist with the Indian non-profit conservation group, Aaranyak. Just years before, this endangered bird had been an object of revulsion in northeast India, and was facing extinction.

Once widespread across the wetlands of northern and eastern India, and many south and southeast

Asian countries, only 1,200 greater adjutant storks – or 'hargilla' as they're known in Assamese, derived from the Sanskrit word for 'bone-swallower' – survive in the wild. Two-thirds of the population is found largely in three villages in the Brahmaputra Valley, northwest of Assam's capital, Guwahati, while the remaining 400 live in the eastern Indian state of Bihar and in Cambodia.

Far from pretty, these huge storks have large, wedge-shaped, dull-orange bills, a distinctive neck pouch, and straggly grey, black and white plumage. Standing up to 150cm tall with vast wingspans of up to 250cm, the carnivorous scavengers often leave bones and other animal remains in their wake, which has earned them a reputation as harbingers of bad luck, prompting villagers to destroy their nests or even poison them.

Purnima first encountered the birds as a young girl in her village on the banks of the Brahmaputra River. She spent much of her time in nature and would turn to her grandmother for answers to her many wildlife questions.

'I would see king vultures and adjutant storks feeding on carcasses of cows in the paddy field. My grandma, with her little local knowledge, would tell me: "Those are bortokola, sagun or samukkhola", calling them by their local names. Back then I never imagined that I would be working so closely with these birds in the future.'

It was while reading for her Master's in Zoology that Purnima reconnected with the stork she had known in her childhood, going on to study the species for her PhD, and learning about the threats to their survival.

'The adjutant was seen as a bird with an evil omen, that brings in carcasses and other rotten stuff,' reveals Purnima. 'Many traditional nesting colonies had disappeared in past decades, and this spectacularly distinct bird was being pushed dangerously close to extinction, yet our conservation fraternity and government departments remained unconcerned. Charismatic animals like rhinos and tigers are the focus.'

The greatest challenge for the storks is to find suitable nesting sites, as they mass nest in particular species of tall trees, returning to the same place each year. They also tend to nest close to human populations, perhaps attracted by the buffet of discarded garbage and scraps.

In 2008, understanding their plight and the part they play in the greater ecosystem of the region – clearing rotting carrion, recycling its nutrients and reducing disease – Purnima began to shape a plan to protect them, which would engage the very community threatening their survival. It would take eight years of persuasion, education and hard work to win over the local people.

'The women didn't like the birds at all,' recalls Purnima, who went door to door in the village of

Dadara to understand how the local people felt about the hargilla. 'They used to say, "Oh, they throw bones in my garden and their chicks fall out of their nests – they make such a mess, please take them away!" But to save the birds, we had to involve the locals because they nest on trees owned by individual households. The future of the greater adjutant stork depended on the tree owners, who used to fell them to get rid of the "troublemakers".'

With poverty a problem in the region, Purnima's first thought was to offer money to villagers in exchange for them not cutting down their trees, but the Conservation Leadership Programme and 2009 award that supported her work provided insufficient funds for the endeavour.

'We had to think again,' says Purnima. 'After more visits around the other villages, a few words clicked – awareness, education, ownership. I asked myself why I didn't dislike my daughters when they made such a mess as young children, just like the storks. The answer is that because they are my children, I have "ownership" of them and I'm their guardian. I realised without any doubt that this would be the solution for saving the birds.'

The work began. Conservation awareness campaigns targeted men, women, farmers, police and the forest department. The group organised cooking, crafts and music competitions for the women, who were reluctant at first to engage in discussions, traditionally an activity reserved for the men. They arranged environmental training for teachers and began programmes in schools to educate children about the importance of preserving India's wetlands and the wildlife they support. Purnima even enlisted a famous local actress, Prastuti Parasar, to encourage the communities to protect the birds.

© WHITLEY AWARDS



'Hindu women are conservative about their devotional songs. They don't change them. But amazingly, some of them have written songs for the stork'

PUARNIMA DEVI BARMAN

'That really was the turning point,' she remembers. 'One of the local tree owners said to me: "What? Is it true that this film star is here because of a tree and a bird in our backyard?" I replied with a smile: "But this is not a normal tree, nor a normal bird. It is a highly endangered bird which is found only in a few places - and Khura (uncle), you are the proud tree owner!" He was won over.'

Slowly, more members of the community joined in the battle. Young volunteers started monitoring nests and rescuing chicks falling from trees in the monsoon months of February and March, while local officials erected nets around the trees to catch falling fledglings. When Purnima began the project, there were 15 nesting trees of greater adjutants in Dadara. Now there are more than 150 nests and no trees have been cut down since 2010.

It's an achievement that has drawn international recognition, with the Princess Royal presenting Purnima with the Whitley Award for nature at London's Royal Geographical Society in May this year, injecting €35,000 of prize money into the conservation programme.

'The stork is everything to me now. It has become my life, my soul,' admits Purnima, who is planning a tree-planting initiative as the next stage in her plan. But the Hargilla Baido, or Stork Sister, as Purnima has become known, is more than just a hero for the birds - she has transformed the lives of the women in the area too.

No longer silent, this empowered band of 70 wildlife warriors have been dubbed the 'Hargilla Army', speaking out for the storks and raising funds for their protection, while also creating incomes for themselves by weaving and selling fine textiles and other goods bearing the hargilla motif. They have also adopted the bird into sacred prayers and religious festivals.

'Hindu women are conservative about their devotional songs. They don't change them,' says Purnima. 'But amazingly, some of them have written songs for the storks.' Now, when the women celebrate the birth of Lord Krishna - just like the children at Sankardev Sisu Niketan school - they include prayers for the hargilla:

*'Hargila, you are safe in our village.'
'Come and breed here and grow your family.'
'We are blessed with your presence in our villages.'*

'Our Hargilla Army is an army without arms,' smiles Purnima. 'But we're armed with the commitment and determination to battle against all odds in saving this endangered bird.'

Find out how you can help to protect the greater adjutant stork at aaranyak.org



© MRS FINLAY



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Big FM – Radio Station, India
5 June 2017

https://audioboom.com/posts/5986050-red-fm-rj-tanmoy-mid-day-masala-world-environment-day-special-green-oscar-award-winner-dr-purnima-devi-barmen?utm_campaign=detailpage&utm_content=retweet&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook

RED FM-RJ TANMOY-MID DAY MASALA- WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY SPECIAL- GREEN OSCAR AWARD WINNER DR PURNIMA DEVI BARMAN



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#RED FM#RJ TANMOY#MID DAY MASALA#WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY SPECIAL#
A FEW WORDS WITH GREEN OSCAR AWARD WINNER DR PURNIMA DEVI
BARMAN

News 18 – TV Channel, India
1 June 2017



Pratidin Time – Local TV News Channel, India
19 May 2017

<https://www.facebook.com/pratidintime/videos/1290003207783509/?pnref=s>



Pratidin Time

May 19 · 🌐

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Assam environmentalist Purnima Barman receives Green Oscar

**Indian Entertainment – YouTube Entertainment Channel, India
18 May 2017**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sx-6lwyt2vk>



Sanjay Gubbi

India

Reducing deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors, India

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by WWF-UK



Sanjay has received widespread media coverage, with twelve pieces in total, including four articles in The Hindu newspaper and a YouTube video from Save Our Species. Additionally, he features in four other articles alongside other Whitley Award winners. The following is a selection of Sanjay's coverage.

To see Sanjay's WFN profile please follow this [link](#):

- **WFN Press Release** 188
- **Print and Online** 204

Conservation leader from India wins 2017 Whitley Award

Prize awarded for reducing deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors

London, UK: 17 May 2017 – HRH The Princess Royal will tomorrow present a Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35,000 in project funding, to Sanjay Gubbi at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, in honour of his work to protect Karnataka's tiger corridors.

Sanjay quit his job as an electrical engineer to follow his passion for working with wildlife. Nearly two decades later he is spearheading conservation efforts in Karnataka, southern India, home to the highest number of Bengal tigers in the country. A scientist at the Nature Conservation Foundation, Sanjay works with authorities and stakeholders to secure and connect tiger habitat. In 2012, working closely with State Government, he secured the largest expansion of protected areas in India since 1970 – increasing the size of protected areas in Karnataka by 37% and enhancing connectivity across 23 sites.

With his Whitley Award, Sanjay will be working to reduce deforestation in two important wildlife sanctuaries which connect several protected areas and act as a corridor for tigers, allowing them to move between territories, helping to prevent in-breeding and benefit other wildlife including leopards, pangolins and honey badgers. Through the provision of fuel efficient stoves, Sanjay will reduce the need for firewood collection by local communities who rely on firewood as fuel for domestic cooking and lower the risk of smoke inhalation - a cause of respiratory disease. In doing so, he will protect these important tiger corridors and benefit up to 1,000 families. Sanjay will also speed up compensation payments to farmers whose livestock has been blighted by tiger attacks reducing human-wildlife conflict and boosting support of conservation from those living alongside wildlife.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "WFN focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for

optimism. The Awards Ceremony is about recognising progress – winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning an Award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they are able to communicate effectively with the public and inform change at the political level.”

<http://bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com/bangalore/others/wildlife-activist-sanjay-gubbi-wins-green-oscars/articleshow/58722268.cms?>

BangaloreMirror

WILDLIFE ACTIVIST SANJAY GUBBI WINS GREEN OSCARS

Bangalore Mirror Bureau | Updated: May 17, 2017, 11.15 PM IST

Karnataka's famed wildlife activist Sanjay Gubbi won the annual Whitley Awards, dubbed as the 'Green Oscars', for his work in the field of animal conservation in India.

Sanjay Gubbi won the award for his work to protect Karnataka's tiger corridors. Gubbi, along with another Indian Purnima Barman, is among the six global winners of the award. Each of the winners received 35,000 pounds (USD 45,374) prize money for their projects.

Gubbi had quit his job as an electrical engineer to work with nature and wildlife. In 2012, working closely with the Karnataka government, he secured the largest expansion of protected areas for the conservation of tigers in his state. "Karnataka is home to the highest number of tigers in India, and in 2015. Our aim is to take the numbers up to 100 over the next few years. This can only be possible through thorough participation of the community," he said.

With his award money, Gubbi hopes to reduce deforestation in two important wildlife sanctuaries which connect several protected areas and act as corridors for tigers, allowing them to move between territories.

The community focus will be around the provision of fuel-efficient stoves to reduce the reliance on firewood collection from the habitat of the tigers and thus, save many lives in the process. "The awards are about recognising progress, winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national-level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning the award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors," said Edward Whitley, founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, which set up awards 24 years ago.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/prestigious-whitley-award-for-sanjay-gubbi/article18476150.ece>

THE HINDU

Prestigious Whitley Award for Sanjay Gubbi

MYSURU, MAY 18, 2017 00:50 IST



Sanjay Gubbi of Karnataka and Purnima Barman of Assam have won the prestigious Whitley Award, popularly known as Green Oscars, for their efforts in wildlife conservation.

The awards are instituted by the U.K.-registered charity Whitley Fund for Nature, which supports nature conservationists in their endeavour to conserve wildlife and nature. While Mr. Gubbi has been awarded for his work to protect tiger corridors in Karnataka, Ms. Barman has won the award for her work in conservation of Assam's Greater Adjutant Stork and its habitat.

The results were announced in London on Wednesday and Mr. Gubbi also wins £35,000 in project funding. A wildlife biologist and scientist with the Mysuru-based Nature Conservation

Foundation, Mr. Gubbi, who is an electrical engineer, went on to pursue his passion for working with wildlife and obtained his Masters of Science in Conservation Biology from the University of Kent at Canterbury. He is also member of the State Board for Wildlife and works at the grassroots to mitigate conflict issues.

Meanwhile, a release issued by WFN said Mr. Gubbi works with authorities and stakeholders to secure and connect tiger habitat. In 2012, working closely with the State government, he secured the largest expansion of protected areas in India since 1970 — increasing the size of protected areas in Karnataka by 37% and enhancing connectivity across 23 sites.

“With his Whitley Award, Mr. Gubbi will be working to reduce deforestation in two important wildlife sanctuaries, which connect several protected areas and act as a corridor for tigers, allowing them to move between territories, helping to prevent in-breeding and benefit other wildlife, including leopards, pangolins and honey badger,” the release added.

Sanjay will also speed up compensation payments to farmers whose livestock has been blighted by tiger attacks reducing human-wildlife conflict and boosting support of conservation from those living alongside wildlife, according to WFN release.

The two wildlife scientists from India were among the six selected out of 169 applicants from across the world working on conservation issues, said the WFN release.

The Times of India – Print & Online Newspaper, India
24 May 2017

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/wildlife-conservation-is-not-a-project-but-long-term-commitment-to-landscape/articleshow/58813600.cms>

THE TIMES OF INDIA

‘Wildlife conservation not a project, long-term commitment to landscape’

Rohith BR | TNN | Updated: May 24, 2017, 10.36 AM IST

BENGALURU: *With 30 years devoted for conservation of forests in Karnataka, electrical engineer-turned-wildlife biologist **Sanjay Gubbi** needs no introduction. Recently, he was honoured with the prestigious Whitley Award (Green Oscars) for his service in wildlife preservation and expanding the protected areas of Karnataka by 6.5 lakh acres. Fresh from a visit to London where he received the award from Princess Anne, Gubbi, who works with the Mysuru-based Nature Conservation Foundation, attributed his achievements to the collective efforts of stakeholders. Excerpts:*

The expansion of protected areas in Karnataka by 37%, in which you were involved, is the largest in India since 1970. Why is expanding forests so important?

It's like what parents do for their children. They want to secure the future of their children by giving good education, or building a few assets for them. To ensure a better future for wildlife, securing their habitats is vital, and then comes recovery. Systematic enhancing of protected areas has provided connectivity for wild animals, especially wide-ranging species such as tigers and elephants, across 23 sites. This exercise is a matter of concern for humans, as these forests are the most important source of fresh water for us; most of our rivers take birth here.

What are the challenges in the process?

It's a long-winding process. Our first effort to expand the protected area around Anshi-Dandeli in Uttara Kannada, of about 60,000 acres, started in 2002 and took seven years for the final notification to be issued. The challenge is to build consensus among stakeholders, including communities, bureaucrats and politicians. Starting from a clerk to the chief minister, you need to follow things up till the last mile. Our biggest expansion of 6.5 lakh acres around areas like Bannerghatta National Park, MM Hills, Cauvery and Nagarhole took only two years from 2010. This was possible because of the supportive bureaucracy a responsive political leadership, and individuals like (cricketer) Anil Kumble.

How did you convince the village communities?

Wherever protected areas have been expanded, villages have been notified as enclosures so that the rights of inhabitants are not affected. We explained to them how protected forests would ensure good rains, water for drinking and agriculture etc. The role of local politicians, especially MLAs, is important in spreading the right message among villagers.

You had a close encounter with a leopard that had entered a school campus in Bengaluru last year...

Most of the wounds have healed. However, I'm yet to regain full sensitivity of my right hand. Princess Anne, while handing over the award to me, said, 'Oh, you are the man with a lot of scars'. As far as I am concerned, I have moved on, and my efforts for conservation of big cats, especially leopards, have continued. I spend more than 60% of my time in the field.

Your thoughts on the Whitley Award?

I dedicate this recognition to the frontline staff of the forest department. Guards and watchers, rangers and some able leadership are the reason why our forests and wildlife are in good shape. And expanding protected areas is a collaborative effort with the support of the forest department, the government, my colleagues, and also my family.

What are your future plans?

After the award ceremony, I met a person called Brake, who is completely paralyzed after he met with an accident while skiing. He can move only his eyes, and with the help of technology, he manages to communicate through eye movement. He comes to the event every year as he gets a lot of inspiration from awardees. The incident moved me. Applied conservation also means a thousand petty humiliations, and hardships. Conservation is not a project, but a long-term commitment and relationship to a landscape. It's not just based on science, but has a strong grounding in society.

BangaloreMirror

BENGALURU HAS A WILD SIDE THAT HADN'T BEEN SEEN

Bangalore Mirror Bureau | Updated: Jun 1, 2017, 10.10 PM IST



Chinkaras, honey badger and smooth-coated otter were spotted in Bukkapatna Village, Cauvery Wildlife sanctuary and Kanakapura Rd respectively

Documentation drives by conservationists led to spotting of rare species in forests around Bengaluru, and experts couldn't be more excited about it

A team of conservationists and researchers, who had set out to document the number of leopards, were in for a wilder surprise. They were awestruck with the presence of animals around Bengaluru that were either unseen or undocumented.

A few of the species spotted by the conservationists, while rummaging through heaps of camera trap images, included a rare honey badger or ratel (*Mellivora capensis*), Chinkaras (Indian Gazelle) and smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*). Interestingly, all the animals have been found in the span of last two-and-half-years around Bengaluru. While the honey badger was documented in Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary abutting Bannerghatta National Park, scores of Chinkaras were spotted at Bukkapatna village near Tumakuru. The smooth-coated otters were discovered at Roerich Estate on Kanakapura Road.

This documentation of rare species, headed by Sanjay Gubbi of Nature Conservation Foundation, has sparked a debate in the conservation circles. Commenting on the documentation, Sanjay Gubbi, who is also member of the State Wildlife Board said,

“These species are found only outside the protected areas and mostly in private lands. This suggests that there is ample scope for conservation even outside the protected areas. The very presence of these species attests that these areas require protection for the propagation of these mammals. It is indeed a good sign that these species have been documented scientifically with photographic evidence.”

HC Poornesha, researcher at NCF said, “It is for the first time that ratels have been photographed. They are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Act. Ratels have appeared in pair on seven different occasions. Ratels live alone in self-dug holes and are nocturnal in nature. Ratels are usually omnivorous. The unique feature is that they have very loose skin allowing them to twist and turn within.”

Similarly, the researchers were ecstatic on sighting chinkaras. “It is known that they exist across North Karnataka but it is for the first time that they have been documented scientifically near Bengaluru. Karnataka is believed to have three species — black buck, four-horned antelopes and chinkaras — out of 6 species of antelopes in India. Bukkapatna has all the three antelope species and perhaps the only documented place in Karnataka for all the three antelope species,” explained Aparna Kolekar, another researcher.

Smooth-coated otters are the latest species to be added to the list of newfound species around Bengaluru, according to researcher Sharath T. Roerich Estate at Tataguni on Kanakapura Road surrounded by BM Kaval reserve forest has revealed the presence of otters. “Otters are categorised as vulnerable on IUCN list and on declining trend. The disappearance of wetlands had affected their population as they are largely found in rivers, large lakes and reservoirs. In fact, the otter that was captured on the camera was just 700 meters away from the Vaderahalli Lake,” explained Ashritha Anoop, another researcher.

The team led by Gubbi has been studying leopards in collaboration with Karnataka Forest Department (KFD). “The department has also been excited and surprised by these findings. The images and documentation have also been submitted to the department for further conservation,” Gubbi explained.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/report-the-man-with-many-scars-2459739>

DNA
DAILY NEWS & ANALYSIS



The man with many scars

MARISHA KARWA | Sun, 4 Jun 2017-07:00am , Mumbai , DNA

Sanjay Gubbi, one of the six recipients of the 2017 Whitley Award, popularly called the Green Oscar, tells Marisha Karwa that wildlife conservation is not a project, but a long-term relationship with a landscape

Sanjay Gubbi was 16 when he saw a tiger for the first time. Three decades later, his efforts have helped secure nearly 2,700 sq km (6.75 lakh acre) of forest land which serve as corridors connecting tiger habitats in the Western Ghats in Karnataka — the largest expansion of protected areas in the country since the 1970s.

The panthera tigris isn't the sole recipient of his attention though.

The electrical engineer-turned-conservation biologist is equally passionate about the other wild cat, a specie encountered with increasing frequency in the urban jungle, the panthera pardus. “The leopard is in need of attention, but there is a severe dearth of scientific data

on the species,” says Gubbi whose doctoral study is on leopard distribution in south Karnataka and management of leopard-human conflict. So it was a cruel twist of fate that deposited Gubbi in the jaws of his subject last year.

Called to rescue a leopard that had strayed inside Bangalore's Vibgyor school in February 2016, Gubbi bore the brunt of the cat's ire aroused by onlookers and media-persons. He managed to escape with grave injuries to his right arm, elbow and hips. “It's been over a year now but people and the scars keep reminding me of the incident almost daily,” he says in an email exchange.

The Whitley Award — a trophy and GBP35,000 — recognises Gubbi's work in securing tiger corridors in Karnataka. But Gubbi has invested in several other aspects of conservation, from advocacy and policy-making, to wildlife science, contesting legal battles, and teaching and influencing future conservationists. Perhaps, he's able to do so much because he doesn't view “wildlife conservation as a job”. “It's our responsibility to do everything within our power to contribute to wildlife.”

The strategist

The Mysuru-based conservationist working with Nature Conservation Foundation approaches issues and projects for the “highest conservation gains for the time, energy and resources one puts in”. “We need to be pragmatic, proactive and pursue the battle to the last mile. In addition, it is vital to build support among direct and indirect stakeholders.”

Fellow conservation biologist Anup Prakash, who has worked with Gubbi on several initiatives, says the 46-year-old's strength is his persuasive language. “To the locals, he talks in terms of rivers and water, to the politicians of constituencies and votes and to religious leaders as the voice of animals,” says Anup.

He recalls that when Gubbi threw his weight behind the group battling to oust Karnataka Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) from Kudremukh National Park in the late 1990s, he would carry a portable television set and video player when visiting stakeholders – this was before mobile phones were pervasive – to explain the threat to biodiversity and pollution of the Bhadra river as a result of mining.

Gubbi strongly feels that the biggest challenge faced by the conservation space is that every time there's a change of guard in the state and bureaucracy, it means changed priorities. “It is important to understand that wildlife conservation is not a project, but a long-term commitment to and relationship with a landscape,” says Gubbi, who counts among his influences Kannada writer Poornachandra Tejaswi and Boy Scouts founder Robert Baden-Powell.

He also cautions against losing sight of these goals in the chase for economic development. Given leeway, Gubbi says he'd set aside some areas in the country for wildlife conservation. “I would love to ensure that the frontline personnel of the forest department are sufficiently supported by the government,” he adds. “And finally, pass on lessons to a cadre of conservationists who will take things further.”

Gubbi, who hopes to use his Whitley Award prize money to help communities living in wildlife corridors shift to alternate energy sources for cooking, says awards and honours bring more responsibility to the winners. “They are motivational,” he says. But so is watching wildlife. “If I see animals in areas that earlier had little or no wildlife, I feel overjoyed. It shows that nature is resilient.”

With some help from Gubbi.

<http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/big-cats-increase-but-not-their-habitat-size/article19096565.ece>

THE HINDU

Big cats increase, but not their habitat size

R. Krishna Kumar

MYSURU, JUNE 17, 2017 23:37 IST



Official hints at space crunch in accommodating tigers at Nagarahole

The steady increase in tiger population in the State yet again underlines the need to expand the tiger habitat lest it results in more tiger-human conflicts in the periphery of national parks.

This came to the fore early this year in the Nagarahole belt with a spate of tiger deaths, while five human deaths were reported from the Bandipur fringes during December-January in 2013-14.

Nagarahole park director Manikandan hinted at space crunch to accommodate the growing tiger population in Nagarahole. “The park has a boundary of 220 km of which 150 km has human habitation and there is no buffer forest on the eastern and western boundary of the national park which adjoins villages,” he added

Conservationist Sanjay Gubbi said owing to effective protection, tiger numbers in areas like Nagarahole and Bandipur have reached ecological carrying capacities, and this at times has led to serious conflicts.

He called for securing corridors connected to areas of potential tiger habitat. The Padri, Hilledale, Thirunelli reserve forests in Kerala are critical for connecting Nagarahole Tiger Reserve to Bramhagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, explained Mr. Gubbi, besides identifying many reserved forests in Karnataka that connect one larger tiger habitat to another.

C.M. Muthanna of Wildlife Conservation Society, India Programme, said nearly 300 sq km of reserve forests around Nagarahole could be declared protected area to accommodate expanding tiger and prey population.

Mr. Gubbi and others, in the paper “Providing more protected space for tigers: a landscape conservation approach in the Western Ghats” in the journal *Oryx*, identified nearly 2,150 sq km of reserved forests within Karnataka that are high potential tiger habitats and need to be notified as protected areas. “Such measures will help young, dispersing tigers to move into potential areas with less competition for food,” he said. If this is implemented, Mr. Gubbi says most protected areas in the Western Ghats of Karnataka can be interlinked ensuring a connectivity from Bannerghatta National Park adjoining Bengaluru to Aghanashini Conservation Reserve in Uttara Kannada district. This will not only provide contiguity of space and habitat for wildlife, it will help absorb spillover population and reduce conflict situation.

NEWS

Wildlife conservation efforts: Sanjay Gubbi wins Whitley Award 2017

Sanjay Gubbi is a wildlife biologist and conservationist who mainly works on conservation issues in Karnataka, India. His interests lie in large conservation biology conservation policy, human-wildlife interactions and outreach. Sanjay hails from Tumkur district in Karnataka. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in engineering. Later he took up conservation as a full-time career and obtained a Master's degree in Conservation Biology from the University of Kent, UK in 2006. His Master's dissertation won two major international awards. He was also the recipient of the Maurice Swingland Award for the best postgraduate student of the year. He is the recipient of Carl Zeiss Wildlife Conservation Award for 2011. In May 2017, Sanjay won the prestigious Whitley Award, popularly known as the Green Oscars, for his efforts in tiger conservation. The awards are instituted by the UK-registered charity Whitley Fund for Nature, which supports nature conservationists in their efforts to conserve wildlife and nature. He won the award for his work to protect tiger corridors, reducing fragmentation threats and conservation outreach in Karnataka.

Sanjay has worked on key panels of Karnataka, including the State Board for Wildlife. His recent work on the Western Ghats of Karnataka has strived to reduce the impact of habitat fragmentation. He has also been collaborating with the Karnataka Forest Department towards an expansion of protected areas.

Pioneering work carried out by Sanjay in the field of protected area expansion, human-animal conflict, conservation of wildlife, and its governance is briefly described here, drawn from the excerpts of the work carried out by him and his colleagues in these areas in Karnataka.

Human-wildlife conflict and work carried out in the area

Karnataka is rich and diverse in its flora and fauna. The recorded forest area of Karnataka is 43,356.47 sq. km, according to the State's Forest Department annual report for the year 2014-15. With regard to the geographical area of Karnataka, unprotected forests constitute 16%, protected forest areas constitute 3% with

5 national parks and 29 wildlife sanctuaries, 12 conservation reserves and 1 community reserve¹. The Western Ghats is a biodiversity hot spot in the country. Animals such as tiger, elephant, lion-tailed macaque, dhole, sloth bear, leopard and gaur are found here. Such fauna are being threatened due to poaching, human-wildlife conflict, habitat destruction and pollution.

Human-wildlife conflict poses a critical threat to the survival of endangered species such as elephant, tiger, lion-tailed macaque, etc. This conflict is an obstacle to wildlife conservation which not only threatens the lives of humans and animals, but also hampers long-term biodiversity conservation goals.

The following are some of the issues, causes and direct/indirect consequences of human-wildlife conflict¹.

Issues in human-wildlife conflict cause damage to crops, livestock, humans, road kills, poaching and transmission of diseases or disease-causing parasites.

Causes of human-wildlife conflict include increased fragmentation of protected areas owing to gradual loss of wildlife habitat; transformation of wildlife habitats for agriculture, tourism and animal husbandry; natural factors such as droughts, man-made fires, climatic conditions and other natural hazards that impact wildlife habitat and seasonal modification of habitats due to rainfall.

Direct and indirect consequences of human-wildlife conflict are chance encounters with wildlife along paths between dwellings and a water source in the forest, and also with wild animals that stray out of the natural boundaries in search of food. This results in injuries/death of people, loss of domestic cattle affecting the wealth and livelihood of families. A common reaction of human-wildlife conflict is the killing of wild animals by people as retaliation.

Transmission of diseases from domestic animals to wildlife and vice versa, competition over grazing land, habitat fragmentation and pollution that pose a threat to the survival of wildlife population are some of the indirect consequences of this conflict. Improvement in the habitat, training and awareness programmes, technical and financial support, boundary walls and eco-development activities are some of the meas-

ures that can be taken to reduce this conflict.

Wildlife-vehicle conflict

Sanjay's work highlighting human-wildlife conflict includes the impacts of roads and highways on movement of animals such as elephants, leopards and tigers²⁻⁴. Gubbi *et al.*² draw our attention to the fact that over the past decade, expansion and improvement in transport and other infrastructure networks have contributed to India's economic growth. The authors state that though there are legal mandates that require assessment of ecological impacts of infrastructure projects prior to implementation, no proper assessment of the post-implementation ecological impact is currently being done. In an attempt to assess wildlife-vehicle conflict owing to the construction of roads, remotely triggered camera traps were placed on two sections of the highway passing through Nagarhole tiger reserve in Karnataka – one section was closed to vehicular traffic and the other was open to traffic during the daytime. Low rates of sighting of chital, gaur and elephant were recorded in camera traps where the traffic density was high. This suggests that these animals avoid busy highways. Gubbi³ has highlighted the mortality of leopards due to vehicle-induced accidents. According to him³, in 5 years (2010-2014), 23 leopards were killed due to road accidents in Karnataka. Another article, a case study⁴, draws attention to tigers. As with other mammals, tigers are also threatened by road traffic. The case study highlights that though the mortality of tigers due to wildlife-vehicle collisions in India is recorded at 20 deaths over the past 15 years, this is most likely an underestimate, due to some deaths not being detected and reported.

Management of wildlife-vehicle conflict

In an attempt to show how the risk of wildlife-vehicle conflict can be managed and mitigated, Gubbi *et al.*⁴ have reported a case study of the Nagarhole and Bandipur conservation reserves, that house over 100 breeding tigers. The authors draw our attention to the fact that there are seven major roads passing

through the two contiguous reserves. In the year 2008, the government closed the 27.3 km stretch of the Mysore–Mananthavadi Road (SH-17) that passed through the southern part of Nagarhole reserve between 18:00 and 06:00 h. An alternative route was identified. This reduced the length of the road within the tiger reserve to 17.3 km and provided better access to 11 poorly connected villages. The realignment of the roads outside the reserve reduced the impact of traffic. Owing to poor condition of the alternate route, in 2012 the government released US\$ 3.2 m for its repair after it was convinced of the conservation and public welfare merits.

In 2010, following the example of the Mysore–Mananthavadi road, the Karnataka Government closed two highways (NH-67 and NH-212) passing through the Bandipur tiger reserve between 21:00 and 06:00 h. An alternate road that was less damaging passed along the boundary of Nagarhole (SH-90). As in the case of the Mysore–Mananthavadi road, this was in a poor condition too. The government allocated US\$ 8.03 m for repair works.

Gubbi *et al.*⁴ cite the following future course of action for reducing wildlife–vehicle conflict:

1. Prevention of construction of new roads in protected forest areas followed by rerouting through the core area of a reserve.
2. Engagement of different levels of the government and community to mitigate road impacts.
3. The need for a dedicated wildlife-crossing structure instead of the current standard drainage.
4. Funding agencies which fund construction of roads should also get involved and ensure that the new developments do not endanger wildlife in the area of construction.

Led by these examples, other state governments implemented night closure of roads in protected forests and developed diversion roads. These include the Mudumalai tiger reserve in Tamil Nadu, and Gir National Park and Velavadar Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat.

Defragmentation of habitat to establish tiger corridors

With regard to tiger corridors, Gubbi *et al.*⁵ have highlighted the following: Sev-

eral effective strategies have been implemented by the Karnataka Government to conserve tigers. However, the protected areas that shelter these tigers were disjointed and isolated. This resulted in increased fragmentation of the tiger population in these areas. The authors state that habitat connectivity between populations will enable genetic exchange between them and help maintain the same. In response to this, in collaboration with civil societies, the Government of Karnataka started to link the tiger populations by identifying ecologically important habitats and designating them as protected areas to ensure long-term habitat protection. The government set up the 906 sq km Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary resulting in contiguous network of protected areas. Over 19 months new areas were added to the network of protected areas that host and connect a population of nearly 300 tigers. Such measures delivered dual benefits of wildlife conservation and protection of watersheds. Using a conservation planning technique that considered ecological, social and political factors⁶, the approach resulted in the expansion of the protected area network by 2385 sq km, connected 23 protected areas and the created three complexes of protected areas, thus increasing the protected area network in Karnataka from 3.8% to 5.2%. Such partnership between stakeholders highlights the importance of complementary roles in conservation planning and implementation.

Welfare measures for forest watchers and guards

Sanjay⁷ talks about the forest watchers and guards as the unsung heroes of wildlife conservation. They are the first line of defence against wildlife poaching, forest fires, timber smugglers and other activities that degrade wildlife habitats. The forest guards face risks from Maoists, terrorists, and also have to face the wrath of local farmers who suffer from human–wildlife conflict. To add, many of these frontline staff are old and cannot take harsh duties which the job demands.

These guards lack basic amenities such as drinking water, and have to face hardships such as night duty, 365-day duty and lack of proper mobile-phone networks. Besides, temporary staff are always at the mercy of the local officer

with a salary that is neither fixed nor assured. They are not eligible for leave and are always in the fear of losing their jobs. Many do not even own two decent pairs of uniforms, which could act as an important deterrent against poachers and smugglers.

Sanjay has helped institute new social security and welfare measures for forest watchers and guards to offset the additional cost of maintaining families at distant places. A new policy that provides hardship allowance from Rs 2000 to Rs 3500 per month was instituted in Karnataka for the frontline staff of protected areas due to his efforts. Karnataka has implemented a policy to provide insurance even for temporary staff working in protected areas, and give one lakh rupees to any temporary watcher who has put in substantial years of service at the time of retirement in any of its tiger reserves. The funding for this is from the respective tiger foundation.

Wildlife governance

He states that conservation of wildlife does not depend on science alone but is also dependent on the quality of governance and wider social setting⁸. 'While effective administrative intervention has often helped in species and ecosystem recovery in India, inept government efforts have accelerated or degraded the habitats with adverse impact to wildlife.'

The author discusses the earlier model of wildlife conservation and how this started to change from the 1990s. The increase in protected areas to 723 over a period of 20 years (1970–1990) was owing to a political leadership that was sympathetic towards conservation of wildlife. He states that this model is now challenged externally and internally; externally owing to economic growth and internally owing to drift of the mission away from protection towards eco-development, system inefficiencies such as lack of welfare measures for department staff and corruption in the Forest Department.

With the country's economy growing at about 7–9%, industrialization and increasing number of development projects pose a threat to wildlife. Sanjay cites that there has been a weakening of the forest conservation laws on account of economic growth, e.g., infrastructure projects

Save Our Species – IUCN YouTube Channel

25 July 2017

(4,800 subscribers)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zp6fu2ZxRyg&feature=youtu.be&a=>



Indira Lacerna Widmann

Philippines

Partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by Notting Hill
Preparatory School



Indira has received eight pieces of media coverage, including a radio interview for the BBC World Service radio programme, Outlook. She was also featured in four additional pieces alongside other Whitley Award winners. The following is a selection of Indira's coverage.

To see Indira's WFN profile follow this [link](#):

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Conservation leader from the Philippines wins 2017 Whitley Award

Prize awarded for 'Jail birds' project: partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo

London, UK: 17 May 2017 – HRH The Princess Royal will tomorrow present a Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35,000 in project funding, to Indira Lacerna-Widmann at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, in honour of her work to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo.

The Philippine cockatoo has declined by a staggering 80% over the last 40 years. Decimated by the cage bird trade and habitat loss it is now extinct in much of its range. In the Filipino city of Puerto Princesa, cockatoos nest in the forested grounds of Iwahig prison – a huge open air penal farm - and forage over military and private land. Indira will use her Whitley Award to work with these novel partners to secure the future of this urban population of cockatoos; training prisoners and the army as wildlife wardens to address poaching in breeding sites and working with landowners to secure feeding corridors under threat from development.

The Katala Foundation, which Indira co-founded, has undertaken conservation work to safeguard this species since 1998. By using specifically developed 'PRIDE' campaigns and reaching out to children and city-dwellers, Indira hopes to build national pride in the Philippine cockatoo. This exciting project will give prisoners the opportunity to learn new skills whilst taking part in conservation; building a brighter future for both people and parrots.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "WFN focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for optimism. The Awards Ceremony is about recognising progress – winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning an

Award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors, so they are able to communicate effectively with the public and inform change at the political level."

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/05/18/17/philippine-cockatoos-hero-named-in-prestigious-green-oscars>



Philippine cockatoos' 'hero' named in prestigious 'Green Oscars'

Ivy Jean Vibar, ABS-CBN News

Posted at May 18 2017 06:05 PM | Updated as of May 19 2017 11:38 AM



MANILA (2nd UPDATE) – A Filipino wildlife conservationist received a prestigious award in the United Kingdom for her efforts in preserving the rare Philippine cockatoo. Indira Lacerna-Widmann, who leads the Katala Foundation's conservation efforts as its chief operations officer, works with prisoners in Palawan to safeguard the red-vented cockatoo, or Philippine cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*), locally known as Katala, Kalangay, Abukay or Agay.

For her efforts to save the birds, which nest within the grounds of Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm in Puerto Princesa City as well as in other areas in Palawan, Lacerna-Widmann also received funds worth 35,000 British pounds (P2.25 million).

Along with five other wildlife conservationists, Lacerna-Widmann was selected from 166 applicants from 66 countries for the Whitley Awards, considered the international "Green Oscars."

She was among six shortlisted finalists who had a chance to win an award from the Whitley Fund for Nature, and a share in funding worth 210,000 British pounds (P13 million). All six were granted funds for their projects.

According to Widmann, she will use the grant to raise awareness about wildlife conservation, and to train prisoners as wildlife wardens at Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm to address poaching in breeding sites such as in Barangay Iwahig.

She also dedicated the award to all Filipinos, especially to Palaweños.

"Masaya . . . masaya pero kaakibat naman sa pagkilala na iyan ay natural iyong responsibilidad at ang bagong enerhiya na meron tayong gagawin," Lacerna-Widmann told ABS-CBN News.

The Philippine cockatoo, listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as critically endangered, is usually caught by collectors for its ability to mimic the human voice, the Katala Foundation said in its website.

Other factors contributing to the dwindling cockatoo population are poaching and the destruction of its habitat, mangrove forests and other forested areas in the Philippines, particularly Palawan.

Filipinos whose projects previously won the Whitley Award include Jayson Ibanez (2015), whose work protects Philippine eagles; and Tess Gatan Balbas (2014), who helps save the Philippine crocodile.

The first Whitley Award was given to Canada-born Dr. Amanda Vincent, for her Philippines-based project focusing on the study of the biology and conservation of seahorses.

Other finalists in the 2017 Whitley Awards are: Ximena Velez-Liendo: An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains; Alexander Blanco: Nest protectors: conserving Venezuela's magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship; Ian Little: Custodians of South Africa's threatened grassland biodiversity; Purnima Barman: Inspiring women to protect Assam's greater adjutant and its habitat, India; and Sanjay Gubbi: Reducing deforestation in Karnataka's tiger corridors, India. Awards were given on Thursday (early morning Friday, Philippine time) at Royal Geographical Society in London, by the UK's Princess Royal, Anne, a patron of the Whitley Fund.

The Princess Royal also presented the Whitley Gold Award worth 50,000 British pounds (P3 million) to Zafer Kizilkaya from Turkey, for his work in securing and expanding marine reserves along the Turkish coastline. **—with reports from Cherry Ann Camacho, ABS-CBN News**

Manila Bulletin – Print & Online Newspaper, Philippines
20 May 2017

<http://news.mb.com.ph/2017/05/20/ph-cockatoo-conservationist-wins-2017-whitley-award/>



PH cockatoo conservationist wins 2017 Whitley Award

Published May 20, 2017, 4:57 PM

By Philippine News Agency

For her efforts in safeguarding the critically endangered Philippine cockatoo, a Filipino conservation leader has been named as one of the six winners of the 2017 Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35,000 in project funding.

Indira Lacerna-Widmann was selected out of 169 applicants from all over the world to receive the award that was presented by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London on May 18.



Whitley Award is an international prize recognizing exceptional individuals for their outstanding conservation work with local communities in biodiversity-rich, resource-poor countries.

Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) in a press release described Widmann as “an outstanding conservationist who works in the Philippines to protect the country’s spectacular wildlife and redefines the way local people engage with the natural world in the 21st century.”

The Katala Foundation Inc. (KFI), which Widmann co-founded, has undertaken conservation work through the Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Program to safeguard this species since 1998.

The Philippine cockatoo has declined by a staggering 80% over the last 40 years. Decimated by the cage bird trade and habitat loss, it is now extinct in much of its range. In Puerto Princesa City, cockatoos nest in the forested grounds of Iwahig prison – a huge open air penal farm – and forage over military and private land.

Widmann will use her award prize to secure the future of this urban population of cockatoos by partnering with the Iwahig prisoners. She will train prisoners and the army as wildlife wardens to address poaching in breeding sites, while working with landowners to secure feeding corridors under threat from development.

The following are the 5 more winners in the 2017 Whitley Awards who have been awarded a share of the prize money worth £210,000: Sanjay Gubbi – India, Reducing deforestation in Karnataka’s tiger corridors; Ian Little – South Africa, Custodians of South Africa’s threatened grassland biodiversity; Purnima Barman – India, Inspiring women to protect Assam’s greater adjutant and its wetland habitat; Alexander Blanco – Venezuela, Nest protectors: conserving Venezuela’s magnificent harpy eagles as a rainforest flagship; and Ximena Velez-Liendo – Bolivia, An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains.

The Whitley Awards has been presented annually since 1994 by the WFN, a UK registered charity that champions outstanding grassroots leaders in nature conservation across the developing world.

“WFN focus on conservation success stories which give us a reason for optimism. The Awards Ceremony is about recognizing progress – winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level,” said WFN Founder Edward Whitley in the press release.

Since then, the Whitley Fund for Nature has given nearly £13.5 million to conservation and recognized more than 185 conservation leaders in over 80 countries.



Philippine cockatoo conservationist wins 2017 Whitley Award

May 20, 2017

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, May 20 —For her efforts in safeguarding the critically endangered Philippine cockatoo, a Filipino conservation leader has been named as one of the six winners of the 2017 Whitley Award, a prestigious international nature conservation prize worth £35,000 in project funding.

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<http://news.mb.com.ph/2017/05/24/pinoy-conservationist-wins-green-oscars-for-jail-birds-project/>



Pinoy conservationist wins ‘Green Oscars’ for ‘Jail birds’ project

Published May 24, 2017, 12:05 AM
by Roy Mabasa

A Filipino conservationist who worked to save the critically endangered Philippine cockatoo (Katala) has won the prestigious Whitley Award, considered as the “Green Oscars” given by a UK-based organization to outstanding grassroots leaders in nature conservation in the developing world.

The awardee, Indira Lacerna-Widmann, who had worked with local prisoners in Iwahig Prison in Palawan to safeguard the Philippine cockatoo, received the award from Her Royal Highness Princess Anne, The Princess Royal of the United Kingdom, at a ceremony held recently in the Royal Geographical Society in London.

Lacerna-Widmann was recognized for her “Jail birds” project under the Katala Foundation, which she co-founded. The foundation also developed and implemented strategies that enable children and city-dwellers to learn new skills in protecting Philippine cockatoos since 1998.

The Filipino conservation leader is one of six individuals to have been awarded a share of the prize money worth £210,000 (P13.5 million) She received the international nature conservation prize with £35,000 (P2.2 million) in project funding donated by Notting Hill Preparatory School.

The Whitley Awards have been presented annually since 1994. In addition to the financial benefit of winning the awards, winners also receive professional training to help them communicate effectively with the public and effect positive change in their respective communities.

<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/900217/taking-an-endangered-bird-under-her-wing>

INQUIRER.NET

Taking an endangered bird under her wing

For saving the Philippine cockatoo from extinction, environmentalist Indira Lacerna-Widmann received the equivalent of the Green Oscars from the conservation community

By: Redempto D. Anda - Correspondent / @demptoanda
Philippine Daily Inquirer / 12:47 AM May 28, 2017



Once feared to be on the brink of extinction, the Philippine cockatoo, also known as katala, is slowly thriving, thanks to an environmentalist whose work with the iconic bird's remaining wild population in Palawan province won her the "Green Oscars" of the conservation community. Indira Lacerna-Widmann, director of the Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Program, last week received the prestigious Whitley Awards in London, conferred by Princess Ann, along with six other environmentalists from different countries.

The award from the Whitley Fund for Nature recognizes "effective local conservationists from biodiversity-rich, resource-poor countries who are spearheading innovative work to save endangered wildlife, and benefit local communities."

"It is rewarding to see the fruits of what we have achieved," Widmann told the Inquirer following the awarding ceremonies held at the Royal Geographic Society in London.



“Katala” foraging in Narra, Palawan province.

Near extinction

The Philippine cockatoo or red-vented cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*) is classified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as critically endangered. Scientific studies have shown that since the early 1980s, the bird’s population has declined by 80 to 90 percent due to illegal wildlife trade and the destruction of their habitat.

Widmann and her biologist husband, Peter, launched a bid to save the local cockatoo in 1998 by forming the nongovernment organization, Katala Foundation Inc., and settling in the province for good.

“Peter is the culprit. He believed so much that I could help him realize his dream of saving a bird he had introduced me to,” said Widmann who has a master’s degree in environmental studies from the University of the Philippines in Los Baños, Laguna province, and a diploma on conservation education from Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology at University of Kent in Canterbury.

The couple’s work began on the island of Rasa off the municipality of Narra, 60 kilometers south of the provincial capital of Puerto Princesa City.

Only about 25 birds were left on the island, which was in fact the largest cockatoo population anyone can find in the entire country.

Today, Rasa Island has a thriving population of over 300 birds, allowing Widmann's group a chance to expand their work to other parts of the province.



Widmann talks about the endangered bird to prisoners at the Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm in Palawan.

Work challenges

With limited funding support, the biologist couple adopted practical and cost-efficient strategies to achieve their goal, including partnering with communities and getting them to understand and embrace the importance of conservation.

While rampant poaching and the destruction of the bird's natural habitat are considered the biggest threats to the cockatoo, Widmann said that educating communities proved to be an effective counterstrategy.

"It is very rewarding to see that (the poachers-turned-wardens) feel proud of what they had achieved," she said.

On Rasa Island, Widmann fought hard alongside communities in Narra to block a plan some three years ago to put up a coal-fired power facility close to the protected habitat.

Local ownership

"The fight against the coal plant was a heartbreaking experience. But support from the community and local government was overwhelming. It was like the birds whispered to me and told me that indeed, we were all interconnected," she said.

Local opposition to the proposed coal plant site forced the proponent to find another location for its power facility.

Even with several challenges facing Widmann and her group, the bird's population continues to recover.



“We have averted the worst scenario, which is the extinction of the species,” declared this Whitney awardee.

“The success story of the recovery of the katala and the sense of local ownership to what we are doing are very rewarding. They affirm that genuine community participation is a must and not an option,” she added.

Widmann vowed to continue working to push local governments to be more aware of the need to conserve the forest habitat of the endangered bird.

“It will really be great if local governments take a more active role in species—and biodiversity conservation,” she said.

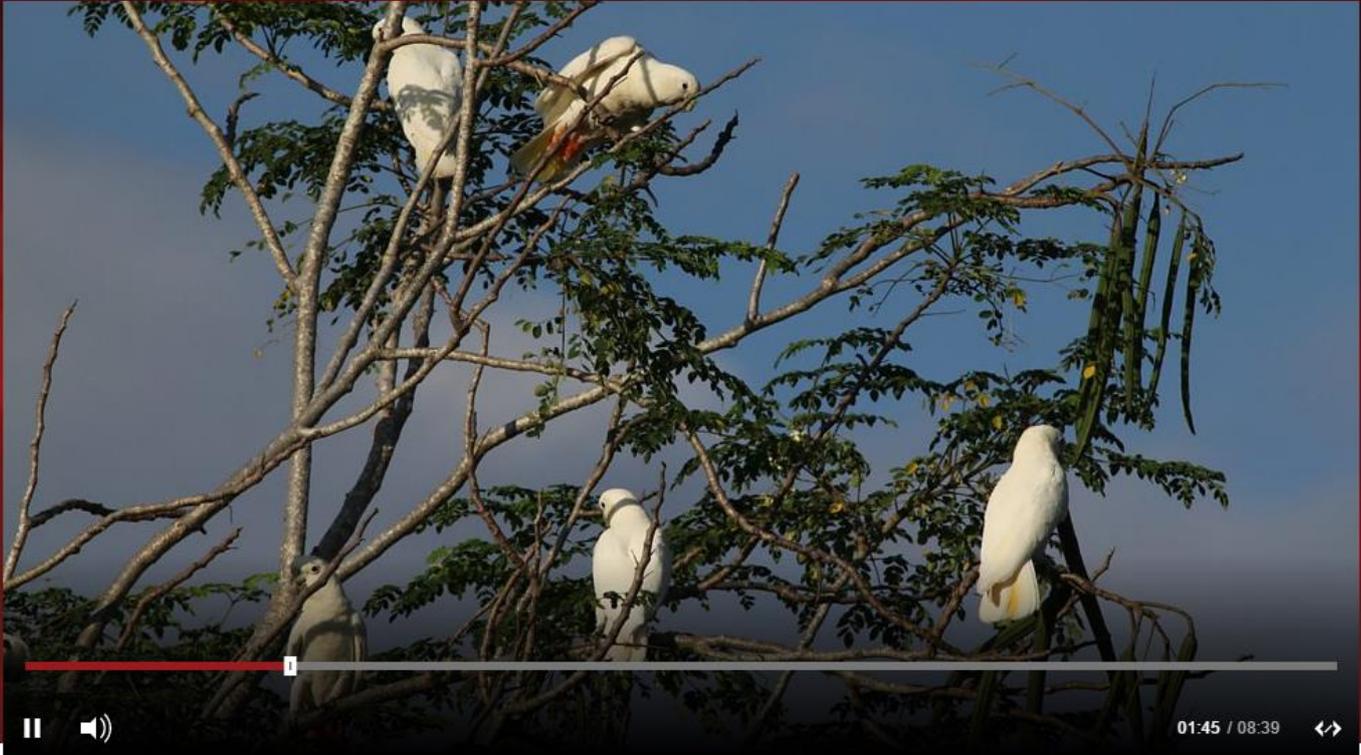
Widmann said her group would use the 35,000-euro prize that went with her award to fund similar conservation efforts, this time at the Iwahig forests, by working with prison authorities at the penal facility that occupies the property.

Outlook, BBC World Service – Radio Programme, UK
12 June 2017

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p055q5tt>

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The prisoners protecting the Philippine cockatoo

Indira Lacerna-Widmann has made it her mission to protect the endangered Philippine cockatoo and has enlisted the help of some unlikely volunteers. She has been working with prisoners in the Palawan province to locate and look after the rare birds as well as helping the prisoners to adjust to life outside of prison.

Image: Philippine cockatoos
Credit: Whitley Award

This clip is from  Outlook

2017 winners

Combined Coverage

Alexander Blanco, Venezuela & Ximena Velez Liendo, Bolivia

Mongabay – Online Global Environmental News
04 June 2017
(Over 20 million visitors per year)

<https://es.mongabay.com/2017/06/dia-mundial-medio-ambiente-historias/>

MONGABAY

Día Mundial del Medio Ambiente: seis nombres que no debes olvidar

4 Junio 2017 / Milton López Tarabochia

Investigadores que trabajan para conservar especies amenazadas y defensores del bosque forman parte de esta recopilación.

El 5 de junio se celebra el Día Mundial del Medio Ambiente, y a propósito de ello en Mongabay Latam hemos preparado una lista con reportajes que nos muestran las historias de seis personas que se han dedicado a proteger la naturaleza y conservar la biodiversidad.

2.- Premio Whitley 2017: veinte años de lucha para salvar al águila más grande del mundo en Venezuela

Alexander Blanco estudió medicina veterinaria. Durante un trabajo de rehabilitación de águilas arpías en un zoológico venezolano tuvo su primer contacto con estas aves. Ha pasado 20 años luchando para proteger a esta especie y su hábitat, y su trabajo sin descanso lo hizo merecedor al Premio Whitley 2017. Blanco no solo delimita su labor a la conservación del águila arpía (*Harpía harpyja*) también a la difusión de la importancia de esta especie y del ecosistema que la rodea. Este reportaje te cuenta más sobre su gran labor.



4.- Boliviana ganadora de Premio Whitley: 18 años trabajando en la conservación del oso andino

Ximena Velez-Liendo es la bióloga boliviana que ha ganado el prestigioso premio Whitley debido a su trabajo incansable por conservar al oso andino (*Tremarctos ornatus*). La especialista realiza un censo poblacional en la zona sur del territorio boliviano y trabaja para determinar las dinámicas de conflicto entre los osos y los habitantes de las comunidades, para que sean ellos quienes encuentren soluciones al problema de la convivencia que se presenta cuando los osos andinos –debido a la escasez de alimento– matan al ganado de los campesinos. [Conoce aquí](#) más detalles del trabajo de la especialista.



Ian Little, South Africa &

Indira Lacerna Widmann, Philippines

**Rainforest Trust – Environmental Organisation Website, US
21 June 2017**

<https://www.rainforesttrust.org/news/rainforest-trust-partners-receive-international-conservation-awards/>



Rainforest Trust Partners Receive International Conservation Awards

JUN 21, 2017

Two of Rainforest Trust's local partners were recognized for their continued commitment to safeguarding biodiversity through community engagement.

This May, the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) presented Whitley Awards to two members of Rainforest Trust partner organizations. According to the WFN website, "The Whitley Awards champion effective local conservationists from bio-diversity rich, resource-poor countries, who are spearheading innovative work to save endangered wildlife and benefit local communities."

Ian Little of Rainforest Trust's partner Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) was recognized by WFN for his efforts to conserve South Africa's grassland habitat against the threat of unregulated agricultural encroachment. Little is working with landowners to help them understand how to sustainably manage their grasslands, and aims to establish a corridor of protected areas.

With an emphasis on community engagement, EWT is also partnering with Rainforest Trust to utilize Biodiversity Stewardship Programs in other parts of South Africa. Currently, the conservation organizations are working on two projects that encourage landowners to become active custodians of important amphibian habitats on their own properties, specifically for the Critically Endangered Amathole Toad and Endangered Pickersgill's Reed Frog.

Another Whitley Award recipient was Indira Lacerna-Wildmann, the co-founder of the Philippine conservation organization Katala Foundation. Lacerna-Wildmann and her team have worked to protect the Critically Endangered Philippine Cockatoo, which has faced drastic population declines due to the caged bird trade and destruction of its habitat. The reserves that the Katala Foundation supports have helped the Philippine Cockatoo rebound, and Lacerna-Wildmann is now working to protect an urban population of cockatoos in Central Palawan that forage over military and private lands.

Rainforest Trust is currently partnering with the Katala Foundation to protect habitat for another species that is also negatively impacted by the wildlife trade and habitat loss: the Critically Endangered Palawan Turtle. This turtle is among the 25 most threatened turtle species in the world, and together the Katala Foundation and Rainforest Trust will secure a key section of its range.

“It is always wonderful to see our partners recognized by such an important international platform,” said James Lewis, Rainforest Trust’s Director of Conservation Programs.

“Like so many of Rainforest Trust’s partners, Ian and Indira are true leaders in conservation, working closely with communities, landowners and governments to ensure that generations to come will be able to share in the amazing biodiversity we all want to see protected.”

Purnima Barman, India & Sanjay Gubbi, India

Business Standard – News Website, India
17 May 2017

http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/2-indians-win-green-oscars-for-conservation-projects-117051701215_1.html

Business Standard

2 Indians win 'Green Oscars' for conservation projects

Press Trust of India | London May 17, 2017

Two Indian activists today won the annual Whitley Awards, dubbed as the 'Green Oscars', for their works in the field of animal and bird conservation in India.

Sanjay Gubbi won the award for his work to protect Karnataka's tiger corridors, and Purnima Barman for creating an all-female network to save the Greater Adjutant stork, known in India as Hargila, and its wetland habitat in Assam.

The two Indians are among six global winners of the award shortlisted from 166 entries.

Each of the winners receives 35,000 pounds (USD 45,374) prize money in project funding over one year.

"This is a life-changing event for my team. It is a dream of every conservationist to win this award and the prize money will go a long way in expanding our Hargila Army network," said Barman, who got attracted to the project while she worked on her PhD in Kamrup district of Assam.

The Hargila storks are large scavenger birds with a global population of just 1,200, 75 per cent of which are found in Assam.

Through her NGO Aaranyak, Barman has mobilised her all- female local network towards sustainable livelihoods through weaving traditional Assamese scarves and saris that are then sold to raise funds for the conservation project.

"With this award money, we plan to scale up this work, encouraging households in the region to take pride in the species and protect the birds and their nesting trees," she said.

Gubbi had quit his job as an electrical engineer to work with nature and wildlife.

In 2012, working closely with the Karnataka government, he secured the largest expansion of protected areas for the conservation of tigers in his state.

"Karnataka is home to the highest number of Bengal tigers in India and in 2015 the figure stood between 10 and 15. Our hope is to take it up to 100 over the next few years but this can only be done through working with the community," he said.

With his award money, Gubbi hopes to reduce deforestation in two important wildlife sanctuaries which connect several protected areas and act as corridors for tigers, allowing them to move between territories.

The community focus will be around the provision of fuel- efficient stoves to reduce the reliance on firewood collection from the habitat of the tigers and save lives all round.

"The awards are about recognising progress, winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning the award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors," said Edward Whitley, founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, which set up the awards 24 years ago.

The other winners of this year's awards include Indira Lacerna-Widmann from the Philippines for her project of partnering with prisoners to safeguard the critically endangered Philippine cockatoo.

Ian Little from South Africa for working on restoring grassland biodiversity; Alexander Blanco from Venezuela for conserving the Venezuelan Harpy Eagles and Ximena Velez-Liendo from Bolivia for working on the co-existence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains.

The Whitley Fund for Nature is a UK-based charity that works to highlight grassroots leaders in nature conservation across the developing world.

This year's winners will be felicitated at a special ceremony at the Royal Geographic Society in London tomorrow and receive their awards from Queen Elizabeth II's daughter Princess Anne, The Princess Royal, who is a patron of the charity.

Business Standard – News Website, India
17 May 2017

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/2-indians-win-green-oscar-for-conservation-projects/1/956226.html>



2 Indians win Green Oscars for conservation projects

May 17, 2017 | UPDATED 18:50 IST

From Aditi Khanna

London, May 17 (PTI) Two Indian activists today won the annual Whitley Awards, dubbed as the Green Oscars, for their works in the field of animal and bird conservation in India.

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"With this award money, we plan to scale up this work, encouraging households in the region to take pride in the species and protect the birds and their nesting trees," she said. Gubbi had quit his job as an electrical engineer to work with nature and wildlife.

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This years winners will be felicitated at a special ceremony at the Royal Geographic Society in London tomorrow and receive their awards from Queen Elizabeth IIs daughter Princess Anne, The Princess Royal, who is a patron of the charity.

The 210,000-pound prize money, which is divided between the winners, is donated by the World Wide Fund UK (WWF-UK). PTI AK CPS

<https://www.scoopwhoop.com/wildlife-activist-sanjay-gubbi/#.g32uni7m9>



Assam's Purnima Barman & Karnataka's Sanjay Gubbi Win The Prestigious 'Green Oscars' Award

by Ritu Singh

Two Indian activists on Wednesday won the annual Whitley Awards, dubbed as the 'Green Oscars', for their works in the field of animal and bird conservation in India.



Sanjay Gubbi of Karnataka and Purnima Barman of Assam were among six global winners of the award shortlisted from 166 entries. Each of the winners receives 35,000 pounds (USD 45,374) prize money in project funding over one year.

Purnima Barman

37-year-old Barman won this award for creating an all-female network to save the Greater Adjutant stork, known in India as Hargila, and its wetland habitat in Assam.



The Hargila storks are large scavenger birds with a global population of just 1,200, 75 per cent of which are found in Assam. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), their total population is estimated to be between 1,200 and 1,800 and around 800 birds are found in Assam and at least 156 birds in Bihar. Through her NGO Aaranyak, Barman has mobilised her all- female local network towards sustainable livelihoods through weaving traditional Assamese scarves and saris that are then sold to raise funds for the conservation project

"This is a life-changing event for my team. It is a dream of every conservationist to win this award and the prize money will go a long way in expanding our Hargila Army network," said Barman, who got attracted to the project while she worked on her PhD in Kamrup district of Assam.

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Sanjay Gubbi

Famed wildlife activist Sanjay Gubbi won the award for his work to protect Karnataka's tiger corridors. Gubbi had quit his job as an electrical engineer to work with nature and wildlife.

In 2012, working closely with the Karnataka government, he secured the largest expansion of protected areas for the conservation of tigers in his state.



"Karnataka is home to the highest number of Bengal tigers in India and in 2015 the figure stood between 10 and 15. Our hope is to take it up to 100 over the next few years but this can only be done through working with the community," he said.

With his award money, Gubbi hopes to reduce deforestation in two important wildlife sanctuaries which connect several protected areas and act as corridors for tigers, allowing them to move between territories.

"The awards are about recognising progress, winning those small battles which cumulatively equate to change at the national-level. In addition to the financial benefit of winning the award, winners receive professional communications training to turn scientists into ambassadors," said Edward Whitley, founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, which set up awards 24 years ago.

Sanjay Gubbi, India & Indira Lacerna Widmann, Philippines

Save Our Species – IUCN Website
23 May 2017

http://www.saveourspecies.org/news/two-more-iucn-grantees-recognised-whitley-awards-2017?dm_i=2GI3,13JMG,5FSX5H,3BMNE,1



Two more IUCN grantees have been recognised for their innovative leadership in protecting threatened species by the Whitley Fund for Nature in 2017.

Indira Lacerna-Widmann and Sanjay Gubbi were two of six finalists each awarded the prestigious Whitley Award (including individual cash prizes of £35,000 GBP) during the ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London 18 May 2017. Both intend to invest their prizes to develop their conservation projects further.

Indira's work protecting the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*), which has declined by a staggering 80% over the last 40 years, has involved the creation of habitat reserves and community conservation initiatives on Palawan island - home to 75% of the remaining 1,200 wild individuals.

Her work since 1998 as co-founder of the Katala Foundation (Katala is the local name for the cockatoo), has helped populations recover. This included preparations for the re-

introduction of captive bred birds – a project supported by SOS - Save Our Species from 2012-2014.

But there is more to do: Indira hopes to secure foraging sites, reduce poaching and perform bird tagging to better monitor behaviour by engaging with partners including the island's open air prison while catalysing a Katala pride campaign among the broader community through outreach. The goal is to significantly improve the parrot's conservation status over the next five years.

Meanwhile, for three decades, Sanjay has been championing tiger conservation in his home state of Karnataka – also home to 20% of India's Endangered tigers (*Panthera tigris*). His work with authorities and stakeholders to protect and connect tiger habitats has helped legally safeguard 2,385km² of habitat representing the largest expansion of protected areas in India since 1970.

In addition to outreach and working with influential religious leaders to influence public attitudes, supporting local community needs has been central to the efficacy of his approach. For example, providing families with gas-powered forest-friendly cooking stoves reduces human encroachment on tiger habitat. And as fewer women risk collecting firewood from surrounding forests, the incidence of wildlife encounters are reduced. Much of this work has been funded by a grant through IUCN's Integrated Tiger Habitat Conservation Programme (ITHCP).

Looking ahead, Sanjay hopes to scale up the provision of these stoves, speed up payments to farmers for livestock losses caused by depredation and to reduce forest degradation in two important Wildlife Sanctuaries which connect multiple protected areas. This will form one of the largest contiguous tiger habitats in the country. It would also benefit other large species such as elephants, leopards, pangolins and honey badgers.

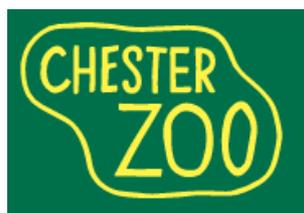
SOS and ITHCP were each set up as partnerships to catalyse conservation on the ground and empower dedicated people from civil society. SOS was created by three founding partners in 2010: the World Bank, Global Environment Facility and IUCN with support from other donors including the European Commission joining in 2017 while the ITHCP was established by IUCN with the support of the German Government and the German Development Bank (KfW) in 2014.

Consequently IUCN is delighted to see the good work of these conservationists being recognised. We take the opportunity to congratulate all Whitley Award candidates and winners on their inspiring achievements to protect our natural heritage. IUCN looks forward to continuing to support future conservation leaders through its various grant-making mechanisms.

Ximena Velez Liendo, Bolivia & Indira Lacerna Widmann, Philippines

Chester Zoo – Organisation Website
18 May 2017

<http://www.chesterzoo.org/global/press-and-media/press-releases/2017/05/conservation-work-win-whitley-awards>



ANDEAN BEAR AND PHILIPPINE COCKATOO CONSERVATION WORK WIN PRESTIGIOUS WHITLEY AWARDS AT ANNUAL ‘GREEN OSCARS’

Two conservationists – fighting to help threatened Andean bears in Bolivia and rare cockatoos in the Philippines – have been bestowed with the highest awards in conservation, known as the ‘green Oscars’.



A project led by Conservation Fellow, Dr Ximena Velez-Liendo, will study human-bear conflicts and monitor Andean bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*) presence and distribution in the dry forests of southern Bolivia

The Andean bear conservation project, developed and run by Chester Zoo in partnership with The University of Oxford's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU) and Bolivian NGO Prometa, has won a prestigious Whitley Award.

Work supported by Chester Zoo to protect critically endangered Philippine cockatoos by employing former poachers as wardens is also being recognised at the ceremony in London on Thursday.

Run by the Whitley Fund for Nature, the international prize honours exceptional conservationists working in grassroots conservation projects in developing countries. The six winners were chosen from a total of 166 contenders from 66 countries.



Dr Ximena Velez-Liendo, a Chester Zoo and WildCRU Conservation Fellow, is among this year's winners with her project '*An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains*'.

Dr Ximena Velez-Liendo, Chester Zoo Conservation Fellow and Research Associate of WildCRU, said:

I never imagined I would receive such an honour. The Whitley Awards are very prestigious and only the best of the best of conservation scientists receive them. It's a dream come true! Thanks to the Whitley

Award, the funding will help us to get the research equipment we need to improve our understanding of the bears' distribution and we will be able to work with more communities and expand our project.

With severe droughts affecting Bolivia's agriculture production, communities are shifting from agriculture to livestock, which has led to an increase in encounters between local people and bears.

Applying an interdisciplinary approach of both ecology and social sciences, the project aims to develop practical interventions for immediate reduction in Andean bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*) conflict, developing alternate livelihoods to local communities, bringing positive change and monitoring the Andean bear populations.

Earlier this year, Chester Zoo and WildCRU joined forces to deliver high-impact conservation research. This collaboration aims to provide new research to assist conservationists in developing innovative approaches to tackle global challenges such as human-wildlife conflict, livelihoods and sustainable development, and monitoring of populations of endangered species in the wild.

Dr Alexandra Zimmermann, Head of Conservation Science at Chester Zoo, said:

This project is key to our understanding of the human wildlife conflict facing Andean bears in their habitats in South America. This Whitley Award will provide the essential support we need to work with local communities, developing sustainable options for people to live alongside the species.

Indira Lacerna-Widmann, Chief Operating Officer of the Katala Foundation, a Philippines-based organisation which successfully implemented the Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Programme (PCCP), is also among the prestigious winners with her project '*Partnering with prisoners to safeguard the Critically Endangered Philippine cockatoo*'.



Philippine cockatoo perching-Dumaran Island 2016 (c) Katala Foundation Inc.

Scott Wilson, Head of Field Programmes at Chester Zoo, said:

The Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Programme is hugely successful, and we are proud to have been major project partners since 2003. The dedication of Indira and the rest of the Katala Foundation team has led to the effective protection of several high biodiversity sites in Palawan, providing a haven for the critically endangered Philippine cockatoo, plus numerous other threatened species.

Assessed by an expert academic panel, the conservationists each won a prize worth £35,000 in project funding over one year. Winners were announced on Thursday 18 May during the Whitley Awards Ceremony, often referred to as the ‘green Oscars’, presented by HRH The Princess Royal at the Royal Geographical Society in London.

Chester Chronicle – Local Newspaper, UK
20 May 2017

<http://www.chesterchronicle.co.uk/news/chester-cheshire-news/chester-zoo-conservation-projects-win-13056414>



Chester Zoo conservation projects win prestigious ‘green Oscars’

Andean bear and Philippine cockatoo programmes honoured at national awards ceremony



Dumaran and Puerto rescued Philippine cockatoos

Two conservationists – fighting to help threatened Andean bears in Bolivia and rare cockatoos in the Philippines – have been bestowed with the highest awards in conservation, known as the ‘green Oscars’.

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Male Andean bear, Bernie, at Chester Zoo

Dr Ximena Velez-Liendo, a Chester Zoo and WildCRU Conservation Fellow, is among this year's winners with her project 'An uphill climb: enabling coexistence of Andean bears and farmers in the Bolivian mountains'.

Chester Zoo Conservation Fellow and Research Associate of WilCRU Dr Ximena Velez-Liendo said: "I never imagined I would receive such an honour. The Whitley Awards are very prestigious and only the best of the best of conservation scientists receive them. It's a dream come true!

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Bushnell

03-09-2017 12:03:14

Andean bear caught on camera

This collaboration aims to provide new research to assist conservationists in developing innovative approaches to tackle global challenges such as human-wildlife conflict, livelihoods and sustainable development, and monitoring of populations of endangered species in the wild.

Head of conservation science at Chester Zoo, Dr Alexandra Zimmermann, said: “This project is key to our understanding of the human wildlife conflict facing Andean bears in their habitats in South America. This Whitley Award will provide the essential support we need to work with local communities, developing sustainable options for people to live alongside the species.”

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Winners were announced on Thursday, May 18 during the Whitley Awards Ceremony, presented by HRH The Princess Royal at the Royal Geographical Society in London.

Part 4: Partnership Funding

Media coverage of winners supported through Partnership Funding by Fondation Segré

Partnership Funding donated by Fondation Segré



Partnership Funding by Fondation Segré is a grant endowed by Fondation Segré and managed by Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN), which recognises and provides further funding to support the work of four of WFN's most successful previous Whitley Award and Continuation Funding winners. Over three years, grant funding totalling €1,500,000 will deliver urgent conservation activities to conserve snow leopards in India, penguins in Argentina, freshwater dolphins in Colombia and large carnivores in Turkey.

This funding offers grants of €337,500 per project over three years (€112,500 per year per project) to outstanding, Whitley award winning conservation leaders and reflects the quality, scale, urgency and financial need of their work. This support provides much needed funding to projects that are having a real and measurable impact on endangered wildlife and local communities. The grants will complete in October 2017.

The Partnership Funding winners are:

- [Pablo Borboroglu](#)
- [Charudutt Mishra](#)
- [Çağan Şekercioğlu](#)
- [Fernando Trujillo](#)

Pablo Borboroglu

Argentina

Global Penguin Society

Penguin advocacy for the ocean

**2014 Partnership Funding Winner
2010 Whitley Award Winner**



“The survival and protection of penguins can only be secured by fostering integrated ocean conservation through science, management and community education. This grant will help us to go a long way to achieving this.” Pablo Borboroglu

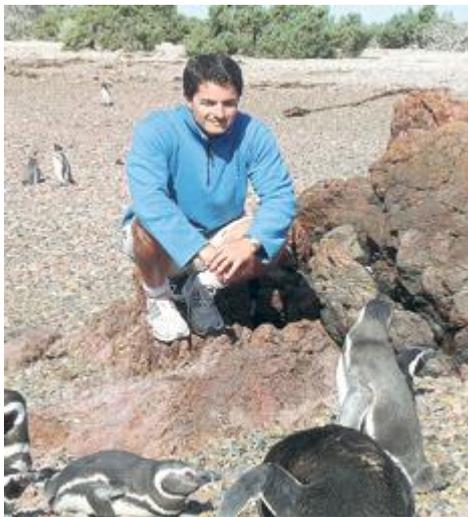
Pablo has featured in five articles this year; the following is a selection of this coverage. Pablo’s WFN profile can be found at this [link](#).

<https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/ciencia/19-313230-2016-11-02.html>

Página 12

El abogado de los pingüinos

En el mundo, más del 60 por ciento de esta especie se encuentra en peligro de extinción. Derrames de petróleo, el mal manejo de pesquerías comerciales y el cambio climático constituyen las principales amenazas. Las estrategias destinadas a revertir la situación.



El biólogo Pablo Borboroglú entre los pingüinos de Punta Tombo.

Los pingüinos han evolucionado durante los últimos 60 millones de años y comparten un ancestro común con los petreles. Sin embargo, a diferencia de ellos, han resignado su capacidad de volar en el aire para “volar en el agua”. Dueños de un sistema hidrodinámico de última generación, barren extensas superficies oceánicas gracias a una singular fisiología que les permite alcanzar grandes velocidades y superar interminables apneas. Auténticos torpedos, algunos alcanzan a nadar 170 km diarios y 16 mil km al año. En la actualidad, 18 especies conforman un mosaico variopinto que se distribuye en el Hemisferio Sur. Pese a lo que, a priori, indicaría el sentido común (y las películas hollywoodenses) no solo habitan en áreas cubiertas de hielo. Además de la Antártida, construyen colonias en localizaciones dispares como Sudáfrica, Namibia, Australia, Nueva Zelanda, Argentina, Chile, Perú y Ecuador.

El pingüino, desafortunadamente, forma parte de la lista roja de las especies confeccionada por la Unión Internacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza. Más de la mitad de sus ejemplares está en peligro de extinción y se requiere del trabajo de científicos y conservacionistas con el objetivo de impulsar mejores condiciones de supervivencia. Pablo Borboroglú reúne las dos profesiones en una misma persona: es

doctor en Biología recibido en la Universidad Nacional del Comahue, investigador de Conicet (con sede en el Centro Nacional Patagónico) y, en simultáneo, preside la Global Penguin Society, una asociación de expertos internacionales que procura fomentar la protección y la educación de la naturaleza en todo el mundo. En esta entrevista, narra las amenazas que afectan a las aves acuáticas más famosas, al tiempo que opina sobre el diseño de estrategias destinadas a revertir la situación.

–Usted es biólogo y desde 1989 estudia a los pingüinos. Sin embargo, previamente cursó Derecho y quería ser embajador...

–Exacto, estudié idiomas en el colegio porque mi intención era realizar una carrera diplomática. Comencé a cursar Derecho en Mar del Plata, mi ciudad natal. Sin embargo, tras dos o tres años, viajé a Puerto Madryn a pasar el verano. Mi familia tenía una agencia de viajes, me encargaba de las reservas y hacía de guía turístico. Como aquí la naturaleza es tan bella atrae el turismo y mi interés, indefectiblemente, debió centrarse en los animales y el medioambiente.

–¿Y por qué los pingüinos?

–Me preocupaban las causas y el modo en que morían. Tanto que participaba de un centro de rehabilitación en Trelew. Sentía ganas de transmitir un mensaje de conservación a partir del conocimiento.

–Imagino que sus conocimientos en Derecho se conectan casi de modo directo con su postura conservacionista y su defensa de la naturaleza.

–Por supuesto, me sirvió un montón, sobre todo por esa posibilidad de pensar los problemas como si fueran casos puntuales. Las herramientas que brinda el Derecho son fundamentales para pensar este tipo de conflictos vinculados a la naturaleza y sus recursos. Además, por aquellos años conocí Punta Tombo y la verdad que resultó una experiencia hermosa. Estar con medio millón de pingüinos alrededor es algo inexplicable, se respira otro aire.

–De modo que en 1988 llegó a Puerto Madryn y tres años más tarde decidió anotarse en la Licenciatura en Biología.

–Sí, claro. Es que la experiencia en el campo me llevó a querer ampliar mis conocimientos. En ese lapso, ya tenía contacto con biólogos profesionales y necesitaba profundizar todo lo que ya sabía. Siempre me apasionó el tema de la conservación y la gestión de recursos naturales para asegurar su integridad. Desde aquí, existen diferentes tratamientos para las diversas especies. Por ejemplo, si uno se enfrenta a una población en declinación lo que se busca es revertir el presente para poder garantizar su futuro. La supervivencia está muy atada a la protección de los ambientes. En general, se producen malos entendidos conceptuales.

–¿Por ejemplo?

–Es muy común que las personas asocien el término “áreas protegidas” con un sitio al que no se puede acceder. Y esta noción, en rigor de verdad, se vincula con un lugar cuyos espacios están ordenados de manera tal que los seres humanos y los animales logren coexistir en armonía. Se trata de proteger las estructuras para que cada actor cumpla su función.

–En este escenario, ¿de qué manera las acciones que realizan los seres humanos perjudican a los pingüinos? He leído que, a nivel mundial, más de la mitad de los ejemplares se encuentra en amenaza.

–Los pingüinos se ubican en la lista roja de especies, confeccionada por la Unión Internacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza. Como otras aves marinas, enfrentan

amenazas tanto en el agua como en tierra. En el mar, son muy sensibles a los cambios climáticos, al mal manejo de las pesquerías comerciales y a la contaminación marina. Como viven en colonias se encuentran muy expuestos a derrames de petróleo.

–¿Y en tierra?

–En tierra, las especies se encuentran amenazadas por los predadores. Y por otra parte, el gran problema del cambio climático y nuestra necesidad puntual como conservacionistas de solucionarlo en el corto plazo. Mientras el mundo se preocupa por soluciones más estructurales, buscamos salidas inmediatas que nos permitan obtener un respiro.

–¿A qué tipo de salidas se refiere?

–Estimulamos la resiliencia de las especies, es decir, su capacidad de resistir a otras amenazas. Me refiero a incentivar un mejor comportamiento de los seres humanos. Somos muy poco eficientes en el manejo de los recursos, sobre todo, en ámbitos donde no hay control como puede ser el medio acuático. Además, hay algo que no se tiene en cuenta: el cuidado de las especies, en contraposición a lo que se podría pensar, redundaría en un beneficio muy importante para la economía de la región. En el sur, existen miles y miles de familias que dependen de modo directo o indirecto del ecoturismo. El pingüino y la ballena constituyen las más grandes atracciones faunísticas de Argentina. De modo que las políticas de conservación se encuentran directamente vinculadas con las dinámicas productivas y la generación de divisas.

–Comprendo. En la organización que dirige se estimulan los buenos comportamientos humanos respecto a estas especies. Cuénteme al respecto.

–Sí, claro. Siempre necesité que mis prácticas científicas cumplieran con una función social, es decir, que los conocimientos pudieran ser aprovechados por alguien más. Hace ocho años fundé la Global Penguin Society, una organización internacional que protege las especies y promueve el manejo adecuado y la educación en la naturaleza. Contamos con proyectos científicos propios, así como también subsidiamos planes externos. Además, fomentamos la conservación de áreas protegidas en mar y en tierra, y contamos con un programa educativo por intermedio del cual llevamos a los más pequeños de escuelas circundantes a conocer los pingüinos por primera vez.

–Además, en 2015 editó un libro que tuvo mucho éxito.

–Correcto, el año pasado publicamos Pingüinos. Historia natural y conservación que ganó el premio al Mejor Libro Editado en Argentina 2015. Allí se encuentra toda la información accesible y compilada en un lenguaje amigable. Escriben plumas muy importantes del campo, verdaderos expertos de todo el mundo (49 colegas de 12 países). Fue tan buena su repercusión que logró una traducción al inglés y, próximamente, estará disponible en japonés.

–Por último, por intermedio de su organización, asesora a Disney. Últimamente, los pingüinos se han convertido en estrellas mediáticas, en especial, concentran al público más pequeño a través de películas como Happy Feet y videojuegos como Club Penguin. ¿Cómo se produjo ese contacto?

–Cuando creamos Global Penguin Society, advertí que los que más googleaban la palabra “Penguin” eran niños, por el juego denominado “Club Penguin”. De modo que inspeccioné el software y me di cuenta de que no existía ninguna referencia puntual de los pingüinos. Es decir, no se hacía hincapié sobre su biología, sus medioambientes, ni siquiera sobre sus características específicas. Así, me comuniqué con los responsables del desarrollo y les comenté la situación. Desde aquel momento, le ofrecimos asesoramiento en contenidos con el objetivo de que Disney enriqueciera la experiencia educativa del

juego. Nosotros colaboramos en ese sentido y ellos, como contraparte, apoyan nuestras actividades vinculadas, también, a los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje que realizamos para conocer nuestra Patagonia.

<http://www.rionegro.com.ar/sociedad/popi-el-guardian-de-los-pinguinos-en-el-mundo-GJ2964091>

RÍO NEGRO

Popi, the guardian of the penguins in the world

More than half of the species are on the "red list". Pablo Borboroglu, a doctorate at UNCo, heads the world grouping that defends and preserves them.

SILVANA SALINAS
12 JUN 2017 - 00:00

Pablo Borboroglu is known as "Popi". So they call it in the "world of penguins". In the world of science, to which it belongs and which, by now, is already its natural habitat. He is a researcher, scientist, expert in biology and, nowadays, it is the 'ace in the sleeve' that have the only 18 species of penguins of the planet to obtain aid, protection and conservation that drives from Patagonia.

He is the "official defender" of these animals that enjoy the "sympathy" of the majority, but of which very little is known. For example, that many are on a "red list". At risk of disappearing from the face of the earth.

Popi or Pablo is the visible head of the World Group of Penguin Specialists of the International Union of Nature Conservation and was the promoter of the creation of the largest Unesco Biosphere Reserve in Argentina with 3.1 million hectares in Chubut , The marine protected area for the largest colony of Magellanic penguins in the world. And it also counts, in its extensive capacity, to be part of the team that achieved in New York that the United Nations Agenda 2.030 incorporates for the first time science and ocean conservation within its exclusive agenda.

What is the most basic thing that can be said about these birds (how to set ourselves in tune)?: They are only present in the Southern Hemisphere, from Antarctica to the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador. That the largest colonies are in Antarctica and also in sub-Antarctic islands but also in the continent, as is the case of Punta Tombo in Chubut. The Argentine Atlantic coasts are home to the largest colonies of the Magellan or Patagonian penguins.

Passion and "chance"

Borboroglu was born in Mar del Plata, but is already Patagonia by adoption. More than 28 years ago (of the 47 that he has) he lives among the arid soils of the south of the country and invests his time in the investigation of marine fauna. He holds a degree in Biological Sciences and a PhD in Biology from the National University of Comahue Bariloche.

His passion for penguins was born almost by chance. He worked in a tourist agency when he began to penetrate the Patagonian fauna and he had to live close to the most

cruel side: more than 40,000 of them died only in a year in Chubut by empetrolamiento. There he began his work to rehabilitate and defend them. "Then I decided to study to be more useful in that way," he says.

During the last millions of years these animals have evolved, however despite their adaptability, more and more human phenomena and activities put their existence at risk. According to the map drawn up by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, more than half of its specimens are in danger of extinction and the effort of scientists and conservationists is needed to improve survival conditions.

Global climate change, pollution, mismanagement of fisheries and many other factors contribute to this, he told the Rio Negro expert.

Q- Why you do volcaste this? What role do 'penguins' play in your life?

R- I wanted to be a diplomat but I came to the south and working in a tourism agency I started to guide groups of foreign tourists. I should have learned about wildlife and I started to connect. I was very sensitive to the fact that 40,000 penguins died each year in Chubut by means of empetrolamiento and I began to rehabilitate them.

Q- Are there many dangers facing the world?

R- Half of the species of penguins, which are 18, is listed as threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. They face threats at sea when they feed and migrate and also on land when they breed. The main threats are climate change, pollution, and mismanagement of commercial fisheries. And on land, human disturbance, introduction of predators and coterro development.

Q- How does climate change impact?

A- In general, the availability of food changed at the time and place where they needed it, causing deaths due to lack of food in youngsters and also in adults and juveniles when migrating. Ice melting in Antarctica affects the availability and quality of environments for reproduction and feeding. Climate Change is also producing more frequent and intense storms, increasing the mortality of young chicks whose down is not ready to get wet.

" + Science - resources "

P- Conservation concentrates all efforts today to protect species. Do they have resources? Does it matter?

R- I would say that most of our resources come from abroad. Conicet offers funds for projects but almost purely to generate science. Conicet evaluates the performance of researchers and pays attention almost exclusively to scientific publications, and at the moment of truth does not value conservation achievements. Only account if you published in English in a foreign magazine. From my own experience, they do not value my efforts to create the largest Unesco Biosphere Reserve in Argentina. Nor did he create and direct the Penguin Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Examples where I have used science to give it more importance and apply it to conservation.

"What is needed is to create or extend forested areas around major colonies. Add additional measures "

Explains the researcher, in relation to areas already protected.

The 'under the sleeve' of the species at risk

Researcher of Conicet, based in the National Patagonian Center, and simultaneously chairs the Global Penguin Society, an association of international experts that seeks to

promote protection and education of nature around the world. They succeeded in including the debate in Agenda 2.030 of the United Nations.

Blue Patagonia, the greatest treasure at the end of the world

Blue Patagonia is the largest biosphere reserve in Argentina with more than 3 million hectares (58% marine and 42% terrestrial) and houses the largest community of Magellanic penguins. In recent years he obtained the official designation of Unesco. Its size is similar to Belgium. It is located in Chubut and is rich in flora, fauna, archaeological and paleontological sites.

It is an international seal in terms of conservation, sustainable development, education and research. It houses 40% of the world population of the Magellan penguin.

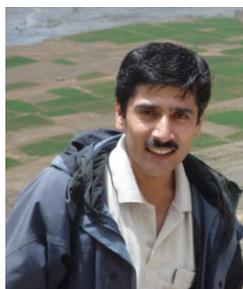
Charudutt Mishra

India

Snow Leopard Trust

From grassroots to global: Realising a conservation vision for snow leopards across their range

**2014 Partnership Funding Winner
2005 Winner of the Whitley Award**



“We envision a world where conservation of snow leopards and their mountain habitats are given a high place in the global agenda. Partnership Funding by Fondation Segré will help us ensure our philosophy of community-based, science-led conservation is embraced across Asia.” Charu Mishra

Charu has featured in three articles this year, including the following pieces from the World Nature news website and Mongabay, and has written two blog posts for the Snow Leopard Trust website. Follow this [link](#) to see Charu’s WFN profile.

<http://www.natureworldnews.com/articles/33451/20161205/cats-kyrgyzstan-former-soviet-country-saved-snow-leopards.htm>

NATURE WORLD NEWS

The Cats of Kyrgyzstan: How the Former Soviet Country Saved Its Snow Leopards

By Arriane Nellaine del Rosario
Dec 05, 2016 04:51 AM EST



Kyrgyzstan is a melting pot of two snow leopard species: the northern snow leopards from Russia, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan, and the southern ones from the Karakoram and Hindu Kush range.

(Photo : Mark Kolbe/Getty Images)

Animal conservationists around the globe are lauding the efforts of Kyrgyzstan President Almazbek Atambayev to save the snow leopards dwelling in the mountainous regions of the former Soviet-controlled nation.

Last March, President Atambayev has transformed the Shamschy, a hundred-square-mile, free for all trophy hunting reserve found in the northern Tian Shan Mountains, into

a safe sanctuary for the magnificent cat species. The conservation initiative is managed by the government in partnership with local and international conservation NGOs, such as the Snow Leopard Foundation of Kyrgyzstan; the Snow Leopard Trust; and the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation.

"It's incomprehensible that some Kyrgyz men, descendants of snow leopards, kill the cats and sell their fur to be fashioned into hats and coats. These men can barely be called human. Anyone who shoots a snow leopard shoots his own people. Anyone who sells snow leopard skins sells his own land," President Atambayev said in an interview with National Geographic.

Protecting the snow leopards of Kyrgyzstan is of utmost important, as the country is a melting pot of two snow leopard species - the northern snow leopards from Russia, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan, and the southern ones from the Karakoram and Hindu Kush range - which are known to go on long, arduous journeys.

Currently, the mountains of Kyrgyzstan is home to roughly 500 snow leopards, which according to the US-based non-profit Snow Leopard Trust, is a significant 10 percent of the total population worldwide, estimated at between 4,000 and 6,500 in Russia and 11 Central Asian countries.

On the other hand, Whitey Award winner and acting executive director of the Snow Leopard Trust, Charudutt Mishra, is optimistic that, without trophy hunting and the continuous effort from the government to preserve and protect these animals, the snow leopard population in Kyrgyzstan could potentially double or even triple in the next 10 years.

In its October issue of *An Ounce of Prevention*, wildlife monitoring network TRAFFIC estimates that between 221 and 450 snow leopards have been poached every year since 2008, or at least 4 every week.

James Compton, Senior Programme Director of TRAFFIC said, "TRAFFIC's analysis confirms the worrying scale of illegal killing of snow leopards. This urgent wake-up call provides a blueprint for GSLEP action at national and transboundary levels to protect snow leopards from threats posed by poaching and trafficking."

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<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/08/collateral-damage-snow-leopards-and-trophy-hunting-in-kyrgyzstan/>

MONGABAY

Collateral damage: Snow leopards and trophy hunting in Kyrgyzstan

BY KATIE ARNOLD ON 31 AUGUST 2017

BOKONBAYEVO, Kyrgyzstan – Kyrgyz folklore is laden with stories that warn its adherents against the over-hunting of animals. In one foreboding tale, Kodzhodzash, the leader of the Ak-Bars tribe, brutally ignores the wish of a female ibex, shooting dead her child and her mate. “May your father cry over you as I cry over my murdered children and for the loss of my kind,” the ibex curses, before luring the hunter to his death. Despite these admonitions, trophy hunting has become a lucrative industry in Kyrgyzstan, drawing tourists from across the world with its low prices and lax hunting laws. Until last year, a license to kill Kyrgyzstan’s most prized trophy, a Marco Polo sheep, was \$3,600 while a Siberian ibex could be shot for just \$500. The fees have almost doubled in the last year, yet remain regionally and globally competitive.

Both the Marco Polo sheep, a subspecies of the argali (*Ovis ammon*), and the Siberian ibex (*Capra sibirica*) can be found on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, with the former listed as Near Threatened. The existing law in Kyrgyzstan does not prohibit the hunting of rare, threatened or endangered species. Instead, it states that animals listed in the Red Book of Kyrgyzstan, including the Marco Polo sheep, can be pursued by those in possession of a special license.



A camera trap captures a snow leopard in Shamschy Wildlife Sanctuary, Kyrgyzstan.
Photo courtesy of the Snow Leopard Trust.



According to the IUCN, there may be as few as 1,500 snow leopards reproducing in the wild. Photo courtesy of the Snow Leopard Trust.

Argali numbers have suffered accordingly, alongside those of its predator – the endangered snow leopard (*Panthera uncial*). The population of this high-altitude predator has been in rapid decline over the last 20 years, with between 4,000 and 7,000 thought to remain as of the last census in 2003. According to the IUCN, major threats to the snow leopard include the overhunting of its prey – ungulates like the Marco Polo sheep and ibex – and the rapid loss of its habitat.

Scientists say preserving Kyrgyzstan’s snow leopard territory is key to the survival of the species as the country’s Tien Shan mountain range serves as a corridor between the northern snow leopard populations in Russia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan, and the more southerly groups in the Karakoram and Hindu Kush.

Yet despite its strategic location, 6 percent of the country has been given protected status by the government while 70 percent is classified as a hunting concession. As a result, local ecologists estimate that half of the country’s ecosystems have been affected over the last 25 years.

Shamshy Wildlife Sanctuary. Photo courtesy of the Snow Leopard Trust.

“The snow leopard used to reside in our alpine ecosystem with ibex and argali sheep in the same system,” said Emil Shukurov, one of the country’s leading ecologists and chairman of the Aleyne Ecological Movement of Kyrgyzstan.

“The hunting of ibex and argali sheep has had a knock-on [effect] on the snow leopard – the situation is so bad we only have three breeding populations of snow leopard in Kyrgyzstan,” he told Mongabay.

According to Shukurov, a healthy herd of argali consists of around 100 individuals. In Kyrgyzstan, those herds have fallen to an estimated 20 to 50 animals, indicating that they are not reproducing sustainably.

“The trouble with our hunting industry is that more animals are being killed than are naturally being produced, so we are hunting species whose ecosystems are collapsing,” Shukurov said. “Hunting and wildlife conservation cannot coexist.”



Siberian ibex in Shamschy Wildlife Sanctuary, Kyrgyzstan. Photo courtesy of the Snow Leopard Trust.



Bust of a hunted Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*). Photo by Maria Ly via Wikimedia Commons (CC 2.0).

It was against the backdrop of these collapsing ecosystems that Kyrgyz campaigners proposed a complete ban on hunting until 2030. The bill was narrowly defeated in parliament earlier this year – with 56 votes to 52 – yet the proposal has sparked a fierce debate over the environmental sustainability of the industry.

In a letter to Mongabay, the assistant director of the State Agency on Environmental Protection and Forestry, Arsen Rysepekov, denied that the hunting industry, which it oversees, was having a negative impact on wildlife populations. He said sustainability is ensured through strict quotas on the number of hunting licenses granted to foreign tourists.

“Each year the Kyrgyz Republic, as agreed with the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic, sets a limit of 70 Argali sheep to be hunted on foreign hunting tours,” Rysepekov wrote. “This number makes up about 0.5 percent of the overall number of such species.”

Bokenbayevo hunting territory. Photo by Katie Arnold for Mongabay.

A similar quota of 0.8 percent is applied to ibex licenses, which translates to a harvest of between 400 and 450 individuals per year.

“According to the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic, this number does not have a large impact on the population of the species overall,” Rysepekov wrote.

The government's estimates are not without controversy. According to the State Agency on Environmental Protection and Forestry, the number of Marco Polo sheep in Kyrgyzstan grew by 9.3 percent between 2012 and 2013 while the ibex population grew by 3.5 percent.

"These numbers are falsified," Shukurov said. "The government has been providing exaggerated population numbers to support the campaign against a hunting ban. Naturally, argali herds can only increase by 3 – 5 percent each year. It's even lower for the ibex, just 1 percent."

Data from the government also show a decline in the species. In 2016, estimates from the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic provided by the State Agency on Environmental Protection and Forestry pegged Marco Polo sheep and ibex at their lowest numbers in eight years.

"The hunting department says there are controls, but sometimes people will come for one animal but are allowed to shoot two or three," said Janar Akaev, a Member of Parliament who campaigned in favor of the hunting ban.



Genetic analyses indicate snow leopards are more closely related to tigers than they are to leopards. Photo courtesy of the Snow Leopard Trust.

Indeed, overhunting appeared rife in 2016, with 435 recorded violations of the hunting law and only 370 official hunting licenses for the Marco Polo sheep and ibex combined. "It is a very corrupt system," Akaev said. "The same agencies that give out the hunting licenses own the hunting concessions and are therefore making all the money from the foreigners. That is why the state agency opposed the legislation."

It is under these questionable financial circumstances that Kyrgyzstan's national parks have struggled to make ends meet, with reports that rangers are woefully underpaid, undertrained, and under-equipped.

The State Agency on Environmental Protection and Forestry declined an opportunity to respond to these allegations of corruption.

However, in his written response, Rysepekov claimed the trophy hunting industry brought in nearly three-quarters of a million dollars in 2016, with some of that revenue allocated for the maintenance of rangers who protect the concessions from illegal poaching.

“If the proposed draft law was adopted, we would have had to finance [these rangers] from republican budget instead,” Rysepekov’s letter concluded.

Rain clouds descend over the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. Photo by Katie Arnold for Mongabay.

However, some point to what they say are considerable efforts made by the government of Kyrgyzstan in recent years to reform the trophy hunting industry so that it can operate alongside efforts to conserve the natural environment.

A new law, “On Hunting and Hunting Management,” introduced in 2014, promotes the allocation of hunting management areas to local communities with vested interests in its sustainable use. Meanwhile, hunting concessions are now leased to legal entities for a period of 15 years, rather than four, allegedly in order to encourage more sustainable business practices.

“The hunting industry is helping to conserve wildlife,” said Marat, a hunting guide from Bokonbayevo. “Foreign hunters want trophies to take home so only shoot large males. This actually helps us control the herd sizes while allowing the females to reproduce.” In a more radical move, the government of Kyrgyzstan recently facilitated the transformation of a hunting concession near the capital city Bishkek into a fully protected nature reserve.



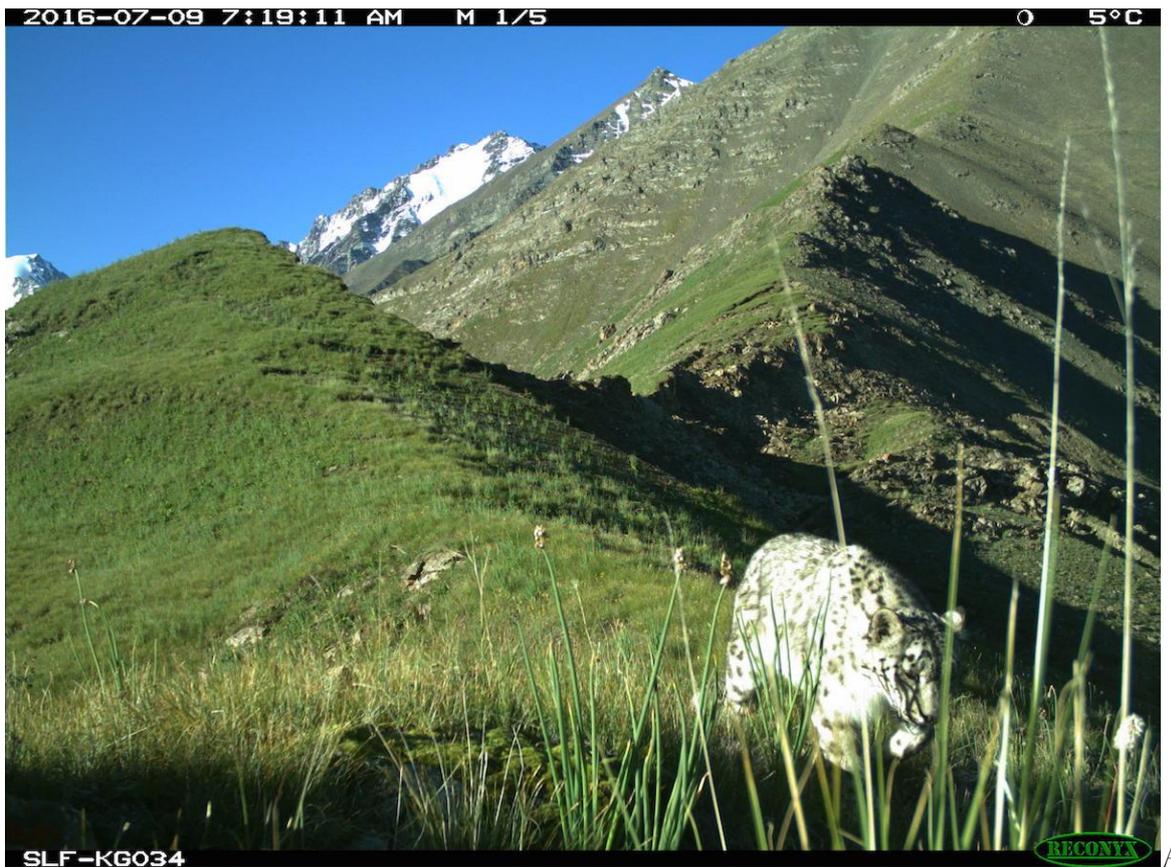
Boo! A snow leopard comes in for a nighttime close-up. Photo courtesy of the Snow Leopard Trust.

The Shamschy Wildlife Sanctuary, which is co-managed by the Kyrgyz government and U.S.-based NGO the Snow Leopard Trust, is home to both Siberian ibex and seasonal populations of argali.

It lies within the crucial snow leopard corridor and proponents of the project say it has the potential to become a key part of their home range if its wild ungulate population can be increased.

It secured an early victory when a number of snow leopards were photographed within just a few months of its launch in 2016. The Snow Leopard Trust is currently using methods like drone technology and camera traps to estimate the size of their population. As well as protecting the wildlife within its territory, Shamschy will host a field laboratory for snow leopard and biodiversity research, an eco-education site for adults and children, and a possible destination for eco-tourism. In doing so, the Snow Leopard Trust hopes to demonstrate that conservation can be a financially sustainable alternative to trophy hunting.

“If this proves to be a successful model then hopefully other concessions will try and emulate it in order to allow their wildlife populations to recover – assuming that at some point these concessions do get over-hunted,” said Charudutt Mishra, executive director of the Snow Leopard Trust.



snow leopard patrols its territory. Photo courtesy of the Snow Leopard Trust. Mishra admits that the reserve cannot protect the snow leopard on its own. At just 200 square kilometers (77 square miles), it is five times smaller than the average home range of a single snow leopard. In fact, research by the Snow Leopard Trust shows that 40 percent of all protected areas within the snow leopard's habitat are too small to host even one breeding pair of the cats.

“We can never have a protected area that is big enough to secure a viable snow leopard population... but a combination of protected areas, community-based conservation and hunting concessions that work in sync with protected areas, could secure a population of a few hundred breeding snow leopards,” Mishra said.

Others however, remain convinced that Kyrgyzstan's controversial trophy hunting industry will forever undermine efforts to revive its snow leopard populations.

“It is absurd that the government permits the killing of the snow leopard's prey yet gives thousands of dollars to protect the snow leopard,” Shukurov said.

“You cannot feed the snow leopard money.”

Çağın Şekerciöđlu

Turkey

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Community-based conservation, ecological restoration and ecotourism at Kuyucuk Lake, Turkey

2014 Partnership Funding Winner
2008 Winner of the Gold Award



“Partnership Funding by Fondation Segré will support landscape-scale conservation of large carnivores in northeastern Turkey through research, awareness raising, environmental education and lobbying the government to create new protected areas, including completion of Turkey’s first wildlife corridor”. Çağın Şekerciöđlu

Çağın featured in four articles this year and was also featured in BBC2 documentary, ‘Turkey With Simon Reeve’. To view Çağın’s WFN profile, follow this [link](#).

<https://phys.org/news/2016-09-birds-ways-ecosystems-healthy.html>



Why birds matter: New book shows the many ways birds keep ecosystems healthy

September 7, 2016



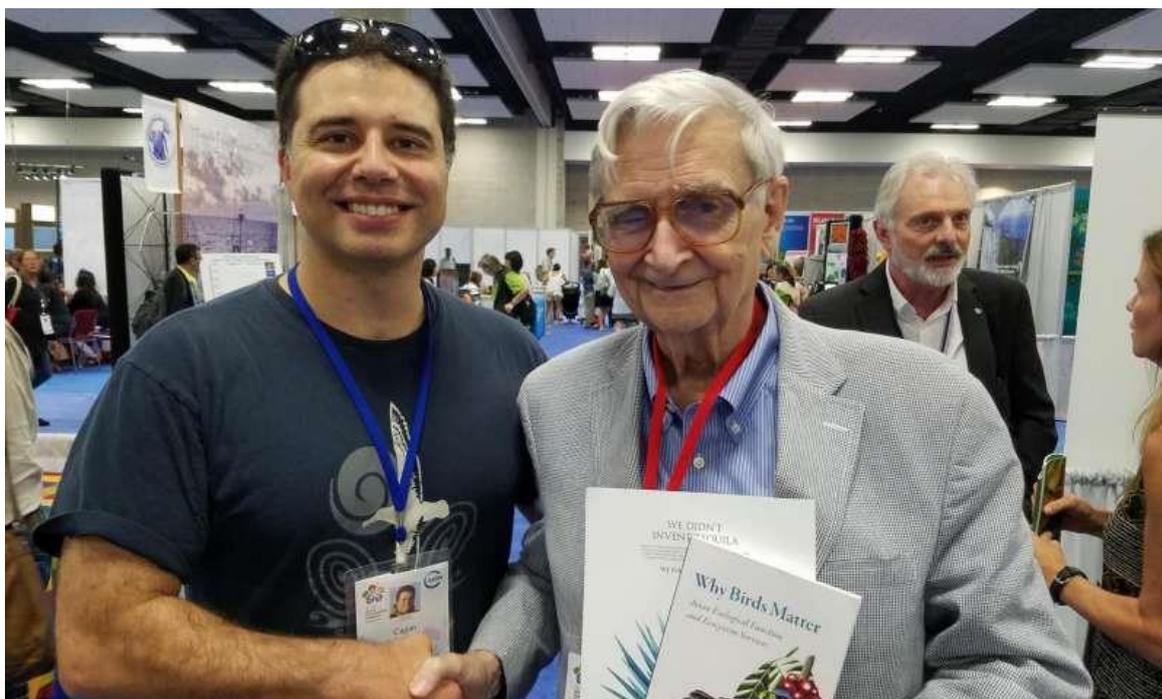
A West Indian woodpecker (*Melanerpes superciliaris*) - in the Zapata swamp, Bay of Pigs, Cuba. The woodpecker is an example of an ecosystem engineer bird. Credit: Cagan Sekercioglu

University of Utah ornithologist and biology department professor Cagan Sekercioglu presents a new book, "Why Birds Matter," this week at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Honolulu. Held every four years, this is the world's largest conservation event. Over 8300 delegates from 184 countries gathered for the meeting where President Obama made an appearance on Monday. Sekercioglu represents his Turkish environmental organization KuzeyDoga that was elected an IUCN Member this year with the support of National Geographic Society and Wildlife Conservation Society.

"Why Birds Matter" highlights the many essential services birds provide to ecosystems and the consequences to soil, plants and animals if bird species continue to disappear. The book is co-edited by Sekercioglu, Daniel G. Wenny of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and Christopher J. Whelan of the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The diversity of birds' diets offers a window into the many ways they benefit an ecosystem. Birds that eat fruit, or frugivores, help disperse seeds far away from the parent tree and away from seed predators. Birds that drink nectar pollinate flowers, helping to spread the flowers' genetic material. Moving up the food chain, birds that eat insects, rodents or fish help control those populations, preventing them from overrunning ecosystems. Scavengers, such as vultures, act as a clean-up crew, consuming carcasses. Birds' droppings also help redistribute nutrients throughout the environment.

Birds confer economic benefits as well, including natural pest control. In the book's introduction, the editors recount presenting results of a study documenting birds' pest control benefits to an audience in rural Illinois. Amazed that bird predation had been shown to increase apple yield by 66 percent, two farmers asked "Why isn't this information public?" "Why Birds Matter" is an effort to answer that question and bring birds' critical ecosystem services into the public consciousness.



Cagan Sekercioglu, left, presents a copy of "Why Birds Matter" to renowned conservationist E.O. Wilson. Wilson's books inspired Sekercioglu to study biology. Credit: Cagan Sekercioglu

Tied to the economic and ecologic benefits of birds are the consequences of losing bird species. Without frugivores, seeds remain close to their trees. Without raptors, rodents

consume ecosystem resources. Without scavengers, other opportunistic species consume carrion and possibly spread disease. Sekercioglu and his co-editors argue that birds' presence enriches our environments and our lives, while their absence could destabilize nature's carefully crafted balance.

Turkey With Simon Reeve – BBC 2 Documentary
2 April 2017

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08ll1wy>

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**2014 Partnership Funding Winner
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“Our project will integrate scientific research with grassroots and political action to conserve all of South America’s river dolphins. Partnership Funding by Fondation Segré will allow us to work effectively and with high impact locally and nationally, and also across borders.” Fernando Trujillo

This year Fernando starred in feature documentary, *A River Below*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York and which won the Best Environmental Film at Sheffield Doc/Fest. Fernando was featured in fifteen articles in total this year. To view Fernando’s WFN profile, follow this [link](#).

<https://theplaylist.net/tribeca-review-a-river-below-documentary-20170422/>



Engrossing Doc ‘A River Below’ Dives In Search Of Dying Amazon River Dolphins [Tribeca Review]

Noel Murray

April 22, 2017 9:00 pm



In the first 15 minutes of the documentary “**A River Below**,” director **Mark Grieco** introduces two unforgettable characters and one mystery. First up is **Fernando Trujillo**, a conservationist who’s spent years leading a team that tracks the population of Amazon river dolphins—a.k.a. “pink dolphins” or “botos”—in order to warn Brazilians that careless native fisherman are endangering one of their country’s most beloved native animals. Trujillo is one of many conscientious scientists who work behind the scenes to collect data, file reports, and safeguard the world’s natural resources. Grieco immediately contrasts him with **Richard Rasmussen**, a burly, charismatic TV host whose programs on Brazil’s National Geographic channel have drawn attention to environmental crises

and the plight of the local wildlife, mainly by dropping this man into the thick of the rainforest, to grapple with nature **Bear Grylls** style.

For all of Trujillo's scholarly efforts and Rasmussen's boisterous advocacy on the bots' behalf, the event that most galvanized the public and the government to act was a stomach-turning video that aired on one of Brazil's most popular television programs. Shot in the dark of night, the footage shows fishermen harpooning then slaughtering a pregnant dolphin, so that they can use the carcasses as bait to catch the scavenger fish pirapitinga—a cheap source of meat often processed and sold throughout the region under different names. The gory clip so horrified viewers that Brazil instituted a ban on catching and selling bottom-feeders.

And herein lies the mystery: Who filmed this massacre? And why? The hubbub over the video's contents was so deafening that it was hard to hear anyone questioning its origins.

"A River Below" starts out as the story of one kind of scandal and then becomes about another—one which at the moment isn't widely known. (After the movie begins screening, the story might blow up, at least in Brazil.) According to what Grieco uncovered, activist groups planned and executed the exposé, with Rasmussen using his connections both to facilitate the hunt and to film it. Everyone's intentions were noble. But this documentary pushes back against the deed and its aftermath, asking if the ends justified the means.

About halfway through "A River Below," Grieco arrives in a small village with his crew, where he finds the fisherman who killed the pregnant boto—all of whom immediately pull out their phones and start filming Grieco, so that they'll have their own record of the encounter. This is where the filmmakers' journey begins, in an eerie moment where they realized the video had harmed more than just one dolphin. If there's one big knock against "A River Below," it's that the film itself probably should've started here too, and acknowledged more that Grieco had to become a character in his own investigation to see it through.

Instead, the director really only asserts himself in his interviews with Rasmussen, which start out congenial and become increasingly contentious as he asks the TV star to defend his choices, and to speak to the communities of Amazonian natives he possibly exploited. The fishermen contend the video was something they were paid to do, and that the resultant backlash has depressed their income and turned them into pariahs among their people. They say they've received death threats, for participating in a staged hunt. Rasmussen and other conservationists counter that they didn't do anything unethical or illegal, and didn't film anything that wouldn't have happened anyway.

Grieco's day job is as a photojournalist, and he brings that experience into "A River Below," always looking for a shot that's both true to reality and—if possible—striking to look at. He sometimes fumbles a bit as a storyteller, letting his journalism side down with

a jumbled chronology and some confusing narrative gaps. (Also, the title is way too vague for a documentary that's generally so accessible and gripping.) But even someone who watched this movie with the sound turned off would walk away remembering its haunting underwater shots of pink dolphins swimming in golden-hued river-water, as well as the way Rasmussen commands the attention of any nearby camera with his steely intensity.

But don't mute "A River Below," because the conversations Grieco has with Trujillo and Rasmussen and others encompass more than just endangered animals—although even if that was all the movie had in mind, it'd be worthwhile. The almost preternaturally telegenic qualities of Rasmussen, as opposed to the quiet academic authority of Trujillo, speaks volumes about how the public responds to important information. The reason why "fake news" works (the real kind at least, not the accurate reporting that powerful people consider unfairly slanted) has everything to do with packaging.

At one point in "A River Below," Trujillo tells Grieco about an incident where he went on TV to warn against the rising levels of mercury in scavenger fish sold in Colombia, and as a result had to start wearing a bulletproof vest, to protect himself from fisherman economically disadvantaged by his findings. Rasmussen, meanwhile, even finds a way to charm the villagers who previously claimed to want to kill him for the way he screwed them over. There's a lot of meaningful debate in this movie about whether it's okay to manufacture data to support a deeper truth. But in the contrast between two very different wildlife-protectors, Grieco makes another valuable point: It takes a special breed to be a sacrificial dolphin.

The Huffington Post – Online News Site, US
28 April 2017

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/a-river-below-tribeca-documentary_us_59022849e4b0026db1df58fc



04/28/2017 10:36 am ET

‘A River Below’ Shows The Media’s True Influence On Environmental Activism

The Amazon pink river dolphin inches closer to extinction in this telling doc.

By Leigh Blickley



SANDARBA FILMS

You would think showcasing the violent killing of an Amazon pink river dolphin on national television would help put an end to the pain inflicted on this endangered species. But using the media in an age where truth is a relative term is not always wise for environmental activists.

The new documentary by Mark Grieco, “A River Below,” which debuted at New York’s Tribeca Film Festival, explores that concept while shining a light on these dolphins that are being hunted to extinction. Because they are docile and easy to catch, pink river dolphins are being killed and used as bait for scavenger fish, which is how local fishermen earn much of their money. But as “A River Below” presents, activists are trying everything they can to stop the cruelty — although it’s never that simple.

The film follows two men in particular: Richard Rasmussen, a reality TV star in Brazil known as the “Brazilian Steve Irwin,” and Dr. Fernando Trujillo, the world’s most noted expert on river dolphins and a preeminent environmental scientist. Can they truly help to prevent the extinction of this animal when there’s so much more going on under those murky waters of the Amazon River?

Below, director Grieco talks to HuffPost about his poignant documentary and how we, as human beings, are making matters worse for the environment around us.



NOAM GALAI VIA GETTY IMAGES

Fernando Trujillo, Producer Torus Tammer and Director Mark Grieco attend the ‘A River Below’ Premiere during 2017 Tribeca Film Festival.

What made you want to uncover what’s going on with the pink river dolphins in the Amazon?

When I was first approached with the idea of making a film about the dolphins in danger, I felt apprehensive about it becoming a “Save the Dolphin!” documentary. But after meeting Fernando Trujillo, one of the film’s main characters and an incredibly dedicated scientist and conservationist, I was hooked and began to dig deeper to find more to the story. I found that many indigenous groups in the Amazon have a similar myth about the dolphin as a shape-shifting, trickster figure that breaches the water’s surface dressed as a man to seduce a young woman. This is what the film is about: nothing is what it

seems and when faced with the desperation to save this creature, our characters transform and do the unexpected.

Was this topic always of interest to you? How did you discover what was happening?

I've traveled to the Amazon several times before this project and always wanted to capture its grandeur and complexity in a film. I had no idea the dolphin was threatened to the point of near extinction before meeting Fernando. He really was my guide to understanding the problem in a nuanced and comprehensive way. The larger issue of animal extinction and our role in it is something important to me. One of the most pressing issues of our time is that human activity is causing another great mass species extinction on Earth — that we live in the so-called “Anthropocene Extinction Era” — a time when the rate of extinction is somewhere between 100 to 1000 times the historically typical or “base” rate. Much of this is caused by deforestation, pollution, and the depletion of plant and animal resources for human consumption. In the Amazon basin and rainforest, one of the planet's most biodiverse regions, the problem is potentially disastrous.

How did you go about getting the two activists, Fernando Trujillo and Richard Rasmussen, involved?

Fernando, like I said, was really the way into the story so he was there from the beginning. When we started filming however, we discovered that so much of the story was in Brazil. After digging around, we uncovered this brutal dolphin killing video and its overnight success to change the law in Brazil. My immediate reaction was to question how it was captured, where, and by whom. All roads led to Richard.

We are at a crossroads, which is said ad nauseam, but it obviously cannot be said enough because our leaders are not paying attention or perhaps are being paid to not pay attention. How else could a woefully ignorant message be perpetuated? Mark Grieco, director of “A River Below”

What did you learn from the experience of directing this film?

My previous film, “Marmato,” changed my life, but also taught me one important rule for documentary filmmaking: forget what film you want to make and listen to the voices whispering off-camera. I started with that same approach and it steered us towards one of the most unbelievable stories and characters I've had the chance to tell. It is also dovetailed perfectly with my own concerns with the truth in images, media influence and distortion, performance for the camera, and my role in all of this as a documentary filmmaker. For me, every film is, in some way, a deeply personal yet momentary reflection of your self. You'll never know exactly what you're doing, so just commit relentlessly.

Does it make you nervous that some leaders of the world are not giving notice to the environment, animals and climate change?

It doesn't make me nervous, it makes me angry. This is why I can completely identify with the conviction of our main characters. Their actions are questionable and extreme because nothing substantial is being done. We are at a crossroads, which is said ad nauseam, but it obviously cannot be said enough because our leaders are not paying attention or perhaps are being paid to not pay attention. How else could a woefully ignorant message be perpetuated? My hope is not to give an answer to this one specific problem, but rather for the audience to recognize the messiness of it all, reflect on themselves, and question what we're willing to do in the face of such immediate problems.

How can we impact change and protect these dolphins from future abuse?

I don't have the answers, but after all this, it seems clear to me that the simple answer is that it's a very difficult solution. We have created systemic destruction, so we need systemic repair — a holistic approach. For me, environmental and ecological conservation is ultimately an act to save ourselves.

What inspires you as a documentary filmmaker? What's your goal?

To find the unexpected angle and story without ever preaching to the choir. My hope is always to challenge the viewer because that is what I'm doing to myself in the process of making my films.



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(Over 20 million visitors per year)

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/07/the-dolphin-who-became-man-will-the-boto-survive-the-catfish-trade/>

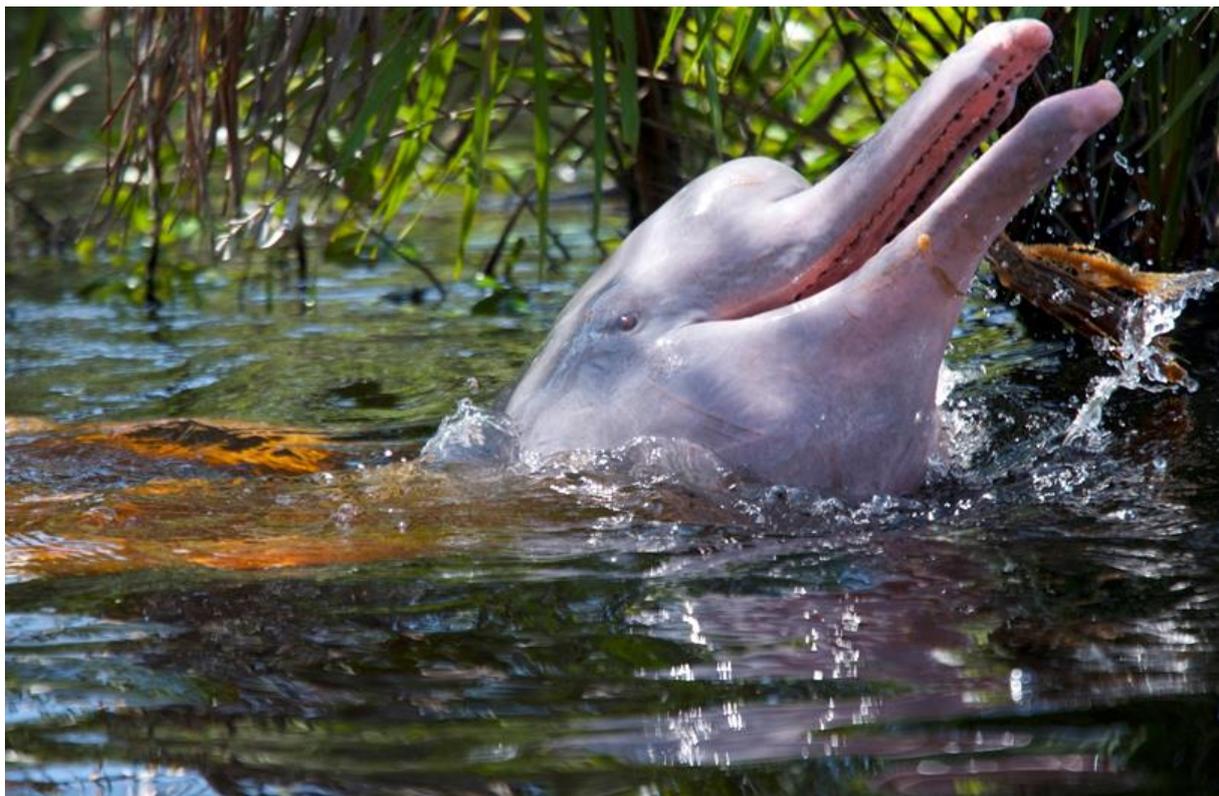


The “dolphin who became man”: will the boto survive the catfish trade?

by Maxine Chen on 31 July 2017

- *Fernando Trujillo has spent more than 30 years studying the Amazon’s elusive river dolphin, under threat by the fishing trade.*
- *Twelve years ago, locals started killing river dolphins to attract a lucrative fish to the carcasses, causing the animals to become endangered.*
- *A new film, *A River Below*, explores the story of the river dolphin and how it relates to the larger tale of the millions of people who call the Amazon home.*

Over thirty years ago, armed with a romantic dream of studying dolphins and a motorboat engine borrowed from a friend, Dr. Fernando Trujillo set off towards the small Amazonian village of Puerto Nariño. The third-year marine biology major soon realized that the Amazon river dolphins (*Inia geoffrensis*), known locally as botos, were just one piece in the complex aquatic systems making up the “most amazing jungle on the planet.” In Puerto Nariño, Trujillo was struck by indigenous people’s belief that river dolphins are sacred, human-like beings who live in underwater cities.



An Amazon river dolphin nabs a fish. Trujillo was “absolutely caught by the beauty of these animals” – the myths that indigenous Amazonians told about them inspired him to protect and conserve them. Photo credit: Fernando Trujillo.

Today, Trujillo is a renowned marine biologist and the scientific director of the Foundation Omacha, an NGO formed in 1993 that uses education and research to conserve the Amazon river and the species it contains. Omacha’s flagship species is the river dolphin. In 2007, Trujillo won the Whitley Gold Award for his work with Omacha. “Omacha”, which means “pink dolphin” in the Tikuna indigenous language, is also what the indigenous Colombians call Trujillo. To many in the Amazon, he is regarded as a dolphin who became a man.



Trujillo examining an Amazon river dolphin. Photo credit: Fernando Trujillo.

“All these beliefs around the dolphins from the indigenous – they are disappearing now,” said Trujillo in this interview with Mongabay. He thinks the international community too often forgets that more than 34 million people live in the Amazon, but less than four million of these are indigenous people. The sheer size of the region’s population has led to a reliance on the commercialization and exploitation of wildlife.

In sequence, Trujillo described the “economic forces” that battered the Amazon. Rubber was discovered in the Amazon in the late 19th century, and hundreds of thousands of indigenous people were enslaved and killed. Then, a hunting boom happened throughout the 20th century. A [study](#) estimates that between 1904 and 1969, around 23 million animals comprising 20 species of mammals and reptiles were hunted and killed in the western Brazilian Amazon. The reason? The international trade in fur and hides.

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“And then it started with the fisheries,” Trujillo said.



An aerial view of the Amazon river. Here, for around a century and a half, economic forces have led to the exploitation of indigenous Amazonian people and major conflicts between people and wildlife. Photo credit: Rhett Butler.

The story started twelve years ago, and it involves a fish that is a highly popular delicacy in Colombia – the capaz (*Pimelodus grosskopfii*). Back then, the capaz was being rapidly overfished (in 2016 the IUCN Red List classified it as as Critically Endangered). The capaz became scarce, so traders began secretly swapping capaz for piracatinga (*Calophrysus macropterus*), a scavenger fish that feeds on rotting flesh. For a long time, consumers were oblivious. Fish is often chopped up and cooked in Brazilian cuisine. Unable to identify the piracatinga by sight, diners would only be able to know what kind of fish they were eating if they were to do a DNA test.

This led to fishermen in Brazil starting to hunt and kill Amazon river dolphins and use their carcasses as bait for piracatinga. Because of their blubber, dead dolphins make an especially good lure for piracatinga. A 2016 [study co-authored by Trujillo and published in *Biological Conservation*](#) shows that Amazon river dolphin numbers are decreasing in several areas, probably due to hunting. Brazil imposed a five-year ban on fishing for piracatinga starting in 2015 – but Trujillo is skeptical that it will succeed, given the sheer size of the now illegal trade.



River dolphins began to be hunted and killed in Brazil 12 years ago, because of their value as piracatinga bait. Photo credit: Fernando Trujillo.

Besides being deliberately hunted, Amazon river dolphins also face conflicts with fishermen over a precious, and increasingly scarce, resource – fish. At the same time, they are threatened by the high mercury content of polluted waters. The harm they suffer becomes more poignant when we learn from Trujillo that river dolphins are – undisputedly – bright and curious beings.

“[I]n the 70s, when people started to use big nets in the Amazon, a lot of dolphins died because they did not realize what the net was, and would get entangled in them. In the 80s, when I started to work, I still looked out for dolphins being entangled, but I started to see dolphins avoiding the nets or jumping above the nets. And in the 90s I realized that the dolphins were going to the nets and taking the fish from them,” Trujillo recalled.

There is still much we do not know about them, according to Trujillo. For example, there is no consensus on how many species of Amazon river dolphins exist. Trujillo is currently working to convince the IUCN – which currently only recognizes one species, *Inia geoffrensis*, as the sole Amazon river dolphin species – to also recognize *Inia boliviensis* and *Inia araguaensis* as distinct species. Scientists are also unsure how many river dolphins are left in the wild. But this may not be the case for long, because Trujillo and his team at Omacha have surveyed a 27,000-kilometer (16,800-mile) stretch of South American rivers to date, to estimate the size of dolphin populations that live in them. In 2008, the IUCN categorized the *Inia geoffrensis* as Data Deficient, but this year, it is

working with scientists to re-categorize the species – and most agree it should be categorized as either Endangered or Vulnerable.

Trujillo's group Omacha encourages economic alternatives to fishing to protect dolphin and other river species – for example, sustainable dolphin-watching, craftsmanship, and a dolphin-friendly catfish certification scheme. In response to a group of fishermen who were aggrieved by dolphins, Omacha rallied these fishermen's wives to form an association and to make fish burgers out of the catfish that had been nibbled by dolphins. For two years, Omacha provided equipment and financial support to the women's association. As a testament to sustainable economic models, the Amazonian Association of Women Fish Processors now sells roughly 13,000 catfish burgers every month. They use the proceeds as income and for supporting river dolphin conservation.



Doing fieldwork in Arauca, Colombia. The organization Omacha has surveyed 27,000 kilometers of South American rivers, undertaken 27 expeditions, and trained over 370 people to survey dolphin population sizes. Photo credit: Fernando Trujillo.

Around three years ago, film director Marc Grieco and producer Torus Tammer approached Trujillo about a new film. The result was *A River Below*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival this April and recently bagged the Environmental Award at the Sheffield Doc/Fest.

This is not another save-the-dolphins documentary, said Trujillo. Rather, it cuts to the heart of the entangled relationships between wildlife and various groups of people in the Amazon by following two environmental activists – Trujillo, and Brazilian biologist-cum-reality TV star Richard Rasmussen – as they work to protect the river dolphins. Through

their journey, the film examines ethical questions that arise when the media is used to further environmental causes.

Trujillo said being involved with the film gave him a more holistic view of the cause he was fighting for. “It was very difficult for me,” he said, “because all the time [Torus and Marc] wanted to bring out my feelings. And as a scientist, I try to keep my feelings out and I try to be very objective. But finally, I think they won.”

With decades of experience as a researcher and conservationist, Trujillo has been a constant fixture on the frontlines of dolphin conservation in the Amazon. “We are collapsing everything. It’s not just dolphins,” he said. “We are collapsing the fisheries... The river turtles. The manatees. The giant otters. We are destroying the largest forest in the world.”

AN INTERVIEW WITH FERNANDO TRUJILLO

Maxine Chen for Mongabay: *You’ve spent the last thirty or so years of your life doing work around the Amazon river dolphin. Will you tell us about your first encounter with the species?*

Fernando Trujillo: I was doing marine biology at the [Jorge Tadeo Lozano University], and I wanted to work with dolphins. At the beginning, my lecturers always said, “If you want to work with dolphins, you’d have to go to another country. In Colombia, we don’t have dolphins.” And that was very strange to me. But I had the opportunity to meet Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau. And I was talking a little bit with him, and he said to me, “Look, I am going to the Amazon, and there are dolphins there, so you should go to the Amazon and study dolphins, because nobody is doing research with these dolphins.” So I started looking for a way to go, and when I was in my third year of university, I finally went in a cargo plane in the Amazon, with an engine that I had [borrowed] from someone.

I arrived in a small town called Puerto Nariño – it’s an indigenous town – and I put the engine in the boat and went to the river. And I was completely in wonder at the presence of the dolphins. Because you are in the middle of the jungle – of the most amazing jungle on the planet – you can see parrots, birds, toucans, and suddenly, you can see a river dolphin! That is very unusual. There are two different species – the pink dolphin and the gray dolphin. And the pink ones are incredible. I was absolutely caught by the beauty of these animals. I should confess I started with a romantic approach – because I wanted to work with dolphins. But I suddenly understood that dolphins were one of the pieces of this complex aquatic system in the Amazon, and the most important things are the humans – the indigenous people.

Dolphins are sacred animals for the indigenous. The indigenous believe that they have underwater cities, and [that] they are like humans, and can become humans. Basically, the indigenous [people] can eat everything in the Amazon – but not dolphins. Eating a

dolphin is like eating a human. They are protected and respected. This combination was an amazing thing to watch in the Amazon forests. All these myths and beliefs around the dolphins were important elements for me, and I decided to do something for these animals and for the Amazon.

Mongabay: *Have the attitudes of indigenous people towards these animals changed in the past 30 years? What are the attitudes that other groups of people in the Amazon hold towards the dolphins?*

A snippet from A River Below, directed by Marc Grieco and featuring Trujillo and Brazilian biologist Richard Rasmussen. Video credit: Sandarba Productions

Fernando Trujillo: Do you know how many people live in the Amazon? There are 34 million people living in the Amazon. And when you ask many people, all of them say maybe one million, two million. There are so many people in the Amazon now – huge cities like Manaus, Brazil have about [two] million people. So basically, everything is changing. And so are the beliefs of the indigenous people.

There have been a lot of economic forces in the Amazon for years. First, hundreds of thousands of indigenous people were enslaved and killed because of rubber. Then there was the international fur trade, and they killed a lot of jaguars and giant otters and other animals for fur. And then it started with the fisheries – the big catfishes. All these beliefs around the dolphins from the indigenous – they are disappearing now. And now, there are more conflicts with dolphins. For example, some fishermen believe that dolphins are serious competition to fisheries, because dolphins used to go to the nets and take fish from the nets. In several places in the Amazon, some fishermen used to shoot dolphins or to poison fish and throw the fish into the water to kill dolphins. So the perception of some people is negative towards dolphins. Same with, for example, caimans or otters.

Humans always blame others for our own actions. I remember one occasion, I was talking with fishermen, and the fishermen were very angry at the dolphins, and they were saying, “We want to kill the dolphins!” And I said, “Okay! If you think that that’s the solution for the fisheries, then let’s go and kill the dolphins!” And the guys went, “Hey, wait, wait, wait. You’re the one who wants to protect the dolphins, and you’re going with us to kill the dolphins?” I said, “Yes! If you’re sure that everything will be perfect once you kill the last dolphin, well, let’s try it!” That’s when the people started to say, “We have more fishermen now, we are collecting a lot of fish – what can we do?” And we started to look for different solutions.

For example, we asked the fishermen to bring the women the next day and we created the [Association of Amazonian Women Fish Processors] to fillet and make burgers out of the catfish that had been bitten by dolphins. And we discovered that there are so few fish of this type that we needed to start using other kinds of fish for the association. So it was a [matter of] perception; only perception.

Everything is changing in the Amazon so quickly.

[In a follow-up e-mail, Trujillo explained that the Association of Amazonian Women Fish Processors was a conservation initiative started by Omacha six years ago. The women involved were relatives of the fishermen who were in conflict with river dolphins. For this initiative, Omacha is supported by the National Learning Service, or Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA), a governmental institution that provides support for professional learning and training. Omacha provided the women’s association with equipment and economic support for a few years to produce fish fillets and burgers from the bitten catfish. Today, around 13,000 burgers are sold each month. All proceeds are used either as income for local households or for supporting river dolphin conservation.]

Mongabay: *Are river dolphins still being targeted and killed as bait for catfish?*

Fernando Trujillo: What happened was the main target of the fisheries was a big catfish. But at the end of the 90s and the beginning of 2000s, the catfish population began to collapse. But the traders wanted to go forward with their business. At that moment, there was a very important fish to the Colombian people called the capaz (*Pimelodus grosskopfii*). The capaz is from the Magdalena River – this goes straight to the Caribbean. But this fish was disappearing as well, from overfishing. So the traders said, “Okay, let’s change the fish for the other one in the Magdalena.” And the consumers couldn’t realize this. They couldn’t distinguish one fish from the other. So all the capaz that were to be sold in Colombia was actually the piracatinga fish or *mota* (*Calophrysus macropterus*), coming from the Amazon. And the market started to become so huge that the fishermen moved to Brazil to promote the fishing of the piracatinga.

The way to catch this fish is to use carcasses of dead animals. Dolphins started to be used because dolphins have a lot of blubber. The blubber of the dolphins attracts a lot of piracatinga. They use, in the Brazilian Amazon, the river dolphins, and also the black caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*). But the black caiman doesn’t have enough blubber. With one black caiman, they can catch 100 kilograms of piracatinga, but with a river dolphin they can catch 200 to 300 kilograms of it.

Everything started twelve years ago. People started killing dolphins in the Brazilian Amazon and there started to be a lot of reports. And at the beginning, the people blamed the Colombian traders [as] the origin of all this new economic activity. But later the Brazilian traders begin to kill dolphins and everything started growing and growing and growing. Some Brazilian researchers started to say that in one year, just in a small area of the Amazon, more than a thousand dolphins are killed to be used as a bait for the scavenger fish piracatinga. There was a lot of international and national reaction. It was only until this Brazilian [news] program, *Fantástico*, showed the very cruel images of the killing of dolphins that the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of the Fisheries decide to impose a ban on the fishing of the *mota*. It started [in 2015] and it’s supposed to last five years.

Mongabay: *Has the ban been effective so far?*

Fernando Trujillo: At the beginning it seemed like it was. But think about the size of the Amazon. It's very hard to control and monitor all the borders and the whole area. And it's more difficult in the sense that the Brazilians eat the fillet of piracatinga. In Colombia, people used to eat the whole fish. If you have the whole fish, you are very sure that you are eating piracatinga. But in Brazil, after the fish is cooked and in pieces, you don't know what kind of fish you are eating. Only with molecular taxonomy or genetics would you be able to have access to this kind of information. It's a very big business here. It's not about bad fishermen, because they are not bad fishermen – the fishermen are very poor people who are only trying to survive, and the traders tell the fisherman what they want for the market. On several occasions, I have really insisted on this. The bad guys are not the fishermen. They are in a position such that they need to do what the traders ask for.

Mongabay: *You mentioned the government only reacted to the problem after *Fantástico* was aired. Do you think that's an indication of the kind of attitude people generally have towards environmental issues? Or was this reaction specific to this problem in the Amazon?*

Fernando Trujillo: Here, probably, the point is governability. The governability in the Amazon is critical because the power is in the hands of these people – the traders, the cattle ranchers, people who have plantations...they have economic power and they have access to the political people. I remember talking to the federal police in Brazil, and they wanted to do an operation to confiscate the fish or to try to get evidence on the killing of dolphins. And sometimes, for example, when they arrive for the freezers, the traders would come with telephones in their hands and say, "it's for you." And it would be a superior, telling the police to stop the operation and go back to the office. They have a lot of power.

It was only after *Fantástico* presented all these images that the public created a lot of pressure and said, "It's not possible that this is happening in the Amazon." And that was the way, because the government reacted and said, "OK, OK, OK. Now, we are going to do something." Because the government knew about this situation for years. For years. It wasn't new information. For ten or 12 years, the government and the environmental authorities in Brazil knew about this situation.

Mongabay: *Did the public know as well?*

Fernando Trujillo: Yes! There were a lot of scientists in Brazil and Colombia publishing evidence on this, but no one wanted to do anything because the economic power of the people there. Also, the situation is very complex. In some parts of the film, *A River Below*, I say – it's not about dolphins, the film. It's really about the economy in a region like the Amazon. The people are trying to survive. The whole planet looks to the Amazon as a possibility – as the last reserve of forests on the planet. But these people from other

countries have forgotten about the 34 million people already living there. What are they going to do to live? Not only to survive, but to live – for their livelihoods. And it's a very complex issue. We're talking about tourists, and fisheries... What will be the activities in the Amazon that can support 34 million people and the more than three million indigenous people living in this area? If you don't protect these activities, you would always have illegal mining, illegal farming, overfishing, and pollution of rivers, and killing of dolphins...but the government is very weak on these areas, and there are no national or regional policies to develop the Amazon in a sustainable way.

Mongabay: *Are you hopeful that things will get better in the region? And on that note, what would you be focusing on moving forward?*

Fernando Trujillo: As I mentioned to you, in some ways, when I started to work with dolphins, I started with a romantic approach. But then I discovered there are a lot of complexities in the Amazon, and we started to use dolphins as ambassadors to the aquatic environment in the Amazon Orinoco. Studying dolphins, we are realizing the magnitude of the trade. We are now evaluating the impact of hydroelectric [dams] in Brazil and Bolivia – how we are losing the connectivity of the rivers. The immigration of the fish is now being interrupted, because there are dams and the fish cannot go forward. And the food security of the people there is under threat.

There are lots of things going on in the Amazon. I'm still planning to do my research with dolphins, but at the same time, I want to study – for example – the situation regarding mercury in the Amazon. Omacha and WWF are now producing a map of toxicology in the region. Which rivers contain a lot of mercury? In which rivers do fish contain a lot of mercury? And from which rivers are people getting mercury poisoning? Because we already have this situation. In Colombia, in the Caquetá River for example, national parks had [researched] the effects of mercury on people, and one hundred percent of all indigenous people living near that river have very high levels of mercury. This is very, very worrying. What will happen in ten years, when people start to die from this? Why aren't governments reacting now that they have the information? It's very hard.

This year, we are going to start a program putting tags on dolphins to look at their movements along the river and see what's happening with hydroelectric dams – if the dolphins can move or not, and how their appetites are being reduced. We are also working with local communities to try and provide some sort of economic alternatives, for example, the [Association of Amazonian Women Fish Processors], or as another example, local communities doing dolphin-watching in a sustainable way. We are also encouraging the carving and handicraft artisans with regard to indigenous people in the Amazon. We are trying to look at different options other than the dolphins to protect, a little bit, the aquatic ecosystems. This is the big challenge we want to contribute to.



Still from *A River Below*. Trujillo and Foundation Omacha are currently mapping the toxicology of South American rivers and studying the impacts of hydroelectric dams on wildlife movement.

Photo credit: Sandarba Productions.

Mongabay: *What do we know about the behavior of the river dolphins? And what do we still need to learn?*

Fernando Trujillo: Two weeks ago, I was in Brazil, and we had a meeting, and we were talking about what we already know about dolphins – and what we need to know in the future. We know they are very intelligent animals. For example, in the 70s, when people started to use big nets in the Amazon, a lot of dolphins died because they did not realize what the net was, and would get entangled in them. In the 80s, when I started to work, I still looked out for dolphins being entangled, but I started to see dolphins avoiding the nets or jumping above the nets. And in the 90s I realized that the dolphins were going to the nets and taking the fish from them. So they are very clever animals.

During the high water season, dolphins are inside the tributaries and lakes, and in the dry season they move to the main river. They take care of their calves in the lakes, and they have a kind of nursery area for this. This is very interesting.

But we still don't know how many dolphins there are in several rivers. I created a program to estimate the abundance of dolphins in South America. So far, we have surveyed 27,000 kilometers of rivers in Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. We have undertaken 27 expeditions. It is the largest expedition with river dolphins in the world. We have trained over 370 people to do abundance estimation of dolphins.

Three weeks ago, I was in Bolivia, training park rangers in national parks on how to monitor dolphins and other aquatic animals in the rivers. This is a very ambitious, long-term program to learn more about the dolphins, and through the dolphins understand a

little bit better the complexities of the Amazon and the aquatic ecosystems in the Amazon.

Mongabay: *Do we have any clear indications of whether river dolphin populations are going up or declining?*

Fernando Trujillo: We [published a paper last year in *Biological Conservation*](#) and it was mentioned by the journal *Science* as one of the important papers published that year because we showed the population trends of the dolphins in the Amazon. The pink dolphins – the *Inia geoffrensis* – are decreasing in numbers in several areas – probably the effect of the hunting in different areas. If you think about the reproduction of dolphins, pregnancy lasts about 11 months, and they only have one calf, and they take care of the calf for two years. So a female dolphin can be pregnant every two or three years. So if you're talking about a thousand dolphins killed a year, just in a small area of Brazil, these numbers give you a feel of what is happening in the Amazon.

We are collapsing everything. It's not just dolphins. We are collapsing the fisheries. A lot of species in the river are disappearing. The river turtles. The manatees. The giant otters. We are destroying the largest forest in the world.



A still from *A River Below* of Amazon river dolphins. From Trujillo's vantage point, apart from dolphin populations, humans are “collapsing everything”. Photo credit: Sandarba Productions.

Mongabay: *There has been some debate about the taxonomy of the Amazon river dolphin overall – whether there are three distinct species or subspecies. Where do you come down on this?*

Fernando Trujillo: Yes – we are still fighting about this. There are several published papers on genetics in the best journals. We know that there are [Bolivian river dolphins] *Inia boliviensis* in Bolivia. Two years ago, the [Araguaian river dolphin] *Inia araguaiaensis* was discovered in the Tocantins River. And we have [the Amazon river dolphin] *Inia geoffrensis* in the main Amazon Orinoco.

We have started to work with the IUCN to do an assessment for dolphins, because for some reason I don't understand, in 2008, the *Inia geoffrensis* was reclassified as Data Deficient. But the good news is that in two months' time, they are going to have a new assessment, and most people agree that this species has to be in the Endangered or Vulnerable category, with all the evidence of all the things that are happening in the Amazon.

[In a follow-up with Trujillo, Mongabay learned that the Omacha Foundation is also working with the IUCN to validate the two new species and hope to have assessments on them next year.]

Mongabay: *Will you tell us how you got involved with *A River Below*?*

Fernando Trujillo: A little more than three years ago, [producer] Torus Tammer contacted me and said he wanted to produce a film about river dolphins. And I thought, "Okay – another film about river dolphins. It's fine." But at that moment, Torus said to me, "No, no – it's not a natural history film about dolphins. I want to use the dolphins to present a deeper story going on in the Amazon." And it was very difficult for me, because all the time Torus and [director] Marc [Grieco] wanted to bring out my feelings. And as a scientist, I try to keep my feelings out and I try to be very objective. But finally, I think they won. They got my feelings out on the film, and I was just trying to express my feelings and my most internal self – about what's happening with dolphins and with the Amazon.

Mongabay: *How will people be able to see it?*

Fernando Trujillo: Torus and Marc are moving around in festivals presenting the movie. I know there's been some interest from online film distribution companies to buy the film and make it massive. I don't know when it'll be made available – but I think people really want to watch the film. For example, at this moment in Brazil, there's a huge controversy about the film. There are lots of newspapers and magazines publishing stories about the killing of the dolphins, whether Grieco created fake [elements] around the situation or not. But everything – what is going on in the Amazon around the dolphins – is on the film. There is none of the producer and the director on the film. The sentences are from the mouths of Richard [Rasmussen] and from me.

Mongabay: *How did working on the film change your work towards river dolphins?*

Fernando Trujillo: This film was different for me. I was doing films for National Geographic, Discovery, BBC – more regarding scientific knowledge about the dolphins. But *A River Below* is more about the ethics of conservation, and the complexities around conservation in the Amazon – the internal and moral conflicts between people there. So it was a different experience for me. It's changed my point of view and made me think more in a holistic way.



still from *A River Below*. In recent decades, the Amazon and the 34 million people it now is home to have been transformed by economic forces. These have created new “complexities around conservation” that everyone must navigate. Photo credit: Sandarba Productions.

Part 5: Media Coverage of Previous Winners

Previous winner

Vivek Menon

India

2001

**Monitoring of elephant poaching and ivory trade in
India and Asia**

**Winner of the Whitley Award sponsored by The Rufford
Foundation**

Vivek has featured in six articles this year in the Indian press, including the following piece from The News Minute. Vivek's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/how-coimbatore-can-end-deaths-man-animal-conflict-reclaim-elephant-corridors-51771>

The NEWS Minute

How Coimbatore can end deaths from man-animal conflict: Reclaim elephant corridors

In an interview to TNM, CEO of Wildlife Trust of India points out how animals and human beings are dying due to the conflict.



Human-elephant conflict is an oft-heard word in Coimbatore and the resultant man-animal death is quite a common occurrence, as the city is on the foothills of the thickly-forested Western Ghats. Whenever a wild elephant strays into human habitation that is an erstwhile corridor, the normal course of action is to guide it back into the forest, or reunite it with its herd. But there has never been an instance or even the faintest suggestion of securing the elephant corridor by acquiring that land and relocating villages.

It is this ‘right of passage’ that would help conserve elephants among a billion people and will be the most effective solution to end the human-elephant conflict, according to conservation biologist Vivek Menon, who has witnessed the successful reclaiming of eight such corridors in Kerala, Assam, Uttarakhand, Meghalaya and Karnataka at the cost of Rs. 80 crore.

As the Executive Director and CEO of Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), and the Chairperson of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group, Menon expects WTI to secure at least 22 of the 101 elephant corridors in India in the near future at an estimated budget of Rs. 200 crore. Some corridors in the Western Ghats also figure in the planned 22. WTI has had several success stories over the years, having executed plans to conserve elephant habitats across India, and their premise has been to understand “the crushing reality that the animal was large, social, intelligent, and a nomad, and has to co-exist with one-third of the world poor that constituted India”.

He says, “Man-animal conflict happens when humans forget to acknowledge these traits. The elephant is large, hence needs lot of food and water; it is social, hence needs to live in a herd and cannot be isolated; it is intelligent and shares similar neurobiological functions as a human; and as a nomad it needs to roam or move and cannot be settled,” said Menon at a recent talk in Coimbatore.

One of the success stories was the process of securing the Tirunelli-Kudrakote elephant corridor in Wayanad, Kerala, where five villages were relocated and 9.2 acres of land was acquired over a period of 12 years.

An important aspect of the WTI’s understanding of elephant conservation is that it has to be different from that of the West because of the ethical, religious and spiritual implications. “We either think of it as Ganesh when we revere it or as Shaithan when there is a human casualty. We should start looking at it as a mere elephant and remember that conflict does not result only in human death, there are elephant casualties too,” he points out.

In 2015, India saw 456 human deaths due to elephants, as against the four or five in Africa. But Menon also points out that 124 elephants have died only of train hits since 1989.

WTI has been trying for several years to reduce elephant deaths due to train hits. Six years ago, they had submitted some recommendations to the Indian Railways. “If they had been effectively used, then such deaths, including the ones on the Palakkad-Coimbatore stretch, could have been avoided,” he says.

“You cannot slow down a train easily and no engine driver wants to intentionally hit an elephant. You have to find other engineering mechanisms and animal detection systems to end elephant deaths on tracks,” he adds.

Coming out strongly against exploitation of elephants, which is in vogue since 1950s, the conservationist also condemns the misuse of nearly 10,000 of them held in captivity in

Asian temples. He says that social change was the solution to ensuring a secure future for such elephants.

Some of the success stories in conservation included putting back 67 elephants in their original habitat, rehabilitating 15, reuniting some with the natal herd (why take them to zoos?).

Another interesting success story is how WTI was able to remove Manas Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam from the UNESCO's list of 'World Heritage Sites in Danger' by not only tripling its size but also replenishing many of its endangered species. Human-elephant conflict can be overcome with the availability of land and the involvement of locals, because they could change things for better or worse.

Previous winner

Raman Sukumar

India

2003

**Asian Elephants as a flagship for biodiversity
conservation in the Nilgiri Landscape, India**

Winner of the Whitley Award sponsored by the Friends of WFN

Raman has featured in nine articles this year, including a piece on the BBC Science News website. Raman's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2017/mar/18/jumbo-infra-projects-pose-threat-to-odisha-elephant-corridors-1582666.html>

THE  NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

Jumbo infra projects pose threat to Odisha elephant corridors

National Board for Wild Life (NBWL) member and elephant expert Prof Raman Sukumar has called for maintenance of gene flow between Mahanadi and Sambalpur elephant reserves (ERs) through increased preservation of corridors and links in these two habitats.

Prof Sukumar, who is mandated with preparing the management plan for ERs in the State besides assessing their carrying capacity and an action plan, felt that it is important to come up with a more rational plan for ERs. Of 14 elephant corridors in the State, he says, not more than 10 are viable for restoration.

“Similipal National Park is compact while Mahanadi and Sambalpur are too restricted. Originally, the State Forest Department wanted a large area to be declared as elephant reserve but it is not viable. We are trying to expand scope of the ERs,” he said.

Prof Sukumar was of the view that grey areas are in Mahanadi and Sambalpur which have a number of corridors and the connectivity is very important for the Government to preserve.

“This can become a larger viable unit. In isolation, Mahanadi is a good reserve but Sambalpur is too small and fragmented. The elephant gene flow between Mahanadi and Sambalpur has to be maintained. The rest of the habitats are fragmented. Keonjhar has got a lot of mining issues while south Odisha is not in good shape,” he said.

The NBWL member felt that linear infrastructure projects such as railways, road and transmission lines are a necessity but the push to make four-lane and six-lane roads cause enormous fragmentation.

The road from Cuttack through Dhenkanal, Angul and Rairakhol, Sambalpur and then Jharsuguda cuts right through Mahanadi ER and linked to Sambalpur reserve, he said and added that there are still links and movements which need to be preserved. “If you

convert it into a major six-lane highway without giving any thought to elephants, these two will be fragmented. We have to avoid that,” he explained.

The elephant expert said the corridors and threats must be identified. If some six-laning projects are planned affecting corridors, foolproof mitigation measures should be put in place allowing unhindered movement of jumbos. “However, critical areas should not be touched,” he said. Wherever such infrastructure is absolutely necessary, there is a need to look for alternative routes.

Sukumar said he is not for large scale land acquisition while managing corridors. “Land is a sensitive issue. We have to identify strategic small land parcels that hold the corridor almost like thread. In those areas, we need to do minor surgeries,” he said.

Odisha elephants are currently in news because of the ‘Giant Refugee’ campaign highlighting the sad plight of jumbos of Athagarh and Chandaka.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-40950303>



Freeze-dried dung gives clue to Asian elephant stress

By Siva Parameswaran BBC Tamil Service



SANJEETA SHARMA POKHAREL

Researchers freeze-dried samples on site for later analysis

"Collecting fresh faecal samples is not as easy as it may sound," says researcher Sanjeeta Sharma Pokharel.

But her efforts have helped scientists in India devise a unique, non-invasive way to monitor the physiological health of wild elephants.

The key has been freeze-drying dung in the field to preserve the elephant's hormones.

As a result, scientists found stress levels in females were more conspicuous than in male elephants.

Over five years, Sanjeeta and her colleagues collected more than 300 samples from 261 elephants in the biodiversity-rich Western Ghats area.

She explained her technique: "I used to hide and observe till the elephant defecated and moved away."

She told the BBC: "These samples mean a lot to me."

Ethical approach

The aim of the research was to evaluate the influence of the elephants' body condition on glucocorticoid metabolites.

Animals such as elephants are subjected to various stressors in their lives, with factors including threats from predators, food shortages, drought and illness.



Image copyrightSANJEETA SHARMA POKHARELImage captionA female elephant in poor body condition. Females exhibited higher levels of stress hormones

Whenever any animal faces stressful events, their body secretes hormones known as glucocorticoids.

These hormones are released into the circulatory system which eventually breaks them down into metabolites that are excreted through urine or faeces.

The researchers say that collecting blood samples to assess stress levels is neither ethical nor feasible, since immobilising the animals will cause additional stress, thus biasing the study.

"So glucocorticoid was measured using faecal or dung samples," said Sanjeeta.



Image copyrightSANJEETA SHARMA POKHAREL
Image captionResearchers observed and followed the elephants until they defecated

The team found the glucocorticoid metabolites in the dung remained relatively stable up to six hours after defecation, though collecting samples as fresh as possible was preferred.

After six hours the dung starts to degrade through microbial activity. To prevent this, the collected samples were freeze-dried in the field and stored at -20 degrees Celsius for further analysis.

Ecological challenges

Stress levels for all elephants peaked during the dry season, when resources were low.

Senior researcher Prof Raman Sukumar said: "In a natural environment, large and long-ranging herbivorous mammals such as elephants may have to face various ecological challenges or stressful conditions.

"One such challenge that might impact their health is forage resource limitation, either in terms of quality or quantity."

Higher amounts of glucocorticoids generally indicated that the animal was more stressed, he said.

"Stress levels in female elephants were more conspicuous than in male elephants."

All mammalian systems would show a similar trend, the researchers say.



Image copyrightSANJEETA SHARMA POKHARELImage captionElephants, like this male, showed higher levels of stress during the dry season

Dr Sukumar and his team claim that their study is the "first to examine the relationship between body condition, seasonality and stress in wild Asian elephants using large-scale faecal sample collection for assaying glucocorticoid metabolites".

The study also focused on finding possible answers to how elephant populations react to chronic stress and if superior nutrition from feeding on cultivated crops could help them reduce their physiological stress levels that may otherwise be enhanced through harassment by farmers trying to protect their fields.

They also examined the idea that body condition alone could act as an indicator of physiological health and fitness of an animal.

In the study, the animal's body condition was scored on a scale from one to five, with one indicating the animal was in a very poor state and five indicating the animal was obese.

The study conclusively found that the stress levels in the Asian elephants peaked during the dry season when resources were low. They also concluded that very poor or poor body condition was a good visual indicator of stress.

Previous winner

Achilles Byaruhanga
Uganda
2004

Conservation of Nabajjuzi Swamp

**Winner of the Whitley Award (Birdlife) sponsored by the Studs
Trust**

Achilles featured in the following article in Ugandan newspaper, New Vision. His WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

http://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1444948/bird-flu-countrywide-surveillance-wild-birds



Bird flu: Countrywide surveillance of wild birds

By Gerald Tenywa

Added 27th January 2017 10:33 AM

A team has been dispatched to conduct an annual count of water birds in different parts of the country.



PIC: A team from Nature Uganda, a partner of BirdLife International, undertaking surveillance at Lutembe Bay along the shores of Lake Victoria in Wakiso district. (Credit: Gerald Tenywa)

As a way of dealing a big blow to Avian Influenza also known as bird flu, a countrywide surveillance of the wild population of birds is being conducted to establish how wide the disease has spread.

This is what a team of experts from Nature Uganda, a partner of BirdLife International will be seeking to achieve in the coming six weeks, according to Achilles Byaruhanga, the executive director of Nature Uganda.

He said the team has been dispatched to conduct an annual count of water birds in different parts of the country with a view of observing whether wild birds are dying or not.

He said the expedition that will cover mainly water birds on lakes Victoria, Mbuoro, Edward and Opeti, plus the expansive marshlands is being conducted with a lot of concern about the birds that tend to stay in large flocks.

“We have many birds that migrate as huge flocks but also many others that are not water birds,” said Byaruhanga, adding that it is easy to pass on the disease when birds stay in congregations.

Along the shores of Lake Victoria, the team is expected at Lutembe, Mabamba and Makanaga. They are also expected to cover parts of western Uganda including Lake Mbuoro and Queen Elizabeth National Park in western Uganda, then eastern and northern Uganda.

Byaruhanga said the operation expected to end at the end of February will help to identify if there are death of birds among the wild population of birds.

He said the outbreak of bird flu among the white winged black terns was also a threat to birds that congregate in areas such as Mabamba, Sango Bay, Makanaga and Musambwa Island in Lake Victoria.



Background

Christopher Kibazanga, the State Minister for Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), last week confirmed the outbreak of bird flu along parts of the shores of Lake Victoria.

He said samples of dead wild birds (white-winged black terns) at Lutembe in Wakiso as well as dead ducks and chicken at Bukakata in Masaka had tested positive.

“The infected birds can be a source of infection to our poultry species (chicken, ducks and geese). The infected poultry or wild birds can also be a source of infection to human beings,” said Kibazanga. “We advise that you avoid touching any live or dead wild birds.”

He added: “Although the threat to human health is currently very low, we do not want to take any risks as the virus has been found to cause deaths in humans elsewhere.”

What is bird flu?

Bird flu is a contagious disease caused by a virus related to human influenza. Some strains of the disease have been passed to humans but this is very rare, and usually only occurs after very close contact with infected birds.

While all bird species are susceptible, domestic poultry are vulnerable to infection. Outbreaks can turn into epidemics among bird populations in a short time.

Symptoms

According to Dr. Anthony Mbonye, the Director Health Services, the disease has similar symptoms with the common flu and has an incubation period of three to four days and is accompanied by sneezing as well as coughing, high temperature, chest pain, difficulty in breathing, muscle aches but it does not spread through air.

Keepers of birds should watch out for symptoms such as swollen head, discoloration of the neck, throat and loss of appetite. Respiratory distress, diarrhea and when birds lay fewer eggs, according a statement from the Ministry of Health.

Previous winner

Randall Arauz

Costa Rica

2004

**Sharks and fisheries: Conservation and advocacy for
endangered marine species**

**Winner of the Whitley Award sponsored by the William Brake
Charitable Trust**

Randall has featured in six articles this year; the following is a selection of this coverage. Randall's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

Cision – News Website, US
25 January 2017

<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/fins-attached-announces-partnership-with-costa-rican-biologist-randall-arauz-300396644.html>



Fins Attached Announces Partnership with Costa Rican Biologist Randall Arauz

Will focus on marine conservation and management policy

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo., Jan. 25, 2017 /PRNewswire/ -- The Colorado-based non-profit Fins Attached Marine Research and Conservation (Fins Attached), announces a new partnership with renowned Costa Rican biologist Randall Arauz. Over the next three years, Arauz will consult with Fins Attached as their International Policy and Development Specialist in an effort to install science based marine conservation and management policy in the Eastern Pacific, and to procure further protection for highly migratory marine species under international treaties.



Fins Attached

"We are excited that we can now count on Randall's expertise to advance our marine conservation and management agenda," said Alex Antoniou, Executive Director of Fins

Attached. "We have focused strongly on generating science on highly migratory sharks, and Randall is the right person to help turn this science into policy, not an easy task when dealing with the powerful global interests of the shark fin industry."

"Fins Attached has been helping researchers in the Eastern Pacific advance shark science for over 15 years, facilitating studies ranging from white sharks at Guadalupe Island, Mexico, to hammerhead sharks in Cocos Island, Costa Rica, and Galapagos, Ecuador," said Randall Arauz. "We must now use every tool available (public awareness, political lobby, exposure in scientific forums, litigation) for emerging marine conservation and management policy to be based on this science."

Randall Arauz has a strong track record of impacts on marine conservation policy on a domestic, regional, and global scale. Through PRETOMA, an NGO he established in 1997, he worked extensively studying sea turtle and shark interactions with fisheries, as well as their migratory movements, and forced important fishery policy change through strategic legal action.

He has served as an official Costa Rican delegate providing his expert advice at meetings such as the United Nations Consultative Process on the Law of the Sea (2004), the Convention on Migratory Species (2007) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (2013). His work has been acknowledged by Conservation International's Neotropical Conservation Award (2004), the Whitley Fund for Nature's Gold Award (2004), the Goldman Prize (2010), and the Gothenburg Award for Sustainable Development (2010). He is currently a PEW Fellow in Marine Conservation.

<https://thecostaricanews.com/randall-arauz-costa-ricas-angel/>

The **Costa Rica** NEWS.

Randall Arauz, Costa Rica's own Angel

For almost 30 years, he's been an environmental flagship for his country

By German Carias

Costa Rica is known in the last decades for its advances in environmental awareness. The country has had great numbers in green technology since its promise to be in 2021 the first carbon neutral nation worldwide. Achieving 299 days of non-carbon energy use is no easy task, and one of the unsung heroes actively works to preserve marine species, Randall Arauz.



Randall Arauz

He was chosen in 2013 as one of the 100 Angels in the planet for his efforts in maintaining nature. Arauz is a marine biologist that has dedicated his professional career to conserve the life of more than 15 species of sharks. In the last 50 years, its population has declined more than 50% due to overfishing.

Ten years after obtaining his degree, Arauz founded in 1997 the Non-Governmental Agency PRETOMA, which stands as Association for the Restoration of Sea Turtles. Once a turtle conservationist, he made major contributions on this area. Later he swayed his interest to shark protection when he learned how the fishing technique operated. Since then his efforts have been most important for the protection of the species. In 2003, he exposed a Taiwanese ship responsible for the death of 30,000 sharks. For this, he received local and international support to enforce Costa Rican laws against shark finning.

As he continued his campaign in his nation, Arauz became close to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Congress to establish a United Nations ban on shark finning. His efforts were awarded on 2007 when the UN General Assembly approved that all shark fins be landed to the body of the shark, meaning a definite win for Arauz and other environmental activists in the world.

PADI – Diving Website, US
26 July 2017

http://www2.padi.com/blog/2017/07/26/why-does-shark-finning-happen/?utm_campaign=conservation&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter#sf100902240



Why Does Shark Finning Happen?

Posted by Emily Bates

On their recent expedition to Cocos Island, a global hotbed of shark activity, Mission Blue sat down with Randall Arauz, a lifelong marine conservationist and recipient of the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2010 for his efforts in protecting sharks and the banning of the shark finning industry in Costa Rica. What follows is a primer on why shark finning happens and how science can help stop it and inform sensible conservation management strategies. The questions were asked by Kip Evans, Mission Blue's Director of Photography and Expeditions.



Randall Arauz, of Fins Attached

Could you describe the shark fishing and finning problem on a global level?

Shark finning is a global issue and it started in the 80's when the long line explosion happened throughout the world and the fishermen saw that they could make a fortune off of shark fins. And the big issue is that shark fins cost \$100/kilo for the fins, whereas the meat of the shark only costs 50¢/kilo. When you're a fisherman, your limiting factor is your holding capacity. So would you rather bring your hold full of meat that is worth 50¢/kilo or shark fins that are worth \$100/kilo? That's the economic incentive to fin the sharks.

And this has been happening all over the world for decades. And the big problem is the Taiwanese businessmen come to countries like Spain, Costa Rica, Mexico, Ecuador – and they buy these fins from the domestic fishermen. And there's a lot of money to be made, so the locals make a lot of money. And these shark fins get sent to Hong Kong, which is the hub of the Taiwanese shark finning industry. And from Hong Kong, they get distributed throughout Asia. It's a huge operation. A multimillion dollar operation. And there have even been ties to local mafias in Asia that interact with this market. It's very very lucrative.

Tell us about your work with shark finning in Costa Rica.

We've been working on the shark finning issue since 1997. We actually blew the whistle on what was going on in Costa Rica then. Unfortunately, when we figured out what was going on in 1997, the shark finning fleet from Taiwan had had 15 years of time to work here in Costa Rica, completely unchecked and freely finning sharks. Ever since, we've had a campaign to try to reverse the situation, first by creating laws and regulations against shark finning. Second, and perhaps the most important part, is implementation and making sure the regulations are respected.

What is the problem with the Taiwanese coming to a place like Cocos or fishing off other parts of the Costa Rican coast?

Back in the 80's when Costa Rica invited the Taiwanese to come to Costa Rica, and throughout the region, the local fleets were fishing just off the coast. And as you know, Costa Rica has Cocos Island and this huge EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone). Back then, politicians used to say that we "lived with our back towards the sea" and that we needed to exploit this huge resource, the Costa Rican EEZ, which is ten times bigger than the country itself. So the government of Costa Rica decided to invite a Taiwanese mission to train Costa Ricans how to long line in the open ocean.

But when the Taiwanese diplomatic mission came, they saw the wealth that could be made here on the shark fins. That's when they decided to turn from technicians to businessmen. I can freely say they corrupted the Costa Rican government. Millions of dollars were involved; they invested money on improving infrastructure in Puntarenas. They did a boulevard in Puntarenas. They built docks and they actually became involved with the Costa Rican Fisheries Institute. And they pretty much got a grip on Costa Rican fisheries policy.



Tell me how the fins are processed through Costa Rica that the Taiwanese bring to shore.

The Taiwanese are operating throughout the Eastern Pacific, all the way from Mexico down to Northern Chile. And Costa Rica, for at least 20 years, was the hub of the shark fin industry. These boats are either Taiwanese flagged – or Belize or Panama flagged – using flags of convenience – but all these boats were foreign boats. And because of that, these boats were supposed to use public facilities in which to land their products. In this way there could be accountability. Instead, for many years these foreign fishing vessels were free to operate and bring all the shark fins that they could from the whole region to their private processing plants here in Puntarenas. And then they would dry the fins and directly export them. And let's remember that in 2001, Costa Rica was the third global shark fin exporter with close to 950 tons a year.

Tell me about how Fins Attached is trying to make a difference and get the laws changed in Costa Rica.

We already have the anti-shark finning law. And during our past administration with President Laura Chinchilla we were able to list hammerhead sharks under CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). Now, the best thing would be if we could snap our fingers and get rid of the foreign fleets altogether, but of course, these people are very well ingrained in Costa Rica by now. They have lots of political sway and economic support. And so we're trying to curtail this situation with the tools that are provided to us by international policy.

So, first we went with President Chinchilla to CITES and we were able to list hammerhead sharks on Appendix II, which will impose international regulations. We also recently worked to get silky sharks and thresher sharks listed. CITES is a great opportunity, but CITES by itself isn't going to do anything. CITES is a tool that we as conservationists have to use to work with our governments to make sure these

regulations are actually implemented. And that's what we're doing right now. We are literally breathing down the Costa Rican government's neck. We are watching everything they are doing with the shark fin industry. And we are blowing the whistle because Costa Rica is doing everything possible under this new presidential administration of Solís to circumvent the CITES regulations.

And what we do is expose the situation, take the government to court, appeal to public opinion and ultimately try to avert this travesty that is occurring now in Costa Rica. Think about it: Costa Rica, the global conservation nation...and we're also the shark finning nation and one that violates international conventions on endangered species.

Could you describe the tagging you are doing and explain how it can make a difference for the sharks?

To save sharks in the Eastern Pacific, or anywhere in the world, we need to know where they are going. We know that sharks are highly migratory. But where are they going? We know they are not randomly distributed throughout the ocean. There are areas where sharks like to congregate and Cocos Island is one of them. Here, when you're diving out at Manulita and you see all these hammerhead sharks, they aren't distributed like that randomly throughout the ocean. There are very specific places where they do this – and they are called hot spots. Cocos Island is one. Galapagos is another.

But we need to know, for example, how are the sharks from Cocos Island relating to sharks in other hot spots like Malpelo Island off the coast of Colombia or Galapagos off the coast of Ecuador? Are they the same sharks? How do they relate to each other? Answers to these questions are very important for conservation management. And so we need to coordinate with different countries and see where the sharks are going. And that's what we're doing with the tagging.

And of course, with this tagging effort, we also need to collaborate with the researchers in the region. Because I could tag a bunch of sharks at Cocos Island, but if I'm not coordinating with the researchers at Galapagos or Malpelo, or on the mainland, we're not going to know where these sharks are going. So this is really team work. And many researchers have to get together so we can figure this out. And that will be the only way that we can design real management plans and conservation plans. If we know where they are going and when they are going.

What do you see as the future of these sharks?

We have to be optimistic. Let's remember that according to the science, we still have 10% of the sharks that we had 50 years ago. So we have to get busy. My goal is for all sharks in the future to enjoy this same protection that sea turtles currently enjoy, that is, total protection from international commerce.

Previous winner

Rodrigo Medellín

Mexico

2004

**Innovative bat conservation in Mexico and Latin
America**

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Friends of WFN

Rodrigo featured in three articles this year; the following is a selection of this coverage. Rodrigo's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/09/rodrigoa-medellin-explorer-moments-bat-agave/>



Can the Bat Man of Mexico also be Tequila's Super Hero?

Conservationist Rodrigo Medellín's efforts to save the lesser long-nosed bat is tied to Mexico's blue agave plant.



Rodrigo Medellín, seen here with a Mexican long-tongued bat (*Choeronycteris mexicana*), links research, conservation, and education to preserve bats and their environment.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THIERRY GROBET, ROLEX AWARDS

By Gary Strauss

PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 21, 2016

Like tequila?

Ecologist and conservationist Rodrigo Medellín wants your brand to be bat-friendly.

Bats have long been among the world's most despised animals, due largely to myth and Hollywood's fascination with vampire bats. But Medellín is trying to lead a the perceptual transformation of the bat, from blood-sucking demon to unsung nature hero, and hopes a bat-friendly tequila will provide a major public relations boost.

Aside from consuming loads of crop-destroying insects, bats are plant pollinators, and Medellín's prized lesser long-nosed bat pollinates the cactuslike blue agave plant, the single plant species from which Mexican tequila is produced.

Habitat destruction has been especially harmful to the lesser long-nosed bat, first listed as a threatened species in Mexico in 1994. By 2008 it was well on its way to recovery, thanks largely to Medellín, a tireless advocate who's been dubbed the "Bat Man of Mexico" for his work with bats. (Medellín, a Rolex Laureate and National Geographic grantee, has also worked to help a variety of other plant and animal species.)



The threatened and endemic banana bat (*Musonycteris harrisoni*) is one of the little-known species that Medellín seeks to study and protect in Mexico.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARCO TSCHAPKA

Over 20 years ago, Medellín initiated research to identify and ultimately help protect the lesser long-nosed bat's caves. His efforts also prompted educational programs that dispelled bat myths and underscored their benefits to thousands of Mexicans.

And he was instrumental in persuading farmers to allow agave plants to flower. Previously, many farmers, seeking to boost the agave's sugar content, cut off the flowers before they could be pollinated, instead using mono-cropped agave. But after crops were decimated by disease caused by a mixture of fungus and bacteria, some farmers, on Medellín's advice, began setting aside 5 percent of their land for flowering agave.



Hundreds of lesser long-nosed bats (*Leptonycteris curasoae*) fly around one of Medellín's students in the Xoxafi Cave.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THIERRY GROBET, ROLEX AWARDS

In fields where farmers have allowed plants to flower, “they’re full of food and bats are visiting—it’s nothing short of historic,” say Medellín, 58. “This is the way things were done six generations ago.”

In 2014, Medellín hooked up with the nonprofit Tequila Interchange Project, an alliance of producers, scientists, and bartenders that advocates the preservation of traditional agave farming, more naturally pollinated wild agave, and other sustainable, environmentally friendly practices.

By year’s end, tequila brands certified as “bat-friendly” will be on the market in the U.S., the world's biggest tequila consumer, under the Tequila Cascahuin, La Alteña, Siete Leguas, and Don Mateo distillery labels, Medellín says.

“This is nothing short of a dream come true,” says Medellín, who hopes enthusiasts snap up the brands, leading to more demand and broader, bat-friendly farmology. “It will help save the bat and tequila at the same time.”



A female Mexican big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus mexicanus*) with its baby. Medellín also studies this little-known, endemic, and insectivorous species.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THIERRY GROBET, ROLEX AWARDS

Medellín, a professor of ecology and conservation at the Institute of Ecology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, isn't just about bats. He's working on saving Mexico's jaguars, which now number about 3,800 in the wild. He'll be in Johannesburg, South Africa, later this month at the 2016 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Conference of the Parties.

"I'm hoping to compare notes in conservation strategies on lions, tigers and leopards," he says. "We're trying to understand why jaguars cannot sustain the level of encroachment by humans that allow the other big cats to survive in other countries." Additionally, Medellín will lobby for CITES protection of the thresher and silky sharks. National Geographic produced this content as part of a partnership with the Rolex Awards for Enterprise.

<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/11/midnight-karaoke-snake-hallucinations-paranoia-and-exhaustion-meet-scientists-who-work>

Science

Midnight karaoke, snake hallucinations, paranoia, and exhaustion: Meet the scientists who work the night shift

By Sam Kean Nov. 23, 2016 , 9:00 AM

All Rodrigo Medellín wanted was a nap. A biologist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City, he had been trapping bats for several nights in a row in the Lacandon rainforest near Guatemala, and was exhausted. “So I lay on the ground,” he says, and blithely fell asleep. Forty winks later, he awoke uneasily. One of the deadliest snakes in Mexico, a tawny fer-de-lance, was slithering by his head, 30 centimeters away. “I did not move and let her pass,” he recalls.

Even after the coast cleared and he set about his bat hunt again, fear wouldn’t loosen its grip on his sleep-deprived mind. That entire night, “I kept hallucinating more snakes,” he says. Every twitching shadow concealed another serpent, every rustling leaf had fangs. Although a veteran of the night shift, Medellín greeted that dawn frazzled.

Working nights is unavoidable, or at least commonplace, in certain scientific fields. If you want to study bat behavior or stellar nebulae or sleep physiology, you may have to become half-nocturnal yourself, and scientists who sign up for the night shift encounter problems that just don’t arise during the day. They tumble down embankments in the pitch black, nod off midexperiment, and grow paranoid in the witching hours. It’s a tough gig, and for these and other reasons psychologists and sleep experts take a dim view of night work, which can disrupt sleep, throw hormones out of whack, and make you measurably dumber. “Human beings are meant to be regulated by light,” says Candice Alfano, a psychologist at the University of Houston in Texas who’s leading a study for NASA that includes a focus on circadian rhythm disruptions. “We still have that biology, even though our social culture has changed dramatically.”

And yet, few of the nocturnal researchers *Science* talked to would give up their work. Amid the misery and exhaustion, science after hours can still produce moments of serenity, even euphoria. “Either you’re getting to know more about the natural world, or you’re getting to know more about yourself,” Medellín says. “It’s always a source of happiness to me.”

The challenges faced by researchers on the night shift vary significantly by discipline. Biologists, for instance, sometimes upend their whole lives to match the nondiurnal schedules of certain plants and animals.

Nicky Creux, a postdoc at the University of California (UC), Davis, studies sunflowers, whose buds open up just before dawn. That means getting up at 3:30 a.m. for weeklong stretches to set up cameras and dissecting equipment, in order to track the minute-by-minute emergence and growth of anthers and styles, plant reproductive organs. Although she’s naturally a morning lark, “Cycling out to the fields in the dark is pretty miserable,” she laughs. At the end of one recent 6-day stretch, her fine motor skills basically broke down from exhaustion: She kept dropping the tiny flower parts and losing them in the grass. She’s hoping the lost data won’t submarine the whole week.

Creux’s social life suffered as well, because she essentially lived those weeks in a different time zone from everyone around her. “Friends want to go to dinner and I can’t,” she says. “I have to be in bed by 8 p.m.” She also found it hard to abandon the lab to rest while others nearby were still hard at work. “As a scientist, you’re used to working 12-hour shifts, and staying until 7 p.m. I had to get my head around the fact that it’s okay to go home at 3.” Alfano says that like traditional night workers, such as hospital staff, janitors, and truckers, scientists can feel tempted to “cheat” and attend daytime events with friends and family. That can compromise an already spotty sleep schedule. “At some point, you’re really pushing the limit of what your sleep-wake system can do,” she says.

Beyond the strange hours, nocturnal biologists often work in environments that can prove dangerous to human beings, who lack the dim light vision and sharp senses of smell or hearing that most night-adapted species rely on. Hong Young Yan, a fish and frog biologist at the Taiwan National Academy of Science in Taipei, was tramping along a dark trail at night once when a colleague went tumbling down a 30-meter embankment. “Suddenly, he just disappeared,” Yan says. The colleague lived, but sprained an ankle and cried with pain as he limped back to camp. Another time, Yan walked smack into a beehive in the dark, and the colony erupted. “We had to run and jump into a stream” to dodge the swarm, he says.

To help his students overcome their fear of the dark, Medellín performs a little hazing ritual, which involves creeping up behind them in a jaguar mask. He gets a lot of screams. “Some might call it a bit of abuse,” Medellín says, but he argues that maintaining a calm demeanor is essential when you dwell among the bats or other nocturnal animals: “The dark is much more comfortable, if you accept it.”



Bat biologist Rodrigo Medellín says, "The dark is much more comfortable if you accept it."

Sergio Speziale, a mineral physicist at the German Research Centre for Geosciences in Potsdam, has pulled many a long night at synchrotrons and other particle accelerators around the world, and his time served has left him feeling philosophical. “Repeated night shifts tend to amplify the effect of whatever happens,” he says. “If things are really cool and interesting, there’s a more euphoric approach to discovery. When things fall apart, the sadness is amplified, too. Working nights will always remain in my mind. It’s sometimes good to experience that in life.”

Previous winner

Hem Baral

Nepal

2005

**Conservation of Nepal's endemic bird species:
participatory conservation in Phulchoki forest**

**Winner of the Whitley Award in memory of Daniel Kelly sponsored
by the Rufford Foundation**

Hem featured in four articles this year; the following is a selection of this coverage.
Hem's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

The Himalayan Times – Online & Print Newspaper, Nepal
29 March 2017

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/migrant-birds-flock-valley-summer/>

The Himalayan

Migrant birds flock to Valley for summer

Published: March 29, 2017 3:36 am On: Kathmandu

With the beginning of pre-monsoon season, Eurasian and other types of koels have started arriving in Kathmandu Valley from southern India and as far as South Africa. According to ornithologists, Eurasian koels can stay even in urban areas with few a trees for them to live in due to its adaptive nature.

Ornithologist Dr Hem Sagar Baral said the first Eurasian koels had arrived in Kathmandu on March 26 this week.

“These Eurasian koels have spread throughout Kathmandu Valley and I can hear their voices most of the time,” Ornithologist Dr Baral told *The Himalayan Times*.

With the beginning of summer, migratory birds have started flying to Nepal for breeding due to easy availability of food. Ornithologists said among them koels had stayed in Kathmandu Valley whereas other birds had flown to the Tarai and other parts of the country.

Besides Eurasian koel, Asian koel, Indian cuckoo, emerald cuckoo, oriental cuckoo, pied cuckoo and lesser cuckoo also arrived in the Valley in the fourth week of March. Every year Nepal witnesses two kinds of bird migration — winter migration and summer migration. While more than 150 species of birds enter Nepal during winter, barely 30 to 40 species make their way to spend summer in the Himalayan foothills of Nepal. Almost always, winter migration in Nepal means birds come from the north soon after completing their breeding cycle.

The summer migration of birds, however, is different. Nearly all summer migrant birds come to Nepal for breeding and most of them come from southern India and south-east Asia.

Chestnut-headed bee-eater holds the record for being the earliest summer migrant to arrive in Nepal. With the arrival of Chestnut-headed bee-eater, there are several other species that have already entered or are preparing to enter Nepal.

One of the most handsome birds of Nepal, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, has also made its way to the Tarai. By the second week of April, many varieties of cuckoos are likely to arrive in Nepal.

“Asian koels has already arrived in Kathmandu. If you are lucky to live near the woodlands or city parks, then you will constantly hear cuckoos throughout the spring and early summer,” Dr Baral said.

He said the longest journey among Nepal’s summer migrants is perhaps made by the pied cuckoo. Some of these birds come from Sub-Saharan Africa — a journey that involves travel of more than 5,000 km just one way. Most of our summer birds stay till the month of October prior to their departure to their winter quarters.

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/nine-bird-species-vanish-kathmandu-valley/>

The Himalayan

Nine bird species vanish from Kathmandu Valley

Published: May 16, 2017 5:00 am On: Kathmandu

HIMALAYAN NEWS SERVICE



A migratory bird takes off in a misty morning at Taudaha Lake, in Kathmandu, on Thursday, December 29, 2016. Photo: Skanda Gautam

With rapid urbanisation, Kathmandu Valley has witnessed the extinction of nine bird species that were common in Valley earlier.

Ornithologists have blamed urbanisation for the loss of wetlands, cultivation fields and forests inside Kathmandu Valley.

According to data, nine bird species have been completely wiped out from the Valley so far.

Researcher and Ornithologist Hem Sagar Baral said chukar partridge, watercock, demoiselle crane, pheasant-tailed jacana, greater painted-snipe, ibisbill, Indian thick knee, small pratincole and yellow-wattled lapwings have completely disappeared from the Valley. “Chukar partridge was a common resident species in and around Kathmandu Valley till the 1950s, but hunting and habitat loss pushed it to extinction and now chukar partridge is no more. It had become extinct around 50 years ago.” Baral said. He said, with urbanisation people begun to construct buildings on cultivated lands.

“Now, cultivation fields, wetlands and forests, among other suitable bird habitats have been replaced by a concrete jungle so the habitat of birds has disappeared from Kathmandu Valley.” He further added.

According to the ornithologist, beside chukar partridge, the watercock has not been recorded for the last 30 years in the Valley. It was a summertime visitor species which was recorded for the last time in 1987. It was still breeding then. Hunting and habitat loss, have however, taken a toll of this species.

Similarly, the passage migratory bird demoiselle crane has also not been recorded in Kathmandu since 30 years. The summer visitor pheasant-tailed jacana has also not been recorded since the last 57 years. Then there is the greater painted-snipe, which disappeared 20 years ago. The inhabitant of hilly areas and rivers and small Island-based ibisbill has not been recorded since the last 40 years in Kathmandu. The ibisbill used to be a common sight in the Bagmati and Manohara rivers.

The remaining three disappeared species are the Indian thick knee, a Tarai based migratory bird, which regularly visited Kathmandu Valley, but has not been recorded in the Valley since the last 67 years. Similarly, the small pratincole has not been recorded since the last 200 years and the lowland habitat-based yellow-wattled lapwing was wiped out from Kathmandu Valley 50 years ago. It was last time recorded in 1949.

Besides Kathmandu Valley, five migratory bird species that used to be common in Nepal about a decade-and-a-half ago have now stopped appearing in the country. They are baer’s pochard, Eurasian curlew, Eurasian spoonbill, pallas’s fish eagle and the Caspian tern. They have not been seen in Nepal since 2000.

The Eurasian curlew was the most common migratory species in Nepal. A flock of 750 birds was recorded in Koshi in 1980. The Eurasian spoonbill used to come to Nepal in a flock of up to 288 in 1979 in Koshitappu. Likewise, the previously resident species Pallas’s fish eagle has now become a migratory species in Shukla Phanta and it has started disappearing from around 1990. The Caspian tern was common until 1989, but became an extremely irregular visitor after the 90’s until it stopped visiting. Two resident species of Nepal — the black-necked stork and the black bellied tern — have now become visitor birds.

Previous winner

Romulus Whitaker

India

2005

**Utilising the king cobra as a flagship species for
India's vanishing rainforests**

Winner of the Whitley Award sponsored by the Friends of WFN

Romulus featured in four articles this year; the following is a selection of this coverage. Romulus' WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/madras-crocodile-bank-romulus-whitaker-national-venomous-snakes-survey-wildlife-conservation-herpetology/1/913532.html>



Now, Madras Crocodile Bank and 3 other organisations to come up with a 'snakescape' of India

Madras Crocodile Bank, Global Snakebite Initiative, indiansnakes.org and Pune-based Premium Serums have launched a 'first-of-its-kind' study in India called the 'National Venomous Snakes Survey.'

Baishali Adak | Posted by Ganesh Kumar Radha Udayakumar
New Delhi, March 27, 2017 | UPDATED 07:00 IST



The cobra, one of India's venomous snakes

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1
The survey will focus on the 'big four' - spectacled cobra, common krait, russell's viper and saw-scaled viper.
- 2
Herpetologist Romulus Whitaker will lead the team.
- 3

They will come up with a comprehensive 'snakescape' of India.

For long, India has been known as the land of snake charmers. But how many of these slithering serpents roam our tropical country? Nobody really knows.

Now, four organisations - Madras Crocodile Bank (MCB), Global Snakebite Initiative, indiansnakes.org and Pune-based Premium Serums - will find out.

Together, they have launched a 'first-of-its-kind' study in India called the 'National Venomous Snakes Survey.'

While India boasts of 10 per cent of the world's snake population numbering some 200 species, the survey will especially focus on the 'big four'.

These are the poisonous and most dangerous spectacled cobra (*naja naja*), common krait (*bungarus caeruleus*), russell's viper (*daboia russelii*) and saw-scaled viper (*echis carinatus*).

HERPETOLOGIST ROMULUS WHITAKER TO LEAD TEAM

Herpetologist Romulus Whitaker will lead the team. At least 700 people - naturalists, photographers and doctors - have been involved for the project spanning 5-10 years. Armed with a website, a mobile application and their forest-combing skills, they will map the entire country - from the Himalayas to the deserts and rivers - and come up with a comprehensive 'snakescape' of India.

Conservationist Jose Louies told MAIL TODAY, "This was a much-needed research. First, we have no such data available for medical or ecological usage. Second, snakebite deaths are hugely ignored in India. As per 2011 government data, some 45,900 deaths occur every year due to snakebites.

That is 125 deaths per day and five deaths per hour. Most deaths take place in in UP, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha." "Since we don't exactly know what kind of snakes are found where, and have not bothered to develop targeted anti-venom serums (AVS), people die.

Hospitals are ill-equipped and awareness among villagers is low," he said. The pilot project will be launched in Naaglok village in Jashpur district of Chhattisgarh, which has been supported by CM Raman Singh.

The Hindu – Print & Online Newspaper, India
10 August 2017

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/how-to-guard-yourself-against-snakebites/article19461094.ece>



How to guard yourself against snakebites

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

TIRUNELVELI, AUGUST 10, 2017 00:00 IST

Move to sensitise people to co-exist with snakes

The Madras Crocodile Bank Trust and Centre for Herpetology, which is researching venom and anti-venom, has planned to educate people of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh on snakebite prevention and first-aid with the funding of a few non-government organisations.

“We hope to reduce the number of lives lost to snakebite and sensitize people to co-exist with snakes, which is a necessity in India. We’re going to conduct lectures and workshops on snake conservation and snakebite mitigation,” Romulus Whitaker, known as ‘Snake Man of India,’ and founder of MCBT / CFH, told reporters here on Tuesday.

India was witnessing up to 50,000 deaths every year due to snakebite while thousands of victims survive with disability. Most of the victims seek local healer or quack treatment soon after snakebite.

“Instead, rush the victims to nearby hospital immediately to get proper medical assistance,” he said.

Snakes would never attack anyone as it would only defend itself when its existence was challenged or threatened, he said.

Around 150 students and nature lovers listened to him as he shared his experience with snakes, especially king cobra.

He will hold workshop at Mundanthurai for the personnel of Departments of Forest and Fire and Rescue Services to train them in outreach, public education and safe snake handling practices.

Born in 1943 in New York, Mr. Whitaker learnt about snakes from his ‘guru’ Bill Haast at the Miami Serpentarium.

He established the Madras Snake Park in 1972, Madras Crocodile Bank Trust and Centre for Herpetology in 1976, the Irula Snake Catchers Industrial Cooperative Society in 1980, the Andaman and Nicobar Environment Team in 1989 and the Agumbe Rainforest Research Station in 2005.

Previous winner

Gerardo Ceballo

Mexico

2006

**Ecology and conservation of the prairie dog
grassland ecosystem of the Janos region, Chihuahua,
Northern Mexico**

**Winner of the Whitley Award sponsored by the William Brake
Charitable Trust**

Gerardo featured in nine articles relating to a study he co-authored about the sixth mass extinction, including the following piece from Mongabay. Gerardo's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

Mongabay – Online Global Environmental News

4 August 2017

(Over 20 million visitors per year)

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/08/sixth-mass-extinction-tsunami-coming-but-preventable/>



Sixth mass extinction ‘tsunami’ coming, but preventable

by John C. Cannon on 4 August 2017

- *Biologist Thomas Lovejoy writes in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that we can stop the current spate of biodiversity and species loss that the Earth is experiencing.*
- *Pointing to a recent study showing that many animals are declining in numbers in addition to those facing the imminent risk of extinction, Lovejoy argues that we need to address all of the impacts that humans have on ecosystems.*
- *He calls for the restoration of degraded forests and wetlands — activities in which everyone can participate — to facilitate the movement of wildlife between habitats and bring back the services that ecosystems provide.*

Planet Earth is barreling through its sixth mass extinction right now, and there’s little doubt among scientists that we humans are responsible. Despite the challenges we face, the encouraging twist this time is that we can do something about it, says biologist Thomas Lovejoy.

“In contrast to any of the other mass extinctions, this is one where one species is responsible and is completely capable of being aware of it and actually stopping it,” he said in an interview. A professor at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, and the “godfather of biological diversity,” Lovejoy recently crafted an essay for the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)* in which he highlighted the importance of taking into account all of the changes we’ve foisted on the planet to address this unprecedented loss of species.



A tree frog (*Hyla* sp.) in the Peruvian Amazon. Photo by Rhett A. Butler / Mongabay
“We’re hardwired by evolution to react to immediate things,” Lovejoy said, “but we also have a fair amount of mental capability that allows us to actually look ahead and project what’s going on.”

What is going on, according to recent research that also appeared in *PNAS* by another team of scientists, is that the numbers of one-third of the 27,600 vertebrate species that the team looked at are falling, including many that we don’t consider close to being wiped out. To be sure, Earth is midstream in an extinction blitz, in which we’ve been losing about two species a year for the past century — up to 100 times faster than “normal” extinction rates. But the authors of the study, published on July 10, write that outright loss of these animals has been masking the downward slide of a great many more.

“What they highlighted so well is that extinction is not just an event,” Lovejoy said. “It’s a process.”

So while it is critical to tackle immediate threats such as poaching and habitat loss by protecting the areas where threatened animals live, we also must find ways to confront the furtive knock-on effects “that could otherwise undercut locally focused efforts,” Lovejoy writes.



Numbers of the African savanna elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) have declined by 30 percent in the past seven years. Photo by John C. Cannon

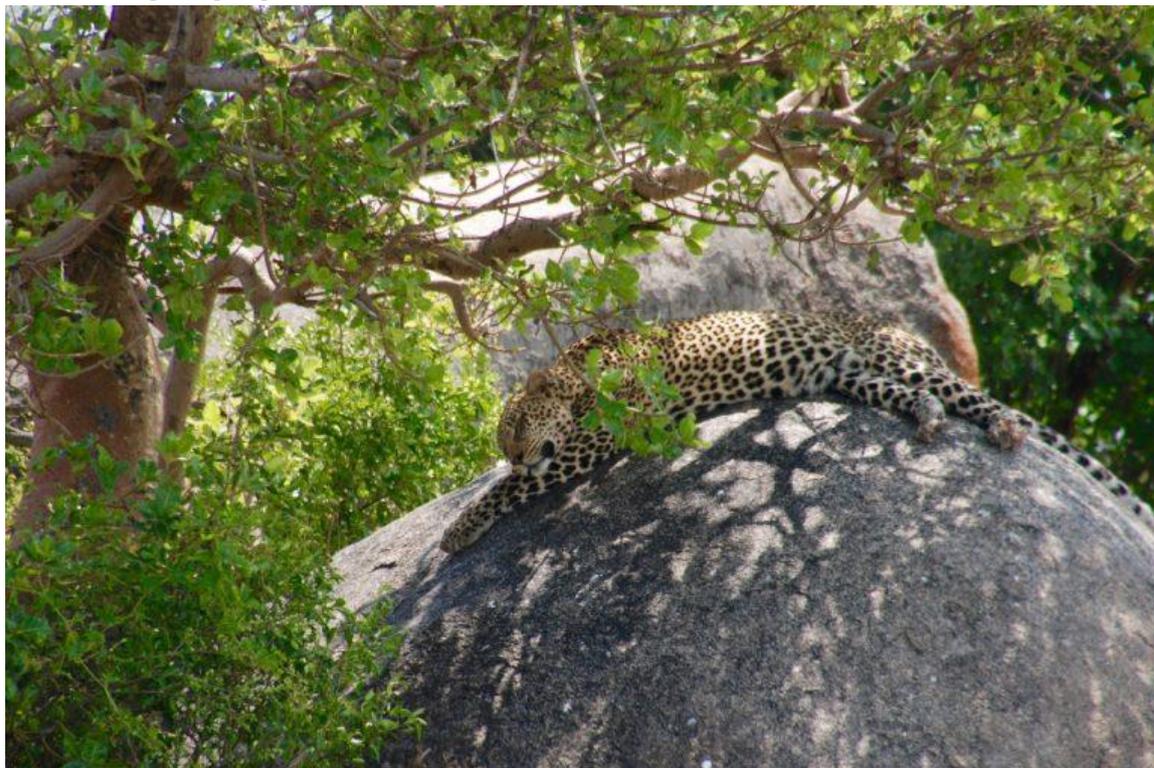
As an example, he points to the dynamics of water in the Amazon rainforest, which Lovejoy knows well after more than five decades of fieldwork there. More than 50 percent of the world's largest rainforest is currently protected in some way, but he writes that even that "impressive" figure may not be enough to stem the loss of species.

As humans cut down other parts of forest, often for the farms and ranches that supply our food, it could disrupt the cycle in which rain falls in the forest and then flows back into the atmosphere through evaporation and the transpiration of resident plants. The protected habitat that's home to many of the Amazon's animals might still stand. But at some point — Lovejoy figures when we've lost more than 20 percent of the rainforest to deforestation — that cycle could rupture, leading to a cascade of degradation, even to areas of safeguarded forest that are part of the larger system. "If we're going to take the extinction threat seriously, we have to look at all these vectors and recognize that, in the end, it's not just about going off and saving something before the last one is snuffed out," Lovejoy said. "It's about addressing these drivers."

The authors of the *PNAS* study referred to the global loss of biodiversity as an "annihilation." That's not a term lead author Gerardo Ceballos and his colleagues toss around lightly.

"As scientists, we have to be very careful not to be alarmist, saying things that are not supported by science," said Ceballos, a biologist at the National Autonomous

University of Mexico. But they decided that the results of their analysis warranted such strong language.



The leopard (*Panthera pardus*), pictured here in Tanzania, is a highly adaptable animal. Nevertheless, it's less prevalent than it used to be and is listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN. Photo by John C. Cannon

"It would be unethical not to say how bad things are according to our data," he added. They also did a deep dive into previous research on 177 better-known vertebrates. The habitats of every single one had been cut by a minimum of 30 percent since the beginning of the 20th century. Forty percent of the animals experienced 80 percent or more habitat loss in that same time period.

"I wish I was wrong" about their results, Ceballos said.

In Lovejoy's essay for *PNAS*, he said that the scale of such global problems demands equally ambitious solutions, such as the Half Earth Project "in which human ambition is embedded in nature."

Although such efforts might appear "impossibly dreamy," Lovejoy said there are manageable ways to start.

Climate change is another process that could undermine functioning ecosystems. However, if we began by restoring forests, wetlands, and other habitats that we've had a hand in degrading, Lovejoy thinks that we could sidestep as much as a 0.5-degree-Celsius (0.9-degree-Fahrenheit) increase in the global temperature because of the additional carbon these areas could then pull out of the atmosphere. The 2015 Paris agreement on climate change aims to keep the increase below 2 degrees C above what the average temperature was before the Industrial Revolution.

“If we [restore these spots], we get a whole bunch of additional benefits,” Lovejoy said. “The ecosystems will be functioning properly again and providing all kinds of different services to us.”



The range of the African lion (*Panthera leo*) is less than one-third the size that it once was. Photo by John C. Cannon

Not only will this restoration reinstall critical connections between wildlife habitats, but people stand to see benefits such as better water quality and cleaner air.

“It also, interestingly enough, empowers the individual because everybody can plant a tree or help with a wetland restoration,” Lovejoy said. “Just like a victory garden in a war effort, everybody can make a tangible contribution and it no longer seems like this impossible, unsolvable problem.

“I’m hoping that as this current young generation comes along that they’ll realize that there’s a glorious contribution to be made to the future of their descendants but also to humanity and life on Earth.”

Previous winner

Erika Cuellar

Bolivia

2007

**Parabiologists and Conservation in the Bolivian
Chaco: towards true integration of indigenous
Communities, Bolivia and Paraguay**

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by Sting and Trudie Styler

Erika was featured in the following article in the National Geographic. Erika's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/09/rolex-explorer-moments-philanthropy-mission-purpose/>

The Power of One Person to Change the World

Exploration, Science, Conservation and Education Shaped by Innovative Pioneers

By **Gary Strauss**

The quest for knowledge about our past, present, and future has never been more important, particularly in a world increasingly changed by geopolitics, climate change, and a burgeoning population crimping natural resources and wildlife habitats. Lending support to the pioneers who conduct field-based research in science, exploration, conservation, and education has been part of National Geographic's core legacy since it was founded 128 years ago. Many of these people, such as educator Kakenya Ntaiya and biologist Nalini Nadkarni, are challenging cultural norms, becoming change agents to improve thousands of lives. Ntaiya is doing so through an all-girls Kenyan boarding school and Nadkarni by bringing science and nature programs to a variety of nontraditional audiences, such as church groups and prisons.

"Whether you're a CEO or an inmate stuck in solitary confinement, what we have in common is humanity and a connection to nature," Nadkarni says.

Examining human culture, nature's diversity, or new realms of life on Earth or deep in the universe, exploration and the impulse to push beyond what's known remains strong.

For decades, the Rolex Awards for Enterprise has been on a similarly inspirational path. Since 1976, the RAE have supported and empowered exceptional men and women who have the vision and determination to conduct landmark research and carry out innovative projects that protect endangered species, advance human knowledge, or improve the lives of the oppressed and disenfranchised.

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Rolex Awards for Enterprise, Rolex has partnered with National Geographic to share stories of those who possess the courage and conviction to take on major challenges to improve lives, seek answers about our past, and lead conservation and preservation efforts to preserve the world for future generations.

They include Rwanda veterinarian Olivier Nsengimana, battling to save the critically endangered gray-crowned crane; adventurer Lonnie Dupre, the intrepid winter explorer raising awareness of global warming; and bio-acoustician Michel

André, developing underwater warning systems to protect ships from colliding with whales and lessen ocean noise pollution affecting a far broader spectrum of marine life.

“We still understand little about how man-made sound can interfere with life in the oceans,” Andre says. “There is growing public and scientific concern, and data suggests that concern is justified.”

Below are short biographies of some of the National Geographic Explorers and Rolex Laureates making a difference in the world. In the weeks ahead, National Geographic will feature stories, photo galleries, and videos featuring them and other inspirational explorers.

Erika Cuellar



PHOTOGRAPH BY THIERRY GROBET

A NEW RODENT, WITH AN INSPIRED NAME

Conservation biologist Erika Cuéllar displayed such tenacity in conservation in the Gran Chaco, a biodiverse region in South America, that her colleagues named a newly discovered type of rodent after her: Erika’s tuco-tuco, aka *Ctenomys erikacuellarae*. The gopher-like tuco-tuco is native to Bolivia. That’s where Cuéllar, a 2012 Rolex laureate and 2013 National Geographic emerging explorer, works to empower communities by helping locals acquire conservation skills and expertise.

Previous winner

Karen Aghabyan

Armenia

2007

Armenia's White Stork: Using Nest Neighbours for Species and Habitat Conservation

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Friends of WFN

Karen was featured in the following article on Smithsonian.com, the online magazine of the Smithsonian Institution. Karen's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/armenian-white-storks-nest-neighbors-180964164/>

Smithsonian.com

Each Summer, These Armenian Villages Are Taken Over by Hundreds of White Storks

Villagers participate in a “Nest Neighbors” program to monitor the health of their new house guests

By Jennifer Billock

SMITHSONIAN.COM

JULY 31, 2017 4:12PM

From late March to August every year, around 650 pairs of breeding white storks descend onto wetland-adjacent villages in Armenia, settling into numbered nests where they will hatch nestlings and teach the babies to feed. The storks—common in worldwide folklore for bringing babies to families—use Armenia as a stopover point to breed on their long journey south from western Europe to their winter grounds in Africa. At the same time, more than 1,000 families in those Armenian villages will take pen to paper and monitor the storks’ progress as part of a program called Nest Neighbors.

Dr. Karen Aghababyan started the program in Armenia in 2006 as a nationwide survey of white storks, with the goal of tracking the health of the nearby wetland ecosystems. He and his team mapped every stork nest in the country, then—since white storks prefer nesting sights that are often near people, like on top of homes or electrical poles—they provided locals with questionnaires in the form of a calendar. The villagers write down important facts on the calendars and report information back to Aghababyan: the nest number they’re monitoring, what date the storks arrive, how many nestlings appear and if any incidents with the nest occur, such as it falling down.

"White storks need open or semi-open grasslands as a feeding habitat," white stork conservationist Kai-Michael Thomsen told National Geographic in 2004. "In middle Europe, you find only man-made grassland habitats. So the white stork in middle Europe uses the man-made landscape."

In 2007, the Nest Neighbors program received a Whitley Award, the top conservation award in the U.K., and continued to receive research funds from Whitley in 2010 and

2014. As the program has aged, community interest has skyrocketed. When Nest Neighbors first started, Aghababayan told Smithsonian.com, villagers agreed to do the work but weren't too enthusiastic about it. Now, he gets more than 100 calls every summer from locals with observations about the nests. Through the program, and through clubs he's started at local schools, Aghababayan is helping to increase community awareness of stork and wetlands conservation.

"Storks are playing a very important cultural role as a model for environmental education," he told Smithsonian.com. "We started developing eco-clubs in these villages in the schools and children are participating with great interest. The storks are top predators in wetland ecosystems, and they play a key role in regulating the number of other species. They provide a great help to agriculture, feeding on locusts and grasshoppers during the summer season. This work helped us to designate several protected wetland sites."

The Nest Neighbors program also led to changes in agricultural practices in local villages. Aghababayan discovered that in some spots, the white storks were reproducing less than expected, having one or no nestlings as opposed to the standard two or three. After a deeper study into the areas, he discovered the problem traced back to the pesticide DDT. "DDT accumulates from one trophic level to another," Aghababayan explained. "Its concentration becomes higher in the top predators [like white storks]."

The pesticide had been banned in Armenia, but villagers who had stockpiles in storage were still using it on their crops—and areas where it was no longer used still had a buildup of the chemical in the soil. Irrigation was kicking it up to the surface soil layers and reintroducing DDT into the local food chain. Armed with that knowledge, Aghababayan's team tried to solve the problem with three tactics. First, they helped villagers to remediate the soil using different plants that collect DDT in their root system. The plants fill up and are then removed, taking the DDT with them. Second, they provided alternative methods of pest control, including installing birdhouses for insect-eating birds (not impacted by DDT) and introducing specific types of organic bacteria to target certain bugs. The third tactic was to develop a White Stork-Friendly product label to help locals market their products in a more eco-conscious way.

Thanks to those efforts, some of the stork pairs are now having between three and four nestlings, and the overall number of breeding pairs has increased from about 580 at the beginning of the Nest Neighbors program to the current 652.

The storks are also starting to attract a small number of tourists who stop to seeing the hundreds of nest-topped houses and swooping birds on their way to visit regional monasteries. Those who want to be honorary Nest Neighbors can tour the small villages near the Ararat Valley wetlands, including Surenavan and Hovtashat.

Previous winner

Deepak Apte
India
2008

**Establishing India's first network of marine
protected areas to protect local livelihoods and the
giant clam**

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by The Shears Foundation

Deepak featured in an article in The Indian Express. Deepak's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/bombay-natural-history-society-bnhs-becomes-state-nodal-agency-for-bird-ringing-4588581/>



Bombay Natural History Society becomes state nodal agency for ‘bird ringing’

BNHS has been ringing birds since 1926 in various parts of the country.

Bird ringing forms a crucial aspect of studying birds by helping scientists understand details, such as the routes birds use, their migration patterns and resting sites. In a landmark decision to further bird ringing studies, the Maharashtra Forest Department has designated the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) as the state nodal agency for establishing a coordinated approach in bird ringing and record-keeping.

BNHS has been ringing birds since 1926 in various parts of the country. With this move, BNHS has become the lead agency to coordinate bird ringing and migration studies. It will provide assistance to NGOs and educational institutions to undertake such studies, and will also draft the protocol for bird ringing. All the proposed bird ringing projects shall be scrutinised by BNHS for further clearance by the authorities concerned.

Dr Deepak Apte, director, BNHS said, “Such decisions will go a long way in assisting the forest department in developing strategies for recording and managing migratory species. This kind of coordinated work will allow BNHS to compile data in a systematic manner and eventually share it with forest department in administratively useable format. Also, BNHS aims to develop national flyway maps. We believe we are the best suited to do this as we have data about bird migration collected over the past 70 years.”

BNHS has ringed over a million birds at different places in the Indian subcontinent, with the initiation of bird ringing study in India in 1959 funded by the World Health Organisation.

Further on, BNHS carried out numerous long-term projects, such as the Avifauna Project and Bird Migration Project focusing on the movement of population structure of the Indian avifauna, and migration pattern of Indian birds and making its data bank respectively.

All of these studies were undertaken with the continuous support and cooperation from the state forest department. “We hope the Government of India will also accept our request to make BNHS the nodal agency for bird migration studies at national level,” added Apte.

Previous winner

Pruthu Fernando

Sri Lanka

2009

**Asian elephants and people: Taking conservation
beyond protected area boundaries**

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by The Shears Foundation

Earlier this year, Pruthu featured in the BBC Radio 4 programme, Crossing Continents. Pruthu's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

Crossing Continents – BBC Radio Programme, UK
15 May 2017

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08pfqls>

BBC RADIO 4 Crossing Continents On Now: You and Yours
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Elephants, Politics and Sri Lanka

Every year elephants kill dozens of people in Sri Lanka. Hundreds of these huge mammals are slaughtered too - often by farmers attempting to protect their land. For Crossing Continents, Linda Pressly travels to the east of the island - one of the regions devastated by over two decades of civil war. Thousands of people fled their homes during the fighting, and in their absence, the elephants moved in. With peace came resettlement, but many villages are now forced to negotiate a precarious existence with the wild herds, and death-by-elephant is not uncommon. Meanwhile, the government is attempting to take action against the illegal ownership of elephants, and prosecutions are in train. In Sri Lanka, elephants are a status symbol for the rich and powerful, and they are also highly revered in Buddhist culture - no pageant is complete without a slow-moving procession of elephants. But there are claims the confiscation of illegally-kept animals has created a shortage for religious rituals, and criticisms that the government is over-responding to the animal rights lobby. In a fractured nation, elephants are becoming increasingly politicised. Linda Pressly reporting.

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Mongabay – Online Global Environmental News
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<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/01/ngo-takes-action-to-save-great-apes-in-camerouns-lebialem-highlands/>



NGO takes action to save great apes in Cameroon's Lebialem Highlands

by Aminatch Nkemngu on 31 January 2017



A view of Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary in the Lebialem Highlands. Photo by Aminatch Nkemngu

The Lebialem Highlands, located in Cameroon's southwest, is a global biodiversity hotspot, a place long protected from development by its ruggedness and small human populations, though that is no longer true. The Highlands stretch from the western flank of Mount Bamboutous across the Bamilike Plateau, and rise from near sea level in the

Bechati area to 2,500 meters (more than 8,000 feet) in the Magha area in Bamumbu village.

The Highlands' dense, lush rainforests have been blessed by four flagship species, three of them primates: the Critically Endangered Cross River gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla deilhi*) of which less than 300 remain in the wild; the Endangered Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee (*Pan Troglodytes ellioti*), the most threatened of chimp subspecies likely numbering fewer than 6,000 individuals; the drill (*Mandrillus leucophaeus*); as well as the Vulnerable African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*).

Cameroon's government acknowledges these biological riches, along with the extreme danger they are in, and has sought to protect great apes and other species by conserving forestlands. "These wildlife species are under threat due to poaching, habitat loss and fragmentation through human settlement and conversion to farmland for subsistence," explained Nono Joseph, the regional chief of wildlife protection for Cameroon's Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF). However, Joseph admits that the government often lacks the resources needed to fully protect Lebialem Highlands biodiversity. Which is where and how the Environment and Rural Development Foundation (ERuDeF), a national NGO, fits into the picture.

"Currently, ERuDeF and its partners are assisting the government of Cameroon to create a system of protected areas in the Lebialem Highlands Complex," said ERuDeF President Louis Nkembi. "The three on-going projects are the Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, the Mount Bamboutos Integral Ecological Reserve, and the Tofala-Mone Forest Corridor."



Chimpanzee with baby captured on camera trap in Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. Photo courtesy of ERUDEF

Great apes under pressure

Nono Joseph outlines the suite of problems facing one of these protected areas, the Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary: “The existence of government measures on great ape conservation has not guaranteed effective management of this sanctuary,” he conceded. Its “wildlife species may even become extinct with increased human activities [by the more than] 30 indigenous communities adjacent to the Sanctuary.”

The villagers (farmers, poachers and hunters) are still engaged in logging, mining, agriculture, and the construction of infrastructure, in and around protected areas. The surrounding communities still depend on bushmeat hunting for food and for selling in local and urban markets. In addition, the majority of farmers on the periphery or inside the forest practice slash-and-burn agriculture and the unsustainable exploitation of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs). Overgrazing too has exacerbated habitat loss. As a result, says the ERuDeF website “there is a conflict of interest between the conservation of great apes and the livelihood needs of forest-dependent communities. Things are even more compounded because of greed and outright neglect of the local communities and the failure to [engage] them in a dialogue. Thus, to ensure effective management and conservation of the Tofala Hills Wildlife Sanctuary, the engagement of local communities is paramount”.



Beehives donated to a local Lebialem Highlands community by ERUDEF. Such projects support economic sustainability while helping reduce pressure on wildlife. Photo courtesy of ERUDEF

The Tofala Wildlife Sanctuary is born

Nkembi recalls his NGO's entry into the Highlands region: "In order to accompany [the] government's efforts to alleviate poverty and sustainably manage the environment for the long term development of the Cameroon economy, ERuDeF and its partners launched in 2003, the Lebialem Highlands/Mt Bamboutous Program for the Management of Natural Resources."

The Lebialem Highlands Conservation Program that constituted the first phase of this effort ended in 2010 with the government designation of several important Highlands' protected areas. In September 2014, a decree signed by Cameroon Prime Minister Philemon Yang, carved out The Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, covering 8,087 hectares (31 square miles) in the Wabane and Alou districts, administered from Bechati village. Tofala Hill is the third protected area designed specifically to conserve the Cross River gorillas in the region, coming after the Kagwene Gorilla Sanctuary and Takamanda National Park.

ERuDEF is "focused on saving the last species of gorillas and chimpanzees across the Lebialem Highlands, in [the] Upper Banyang and Nkingkwa Hills.... Our work on great apes led to the creation of the Lebialem Highlands Conservation Complex and the Lebialem-Mone Forest Landscape. ERuDeF is also assisting the government in

protecting apes in the Mak/Betchou Forest, Nkingkwa Hills and Tofala-Mone Forest Corridor. The core forest blocks includes the Tofala Hills Wildlife Sanctuary, Mak-Betchou Forest, Nkingkwa Hills and Tofala-Mone Forest Corridor,” reads an NGO document.



Inside Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. Photo by Aminatch Nkemngu

Declaring these new preserves is one thing; effectively managing them, and winning over local villages to the conservation process, is another, Nkembi agreed: “This is why since 2001, ERuDEF has held key local consultative meetings [with the region’s communities] to regularly seek continuous support in the development and implementation of its program across the Lebialem Highlands”.

Report from Tofala Hills



Tankoh Solomon Tayem, an ERuDeF field assistant who has been carrying out bio-monitoring of wildlife in the Tofala Hills Forests for five years estimates that between 20 and 25 gorillas remain in the area. “I have been monitoring them, their tracks, what they eat, where they sleep, and what they do,” he explained enthusiastically.

A Cross River gorilla killed in Pinyin, a community adjacent to the Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary in 2013. Photo courtesy of ERUDEF

“We still have about 300 Chimpanzees there,” he added, but other key species have dwindled or vanished from the preserve. “As for the elephants, increased human activity has forced them to move further south into the Manyu forests,” said Tayem. “They are no longer here. Drills are finished in Tofala. I had one drill up there, but it has disappeared. The problem is that drills are not afraid of humans. When they see humans they continue playing. So they are easy targets for hunters.”

ERuDeF’s Director of Conservation, Allen Tabi reported that poaching remains a serious problem inside the preserve: “Videos downloaded recently from camera traps planted in the Sanctuary... portray a number of wildlife species with injuries inflicted by wire [snare] traps planted in the park by adjacent communities.... The non-selectivity and frequent incidents of severe wounding of animals [by these traps] has made most wildlife species in the area even more threatened.”

Tabi understands the reason for the poaching: “So long as local people are hungry and poor, snaring will continue to prevail and inflict severe injuries to, and cause the death of, curious young chimps, monkeys, civets and other wildlife species indiscriminately.”

Village grievances

Even as ERuDeF seeks to open communication channels with local villages, there remains a deep disconnect and resentment within the communities surrounding Tafola: “We have heard that a Wildlife Sanctuary has been created around here, but that is on the map,” a local chief stated dismissively. “We do not understand what [the government] is doing. There is no dialogue. We have our ancestral shrines inside the sanctuary. We still go there for our traditional rites. People still farm and hunt there. They came and formed forest management committees here. Since then, ERuDeF and the Conservator of the Sanctuary have not come around. We do not know where the committees work and where they hold meetings. We, the traditional rulers, will not accept decisions taken without our consent”.



An ERUDEF Signpost at the entrance to Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. It warns of the penalties for harming great apes. Photo by Aminateh Nkemngu

The chief is perplexed by conservationists and their goals: “We do not have any problems with gorillas and chimpanzees. We are struggling to survive, and they too are struggling to survive. We meet in the forest. When gorillas, chimpanzees and humans meet, they all move in different directions without any disturbance. So we don’t know what this Sanctuary issue is all about”.

The chief of Bangang, another village, is also perplexed. He sees no need to protect great apes that are already safe from harm: “Bangang does not have any land to sacrifice for any Sanctuary. The land they want to take from us was offered to the community by Sabis, a neighboring village, in Upper Banyang District since 1978. [The conservationists] are talking about protecting gorillas. But our forefathers started protecting them before now. We have been protecting gorillas because we know that they are totems of human beings. Each time a gorilla is killed, somebody drops dead in the village. So we know all the gorillas in the bush are totems. We don’t hunt or kill them. We have been protecting them because they are part of us.” He concludes defiantly that, “If they want to force the Sanctuary on us, we will instead make the gorillas to disappear”.

Chief Ekwe Robert of Besali village noted that ERuDeF “promised to create palm oil cooperatives for men to market their palm oil, while micro credits would be provided to women to start retail businesses, [such as] poultry farms and vegetable gardens. But till now, the things they promised have not come. So we are continuing with our activities in the forest as usual.”



An ERUDEf team monitors great apes. Photo by Aminatch Nkemngu

ERuDeF responds

Despite the resistance found in surrounding villages, ERuDeF continues working to engage and involve local communities encircling the Tofala Hills Wildlife Sanctuary to assure the conservation of the Cross River gorillas and Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzees. "Increases in community engagement through sensitization and alternative livelihood support will lead to reduced logging, poaching, hunting and farming in and around the Sanctuary," argued Nkembi. "Consequently, the survival of the rich biodiversity will be guaranteed."

In a bid to increase community conservation awareness and improve communication, ERuDeF created a newspaper in 2013, the Green Vision. The NGO is also employing villagers in its bio-monitoring programs. In September, it trained two eco-guards, Elebe Bessala Aldalbert Christian and Goue Mengamenya Placide, for patrols within the Tofala Wildlife Sanctuary.

The bio-monitoring program has opened the eyes of these two men to the importance of the Sanctuary. "Before, our surveillance activities were limited to communities around the sanctuary, mostly by monitoring bushmeat sales in markets; no monitoring was carried out within the Sanctuary itself. This [bio-monitoring] activity has enabled my colleague and I to have a better idea about [goings on within] the Sanctuary," said Elebe.



cassava grinding machines donated to the Bechati community by ERUDEF. Photo courtesy of ERUDEF

ERuDeF is also working to reduce poverty by encouraging new livelihoods. “The oil palm mill support project has greatly reduced human impact on key biodiversity hotspots in the area,” said the NGO’s Director of Livelihood and Economic Development. “The introduction of Non-Timber Forest Products and the [enhancement of the] palm oil supply chain, will further reduce [poverty and reliance on poaching}. ERuDeF’s “Passing on the Gift” initiative has also promoted pig farming and bee keeping in communities near the preserve.

The NGO is also working to expand great ape protections. Nkempi noted recent support by the Waterloo Foundation and Global Forest Watch (GFW), which allowed ERuDeF to create four community forest blocks since January 2016.

These community forest blocks “will serve as a genetic wildlife corridor, linking the chimpanzees and gorillas of the Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary and those of the Takamanda reserves through the former Mone Reserve,” said Nkempi. “The long term goal is to conserve the rich biodiversity/threatened species of the area... [through the] sustainable management of the community forest by the local communities”. But, he warned, success will only come if the local communities enhance their skills and build capacity to effectively manage the community forests.

Region-wide partnerships

ERuDeF doesn't stand alone in its crusade to save great apes. It is joined by five other NGOs who have agreed to join forces in fighting against great ape extinction across Central Africa. Meeting in Nkala, Democratic Republic of Congo in April 2016, these NGOs came up with new strategies against forest degradation, habitat fragmentation, poaching and the illegal wildlife trade.



Pig farming promoted by ERUDEEF. Photo courtesy of ERUDEEF

These NGOs include ERuDeF and Tropical Forest and Rural Development (TF-RD), both from Cameroon; the MBOU MON TOUR and the Groupe d'Appui a la Conservation des Ecosystemes de Basankusu et Bolomba (GACEBB), from D.R Congo; the Association Protectrice des Grands Singes De la Moukalaba from Gabon; and Endangered Species International from the Republic of Congo.

More good news for Cameroon and the Lebialem Highlands: Rainforest Trust-USA, a world leader in tropical ecosystems and wildlife protection, has approved a 3-year, US \$700,000 funding plan for the Tofala Hills Wildlife Sanctuary and for the creation of the 14,080 hectare (54 square mile) Mak-Betchou Wildlife Sanctuary, a program that will extend through 2019. That funding will also aid in the development and implementation of a Management Plan for the Tofala sanctuary.

“ERuDeF remains indebted to the Rainforest Trust for this generous donation,” Nkempi said. He added that this funding is a bold step toward providing a safe haven to over 300 chimpanzees, unknown numbers of gorillas, and over 100 elephants, as well as other

threatened wildlife in the proposed Mak-Betchou Wildlife Sanctuary. It will equally support the effective management of the Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary with its roughly 25 Cross River Gorillas and 150 Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzees.



A fresh gorilla nest. Photo courtesy of ERUDEP

Hope for the future

Visitors to Tofala, including British ecologist Mike Gray, are enthusiastic about the preserve and ERuDeF's role in managing it. On a visit there in November he noted that, "ERuDeF is doing a globally acceptable job, despite the challenges and resistance that the organization is facing from adjacent communities that hunt and farm in the Sanctuary." He emphasized the urgent need for other stakeholders, especially Cameroon's government, to step up to the plate and to aid ERuDeF in great ape preservation in the Lebialem Highlands.

"The establishment of the new Cross River gorilla sanctuary is an exciting and important milestone and achievement," agreed Arend de Haas, Director of the African Conservation Foundation (ACF) which has been partnering with ERuDeF in the Tofala-Mone Forest Landscape since 2004. Major successes so far, according to the ACF director, include the discovery of new Cross River gorilla populations in the Tofala-Mone Forest Corridor, the launch of a great ape monitoring program, the creation of community management structures, and the successful educational and livelihood projects in the project area.

Sally Laahm, the African Conservation Officer for Rainforest Trust, recently spent ten days with ERuDeF, exploring the proposed Mak-Betchou Wildlife Sanctuary, Muanengouba Mountain, and Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary.

At trip's end, she praised Tofala for its biological riches: "We weren't there for very long, but we saw many signs of the presence of gorillas and chimpanzees, very close to the camp. [The area] is of very high conservation value, and it is surrounded by villages in which ERuDeF already has a good number of livelihood projects." Still, she noted, these achievements will not be sustainable long term without an influx of international support and money — the future of Cameroon's great apes depend on it.



A Cross River gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli*) named Nyango in captivity at the Limbe Wildlife Center, Cameroon. NGOs like ERUDEP stand between this species and its extinction. Photo by Julielangford licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

Previous winner

Eugene Simonov
China, Mongolia, Russia
2013

**Keeping Rivers Wild and Free: Protection of the
Amur River basin**

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by The Shears Foudation

Eugene was interviewed for the following article on the Rivers Without Boundaries website. Eugene's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://www.transrivers.org/2017/1952/>

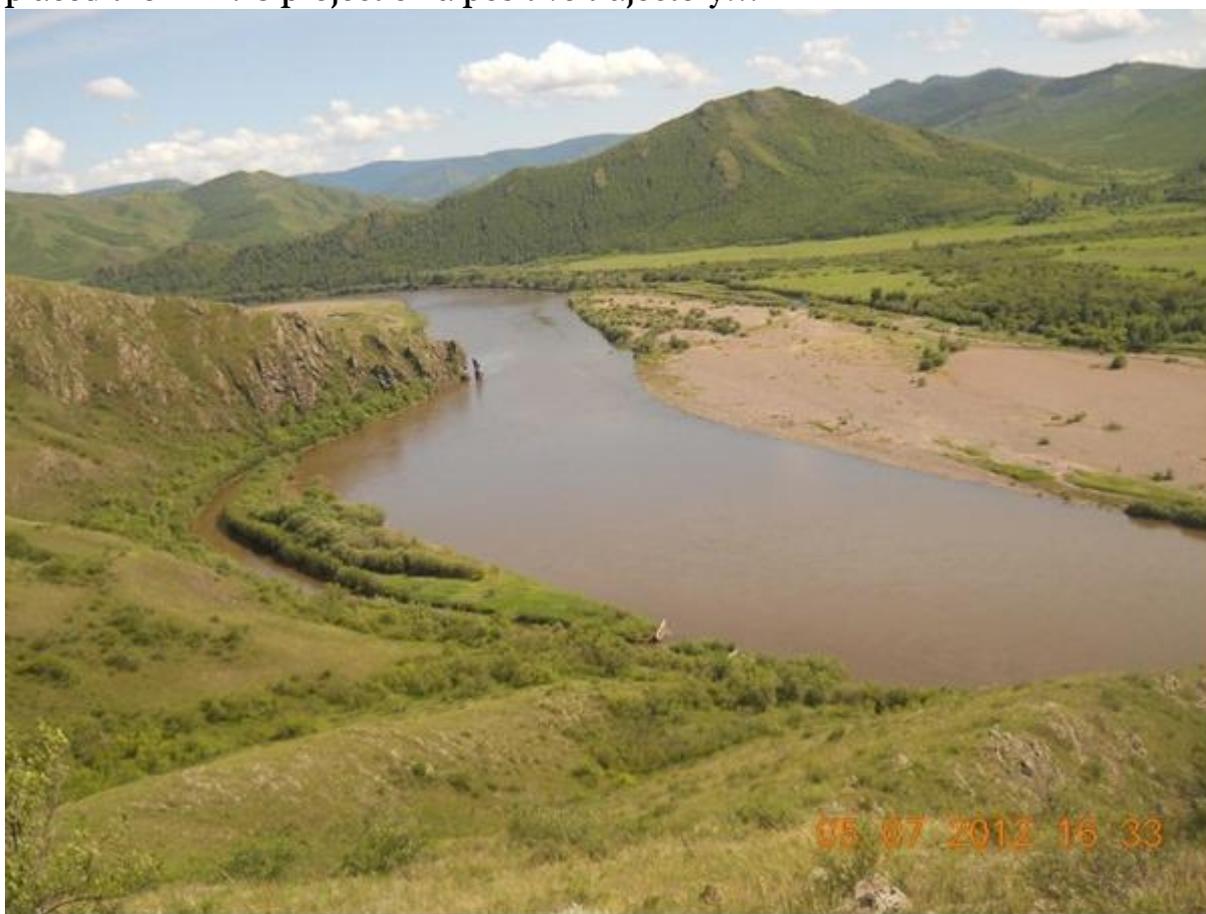
Rivers without Boundaries

Saving Transnational Rivers

Baikal vs. Dams – Game Over?

3 AUGUST 2017

The WB Inspection Panel recognized that 2015 Request for Inspection "had placed the MINIS project on a positive trajectory..."

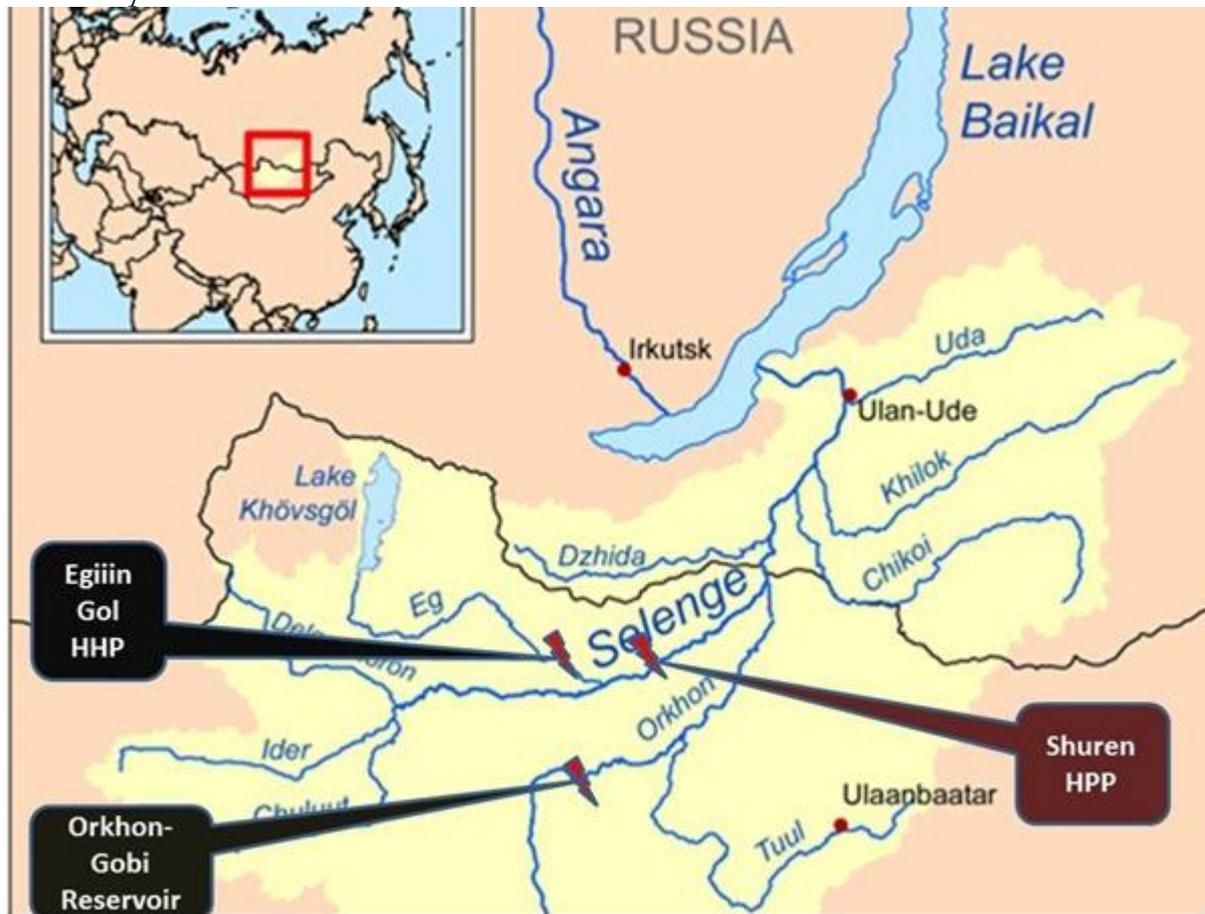


*Finally it is all over! The World Bank Inspection Panel after 2,5 years of close supervision decided not to investigate **compliant submitted by Mongolian and Russian citizens** concerned with intended feasibility study of Shuren Hydropower and the Orkhon Gobi Water Diversion projects in Lake Baikal Basin.*

The Panel justifies its soft decision by obvious improvement in MINIS Project consultation mechanisms and promises to reshuffle completely the intended set of studies, committing to undertake comprehensive regional assessment ahead of any feasibility studies and ELAs on specific projects. The Panel notes that

this recommendation does not in any way preclude the possibility of a future Request for Inspection based on new evidence or circumstances not known at the time of the current recommendation.

Local conservationists may consider accepting this kind invitation in future. The RWB welcomes all generous promises made by the WB but would like to see some solid guarantees for their implementation. So far there is no clear commitment from the MINIS Project even for public consultations for new draft assessment plan.



History:

The MINIS Project was signed in 2011 for 5-year period as incubator for mining-related infrastructure projects, initially having nothing to do with hydropower. In early 2012 a feasibility study for Shuren Hydro on the main stem of Selenge river was suddenly inserted into the project in addition to Orkhon water-supply.. Those dam projects are meant to provide water and electricity to mining. At the same tie in 2013 the Government of Mongolia restarted planning of another large dam in Lake Baikal basin – **Egiin Gol Hydro**. outside of the realm of MINIS Project. The Rivers without Boundaries Coalition started questioning the legitimacy of those dam projects. In 2014 the Coordinator of the RWB Dr. Simonov was illegally deported as "person presenting a threat to national security of Mongolia".

The World Babnk Inspection Panel (WBIP) received a Request for Inspection on February 10, 2015. MINIS (www.minis.mn) is a Technical Assistance operation aimed at facilitating infrastructure investments to support mining operations in Mongolia. Its Component 1 finances assessments, studies for subprojects, two of which are the subject of the Request: Shuren Hydropower Plan and Orkhon Gobi Water Diversion project.

The complainants alleged that these subprojects may have potential irreversible environmental and social impacts on the Orkhon and Selenge River in Mongolia and Russia's Lake Baikal, a World Heritage Site. They also raised concerns about lack of consultation and disclosure of information.

After **2.5 years of project monitoring** the Panel, recommended not to investigate the complaint. In making this recommendation, the Panel emphasized the need to ensure diligent implementation of the full set of environmental assessment tools that have been identified. The World Bank Board of Executive Directors approved the **Panel's recommendation** on July 27, 2017.

The WB Board is yet to approve the MINIS Project extension before previously given extension expires in September 2017.

Interview with a Cautious Optimist

We asked Eugene Simonov, RwB International Coordinator several questions about this new situation.



What are likely major consequences of new developments for Selenge River and Lake Baikal ?

SIMONOV: In any case through WBIP and other channels the RwB and allies succeeded in de-risking the MINIS Project. In May they were holding public consultations on draft plans for combined REA and ESIA studies that directly lead to development of hydropower project documentation sufficient for investment. Whatever happens now under the name of united stand-alone REA (regional environmental assessment) in any circumstances it cannot result immediately in a fundable project. Judging from new documents the MINIS Project till 2020 will not be able even to start feasibility studies. But this less-threatening REA may open channels for objective study and fair consultations. This is good for Baikal and I do not see how they can reverse those commitments without complete loss of face.

The WB Management appears to make some strong commitments to an REA, cumulative impact assessment, and analysis of alternatives. Are there any traps and aspects to watch for?

SIMONOV: First trap as noted by Inspection Panel is poor illogical and sometimes biased design of the assessment process\documents, many things could still be planned in a wrong way.

Content wise it is important that the Analysis of alternatives is not narrowed to several predetermined choices but is strategic and participatory.

The REA process should identify necessary limits of allowable flow alteration and other (transboundary) environmental impacts on aquatic ecosystems (right now this assessment is mistakenly placed in later ESIA phase).

The REA should include wide analysis of policies governing conservation, water and energy and bilateral cooperation in both countries and use of international conventions in order to help better tools for joint river basin management and cooperation in energy sector.

The MINIS Project so far had demonstrated major failures in supervising other cumulative impact assessments (CIA), but such CIAs are major part of this REA as well. we hope that after many months of rewriting the draft CIA reports for the Baganuur and Tavan Tolgoi coal complexes should go again to public consultations and, in our view, process must be completed BEFORE the ToR for REA of Orkhon and Shuren (that includes CIA) is finalized. The MINIS project should fully resolve old mistakes with CIA before planning new CIAs.

As noted by the Panel (and earlier by the Rwb) there is pressing need to ensure that duration, consultant diversity and financing should correspond to complexity and scale of the tasks of such REA study and Baseline Assessment.

In absence of draft ToR for REA it is counterproductive right now to discuss its details, however it is essential that all promises given about it **in response matrices** are fulfilled. Thus new consultations are essential to make that happen. As explained in the Panel document – this will be completely new plan (yet to be written) for unified regional assessment that should become subject of its own public consultations and UNESCO\IUCN review before any tender.

– **The Panel notes that steps are needed to address impacts on indigenous peoples in Russia. What are the recommendations that you have on that?**

SIMONOV: We recommend to start identification and special consultation with indigenous communities early on in REA phase. Finally the WB Management has already recognized their existence in Russia, but is yet to do so in Mongolia where local nomadic herders are definitely as indigenous as similar communities in Russia.

The Panel points to the "outside labor force influx in nomadic areas" as one example of one of dozens of generic social aspects to be explored during REA. None of them has been really properly addressed since the project inception in 2011, especially in consultations process with potentially affected people. This is another reason why new consultations for the REA ToR are essential. Long-term plan for all consultations (throughout REA process) should be also developed and disclosed as soon as possible.

– **What is your assessment of the Mongolia consultations in June-July 2017?**

Consultations at 19(!) locations in Mongolia were held at inappropriate time of presidential elections and attracted much less people (1000) that those in Russia held at 12 locations (1700 people) – although Russia is far away from construction sites. Since, in

my view, the new consultations are necessary for new REA ToR, all fallacies should be taken into account during their planning including: inappropriate timing, lack of involvement of affected herders, suppression of local opinions by rude high officials, etc

The Panel also notes that an important next step will be to integrate stakeholder comments into the TOR, how is it going so far?.

SIMONOV: Show me that draft Terms of Reference, please, and I will tell You.....

Response Matrices disclosed so far are very general, promising to consider everything but not in sufficient detail. Disclosure of the response matrix for RwB comments and other more professional commentators has been delayed by MINIS. No process suggested to ensure\verify that in future this extremely complicated united REA TOR incorporates comments of stakeholders, especially given the fact they commented on very different ToR (combined ToRs for REA and ESIA separated for two projects). Again new REA ToR consultations are essential for ensuring that.

But, look, the WB and MINIS practically promised to implement all major recommendations made by RwB and allies, what makes You still feel uneasy?

SIMONOV: Civil society trust in MINIS's integrity is very low. It is based on sad experience. In 2016 before Inspection Report and the Board decision to grant project extension the WB Management promised to do thorough consultations on draft ESIA ToRs before the tender. However, as soon as MINIS received the project extension they announced a tender on REA+ESIA. The promise to disclose and consult on the TOR for this combined REA-ESIA was not fulfilled. When RwB pointed to this violation MINIS allegedly stopped but no one was held responsible nor the Request for Consultants has been officially voided.

In absence of clearly defined supervision\consultation process we cannot rule out something like that may happen again. I will feel uneasy until MINIS officially cancels the old shortlisting\tendering outcome resulting from their actions in September 2016 and announces public consultations for the new "all-in-one" terms of reference for the REA.

Previous winner

John Kahekwa
Democratic Republic of Congo
2013

Inspiring community action for gorilla conservation

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by Goldman Sachs

John featured in the following article in Geographical magazine. John's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://geographical.co.uk/nature/wildlife/item/2241-gorillas-and-guerrillas-conservation-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo>

Geographical

Gorillas and Guerrillas – conservation in the Democratic Republic of Congo



A Grauer's (or Eastern Lowland Silverback) gorilla in the DRC *dptro/Shutterstock*

John Kahekwa is the founder and general manager of the Pole Pole Foundation (POPOF), a Congolese run conservation NGO which works to protect the critically endangered Grauer's gorillas and their habitat in Kahuzi-Biega National Park (KBNP), and to support the sustainable development of surrounding communities 'The problem is that those with guns who destroy the environment get rich, while we who protect the environment remain poor.' These words from John Kahekwa, the winner of the **2016 Tusk Prince William Lifetime Award** for conservation in Africa, sum up the challenges of protecting endangered species in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The **Grauer's gorilla** species was added to the IUCN Red List of Critically Endangered Species in 2016, after a census found their numbers had declined from around 20,000 members before war broke out in the DRC in the 1990s, to under 3,000 today. **The gorillas remain under threat**; their habitat is being destroyed for charcoal, timber and to develop mines for valuable minerals, and many gorillas are falling victim to the bushmeat trade, caught in traps laid by impoverished poachers.



John Kahekwa with a Grauer's gorilla in KBNP

With little funding available for conservation work, a negligible tourist industry due to ongoing security fears, and the challenges of working in a country ranked close to the bottom of the **Human Development Index**, saving the Grauer's gorillas and their habitat in eastern DRC is one of the great conservation challenges of the 21st century. It is a challenge that John Kahekwa and POPOF are meeting head-on.

The Pole Pole Foundation (POPOF) was founded 25 years ago, when John was working as a ranger in **KBNP**. 'I was doing daily patrols and collected thousands of snares, and found five young gorillas that had died in those snares,' he says. 'I found out the snares were being laid by people from the local communities, so I asked them, "why do you lay these snares?" They replied, "empty stomachs have no ears. We need jobs."'

At that time, John had saved \$6,000 from a small business he had started, selling souvenir t-shirts to tourists he took to visit the gorillas. 'My wife wanted us to buy a

house, but I felt guilty. I thought, “if the gorillas could speak a human language, they would say I am a bad man; I make money taking people to see the gorillas but I keep it all to myself.”

So John used the money from t-shirt sales to create POPOF, to work with communities to protect the gorillas. ‘*Pole Pole*’ means slowly in Swahili. The aim of the foundation was to work slowly but surely to help the communities and protect the gorillas.



Learning about the great apes

POPOF worked well for several years, but then war came to the DRC. The aftermath of the **1994 Rwandan genocide** led to an invasion of the Congo, which sparked a conflict that would claim over five million lives in the following decade, and which continues to create insecurity in the country to this day. In spite of the danger to himself and his family, John stayed in the DRC and kept monitoring the gorillas as best he could.

Many of his most-loved gorillas that he had known for more than a decade, were killed during the conflict, but John refused to give up. When a semblance of peace returned, John restarted POPOF’s programmes and has continued to develop and expand those programmes over the last decade.

POPOF has achieved great success in this period. It has planted over four million trees, creating a buffer zone between the park and the community and a sustainable source of charcoal and timber that keeps the forest in KBNP protected. It also runs three schools to teach hundreds of children each year the conventional national syllabus as well extra environmental education, including agroforestry, and runs livelihood projects to provide ex-poachers with alternative sources of income.



POPOF Primary School Future Rangers

When working in as challenging an environment as the DRC, you need people with grit, determination and innovation – something that John has in abundance. John founded POPOF with revenues from his entrepreneurial activity 25 years ago, and has continued to innovate since then, finding new ways to meet the needs of local communities, to mobilise revenue for POPOF’s activities, and to bring tourists back to see the gorillas.

POPOF has recently launched a number of innovative projects to protect the gorillas and support local communities. They have created a Spirulina nutrition project, creating ponds where the highly nutritious algae is grown and harvested and then distributed to malnourished children. The project has been a great success in the early stages, and they are now looking to expand; Spirulina holds the potential to provide a low-cost and versatile solution to end hunger in many of the poorest parts of the world, and it reduces demand for bushmeat, helping to protect the gorillas.

And it is helping inspire a new generation of Congolese conservationists through a social tourism programme, taking people from local communities to visit the gorillas.

John explains, ‘It seems unjust that the only people visiting the gorillas are wealthy people from outside Congo, while those who are the neighbours of the park cannot afford to see the gorillas. Our social tourism is a new approach that will create an awareness in the hearts of the communities and they will know the importance of protecting the fauna and the flora in the park.’

POPOF has also worked with the **Marjan Centre for the Study of Conflict and the Non-Human Sphere**, a research group within King’s College, London, to develop a new type of carbon offset programme. ‘We don’t want to just ask people for donations all the time,’ John explains, ‘we also want to provide a service. If we can raise money from offsetting emissions, that is a service, and it is a story; we think knowing the money is saving the lives of gorillas and the children we work with will inspire more people to offset their emissions.’

The carbon offset scheme aims to put a ‘face on a ton of carbon’; offsetting carbon emissions through projects such as tree planting but also mitigating the impacts of climate change on wildlife and poor communities by funding projects related to conservation, health, education and development. The project has been established at King’s to explore the possibility of an internal carbon offset programme that reduces the university’s impact from international travel.



Kindergarten pupils holding wooden gorilla portraits carved by former poachers

Later this year **Wild Frontiers, the London-based adventure travel operator** which specialises in opening-up previously off-limit locations to tourists, is launching the ultimate primate safari, offering people the opportunity to visit the gorillas with John as their exclusive guide, to provide a unique experience to see the gorillas and the behind-the-scenes work needed to protect them. ‘This new safari is exciting for us and for the park. There have been too few tourists for too long. If these trips can help bring more people to see the gorillas, I think it will help to secure their future, as it has in Virunga [with the mountain gorillas].’



John Kahekwa with two gorillas

In spite of John’s work, many challenges remain. Security has yet to fully return to the DRC, and the country has been called the ‘rape capital of the world’. Many rangers have been killed in the line of duty and the murmurings of disruption emanate from Kinshasa over the recent disputes about when the next election will take place. Conflict minerals – such as the coltan used to make mobile phones, which are mined in parts of KBNP – remain a problem, funding rebel groups and corruption in the DRC and threatening the gorillas and those who seek to protect them.

It is one of the most challenging regions of the world to work in, but POPOF’s work is giving the Grauer’s gorillas a good chance of survival. In a country often referred to as the Heart of Darkness, John Kahekwa and the work of the Pole Pole Foundation is a shining beacon of hope.

Previous winner

Paula Kahumbu

Kenya

2014

Hands off our elephants: Delivering African leadership to address Kenya's poaching crisis

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by by The LJC Fund in Memory of Anthea and Lindsey Turner

Paula has received extensive media coverage this year, both from writing her own articles for publications such as The Guardian, and for the campaign her NGO are engaged in with drinks brand, Amarula. In total, Paula has featured in 51 articles. The following is a section of this coverage. Paula's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Jumbos-increase-in-Kenya-despite-poaching-menace---/1056-3366404-format-xhtml-r4ynjc/index.html>



Increase in elephants owed to strict anti-poaching rules

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 2 2016



Elephants feed at Samburu National Park. The rate of decline accelerated from 2007 to 2014, when 352,271 elephants were counted in the 18 countries surveyed. FILE PHOTO

Kenya is one of only four African countries that have seen an increase in the population of elephants in the past decade.

Save for Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and South Africa, which recorded slight increase, Africa, in general, had a 30 per cent decline in savannah elephants due to poaching.

Wildlife conservationist and WildlifeDirect CEO Paula Kahumbu said the slight increase in Kenya was because the country has invested heavily in anti-poaching measures, which include enforcement, prosecution and punishment.

“The country took a good step in collaborating with non-governmental organisations that aim at conserving wildlife and this has really also created an impact,” Dr Kahumbu said.

The *Great Elephant Census Report* released Wednesday after three years of counting indicated that the population decreased by nearly a third between 2007 and 2014. This translates to the loss of 144,000 elephants.

The worrying report, which shows that Africa now has only 352,271 elephants, says that across East Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania have experienced large declines in populations.

"Though the numbers of elephants are still relatively high in these two countries, poaching has had major impacts on populations," the report shows.

"Elephant populations elsewhere in eastern Africa, including Kenya, Uganda, and Malawi, show more positive trends recently.”

Ms Kahumbu said despite the impressive slight increase, Africa would continue to experience dwindling numbers of elephants if countries like Japan, China and Thailand would continue having a ready market for ivory.

FRESH MEASURES

The report that surveyed 15 out of the 18 countries that still have viable elephant populations, shows that Tanzania, Cameroon and Angola had the largest decreases in elephant populations although Tanzania still has the third largest numbers (on 42,871), with Kenya in fourth place on 26,000.

The current rate of decline is eight per cent per year, primarily due to poaching.

The rate of decline accelerated from 2007 to 2014, when 352,271 elephants were counted in the 18 countries surveyed.

“This was an extraordinary collaboration across borders, cultures and jurisdictions. We completed a successful survey of massive scale, and what we learned is deeply disturbing,” said philanthropist and Vulcan founder Paul Allen.

Ms Heather Sohl, chief adviser on wildlife at the WWF-UK, called for a renewed effort to deal with poaching.

“This census has confirmed what we all feared – that elephant numbers are continuing to decline rapidly in many parts of Africa as a result of poaching and human impact on their habitat and survival of some savannah elephant populations is threatened,” she said.

The Guardian – Online & Print Newspaper, UK
12 September 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/07/saving-africas-elephants-isnt-just-a-white-mans-job>



Saving Africa's elephants isn't just a 'white man's job'

Kenyan conservationist Paula Kahumbu leads a new generation of Africans who are taking control of their environmental future

Wednesday 7 September 2016 15.33 BST Last modified on Monday 12 September 2016 11.29 BST

In the cool and serene area of Karen, near Nairobi, in the offices of the conservation organisation she has built, Paula Kahumbu eats chicken and rice and talks about a revolution.

“Conservation is not a monopoly of one particular race or tribe. Conservation is part of all of us,” says Kahumbu. “Yet for decades, looking after the environment in Africa has been seen as a ‘white man’s job’.”

The 49-year-old Kenyan is leading a new generation of African conservationists. But she owes her own debt to that anachronistic European network. By chance, she grew up next door to one of the best-known conservationists of all time, Richard Leakey. With time, Leakey’s interest in the wild rubbed off on a young Kahumbu.

“Richard Leakey has been my mentor since I left high school. I have known him since I was a child as he was a neighbour who encouraged me to explore and learn all I could about wildlife,” Kahumbu says.

After doing courses in Bristol and Florida, Kahumbu became a ranger employed by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). But while in government and with all the state privileges that came with her position, the irony was she could not fully speak up.

“After a while I realised that there are things I could say and many more that I couldn’t say while employed by the Kenya Wildlife Service. There was a limit to what I could do. Government has too much protocol ... too many checks on your way to doing the right thing.”

Within a couple of years, Kahumbu had set up her own organisation with Leakey, Wildlife Direct, and was campaigning in her own right.

Children read educational comics as part of Kahumbu's Hands Off Our Elephants campaign. Photograph: Whitley Fund for Nature

In the years since that decision, Kahumbu, who has regularly contributed to the Guardian, has become one of the most successful and high profile conservationists in Africa. Her organisation has employed more than 70 people and counts thousands as supporters and donors. Kahumbu is a National Geographic emerging explorer as well as the recipient of the 2014 Whitley Fund for Nature award for her efforts in developing leadership in conservation in Africa.

'The conservation of elephants naturally requires land and space, and therefore it helps all other species.' Photograph: Whitley Fund for Nature

Efforts such as hers are beginning to generate more interest in conservation among the local population, at the same time that a new generation of young Kenyans are taking on the baton and leading the conservation conversation. Kahumbu mentions elephant expert Dr Winnie Kiiru, ecologist Dr Joseph Ogutu, lion expert Shivani Bhalla, rhino expert Dr Benson Okita, ornithologist Martin Odino as well as Ikal Angelei of the Friends of Lake Turkana initiative.

The results of the wars we in conservation fight and win are not instant. They will be felt by generations to come.

She singles out peers from not only Kenya, but other parts of the continent. In Uganda, gorilla veterinarian Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka has founded Conservation Through Public Health, which supports the health of wildlife and local communities. Zambia's Thandiwe Mweetwa is a lion expert and a National Geographic awardee. Makala Jasper of Tanzania has fostered the community stewardship of forests and helped tens of thousands of people improve their lives and their environment.

"There are many more out there and I know that through their work, Africa's wildlife stands a chance," says Kahumbu. For her, encouraging more Africans into conservation means inspiring passion and wonder for the natural world.

"We need to show the children how beautiful our country is. Automatically they will want to protect and conserve our environment," she says. Each year her organisation takes primary school children into the national parks "so that from an early age they will know what is at stake".

Currently, together with other conservationists, Wildlife Direct produces Kenya's first wildlife documentary and talk show on local TV station, NTV. The programmes debuted to rave reviews from TV pundits and bloggers. Kahumbu says the two programmes reach an average audience of 4 million viewers every week.

"Through the programmes we hope to engage a much wider audience and tell Kenyans about the beauty within their country. It is only through showing them this that they will appreciate nature and hopefully get into conservation themselves," she says.

Speaking to Africans about conservation is not uncontroversial and her work has not always been straightforward. Wildlife in Kenya, like in many other parts of the world, is under threat from shrinking habitats, poaching and corruption. Because of this, Kahumbu's life has been threatened more than once.

“The sad thing is that in my line of business, those who threaten you are those you least expect,” she says. Three years ago she was warned of “dire consequences” if she chose to continue with a court case over the hiving off part of the Nairobi national park to build a road that would link two ends of the city and cut through important habitat.

‘We need to show the children how beautiful our country is. Automatically they will want to protect and conserve our environment,’ says Paula Kahumbu. Photograph: WildlifeDirect

As the case continued, officials from KWS, the agency where she started her conservation career, would pass on threats from interested parties in the case.

“This was beyond shocking. People I had known for years would pull me aside and tell me it was in my best interest to let the matter rest. That the people involved in the project were very bad men who would do anything to have their way,” she says. Although she puts on a brave face as she talks about this, it is those close to her that she worries about most.

“There is always the fear that if they can't get to me they can get to someone close to me. But we have had to soldier on,” she says. Her sense of mission has kept her going even in the face of danger. “I think Kenyans generally are proud of their heritage, and they would support anyone who is fighting for it,” she says.

By the entrance to the offices of Wildlife Direct a huge picture of an elephant stares at you as you arrive. “She is called Jabulani, she is South African,” Kahumbu explains. Her work has helped many species, but in her heart there has always been one above all others.

“Why elephants? I think they are among the most important species because they are a lot like us and easy to relate to. Their conservation naturally requires land and space, and therefore it helps all other species,” she says.

This year has been particularly successful. After three years of planning and lobbying, Wildlife Direct – in partnership with other organisations – got the Kenyan government to burn all its ivory stockpiles in April, with the aim of distorting black market ivory prices.

“That will have a trickledown effect that will lead to the securing of the global elephant population,” she says. “Ivory prices are already coming down as a result of that ... and countries have banned the trade of ivory and ivory products within their borders. The direct impact of this will be felt later when jumbo populations around the continent recover.”

The path towards this recovery has perhaps never been more controversial. At the meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) later this month, proposals and counter-proposals aim to either create a blanket global ban on almost any ivory trade or open up controlled sales from some southern African countries. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) will debate a total domestic ban at its conference this week.

Kahumbu says elephants deserve the highest level of protection and that the possibility of future trade is a major threat to their survival because it attracts ivory speculators.

“We have been lobbying for domestic bans in ivory trade worldwide for several years. We support it and regret that IUCN and Cites have taken so long to recognise the need for this. It couldn’t come soon enough,” she says.

As the debate on a total ban on ivory trade goes on, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe are pushing for one-off sales of their stockpiles. “This is outrageous given the plight of elephants, which was triggered by these same countries selling ivory in 2008 to China and Japan. They too should join the rest of the world sooner rather than later,” she says. “It is shocking that three southern African nations will not acknowledge this.” Kahumbu’s love for elephants has been the consuming passion of her life. She has worked for six straight weeks without a break. But she doesn’t mind.

“This is my life. And you can’t really take a break from life, can you?” she asks. As she finishes off her late lunch, she reflects on the paradox that is conservation.

“It is immensely fulfilling, but can be thankless too. The results of many of the wars we fight and win in conservation are not instant. They will be felt by generations to come,” she says.

For the next year the Guardian will be running a year-long focus on the plight of elephants; get in touch with your stories [here](#), and read more of our coverage [here](#).

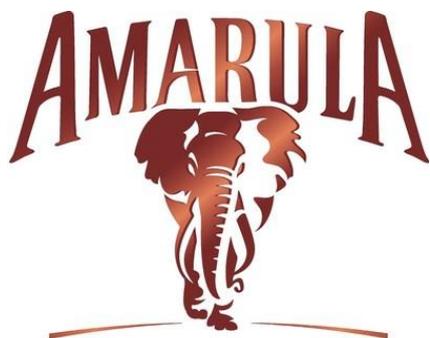
<http://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/Amarula-Launches-New-Campaign-To-Save-African-Elephants-On-World-Elephant-Day-1002240349>



Amarula Launches New Campaign To Save African Elephants On World Elephant Day

Aug. 8, 2017, 08:00 AM

Amarula, the best-selling South African cream liqueur, announced today the start of their new awareness and fundraising campaign in the U.S. to save the African Elephant. In partnership with the renowned conservation group, WildlifeDIRECT, they launched a new campaign titled "Don't Let Them Disappear." The global campaign aims to raise awareness to the ongoing struggle to protect the world's declining African elephant population. The cornerstone of the campaign is a fundraising initiative whereby \$1 from every bottle of Amarula sold in the U.S. between September 1, 2017 and December 31, 2017, will go directly to WildlifeDIRECT's impactful global conservation efforts.



To kick off the "Don't Let Them Disappear" campaign in the U.S., Amarula is hosting a visually-arresting event in New York City on August 12th, World Elephant Day, wherein a life-sized ice sculpture of an African elephant will be placed in the sweltering heat of New York City to illustrate the rapid loss of the African elephant population. The "Disappearing Elephant" will be on display at Union Square North starting at 7am and remaining onsite for the entire day. The lifelike sculpture will consist of roughly 85 blocks of ice, weighing an estimated amount of 18,000lbs. Over the course of the day, this massive ice sculpture will gradually melt, symbolizing the alarming rate in which African elephants are disappearing at the hands of poachers. Dr. Paula Kahumbu, the foremost authority on African elephants and CEO of Amarula's charitable partner, WildlifeDIRECT, will be present to educate and help raise awareness to the public.

"There are only approximately 400,000 African elephants left in the world, and one is lost every 15 minutes to poachers. We need help spreading the word about the plight of our elephants," says Dr. Kahumbu, CEO of WildlifeDIRECT. "This campaign is a critical component to our global conservation efforts, and the funds raised through Amarula's help with truly make a difference."

The global initiative by Amarula continues the company's consistent efforts since 2002 to help save the African elephants. Launched in 1983, Amarula is known worldwide, and today, has a retail presence in 100 countries, accumulating numerous awards across the globe.

The African elephant plays a crucial and symbolic role in the creation and spirit of the celebrated cream liqueur. Once a year, elephants begin their journey to feast on the sun-ripened fruit of the Marula trees, which grow wild and free across the subequatorial plains of Africa. This signifies to local communities the fruit is ready to be hand-harvested and ultimately turned into Amarula.

Amarula is available worldwide, with national distribution at a retail price of \$23.99. For more information about Amarula and their "Don't Let Them Disappear Campaign," visit: www.amarula.com.

Forbes – Online & Print Magazine, US
12 August 2017

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilydrewry/2017/08/12/seat-of-power-episode-2-dr-paula-kahumbu-fight-to-save-the-elephants/#1c2a8c8f200b>

Forbes

Seat Of Power Episode 2: Dr. Paula Kahumbu's Fight To Save The Elephants

Emily Drewry , FORBES STAFF

Seat of Power is a Periscope series hosted by Emily Drewry where experts share their insight on the news of the world. Follow along: #SeatofPower.



Courtesy of Paula Kahumbu

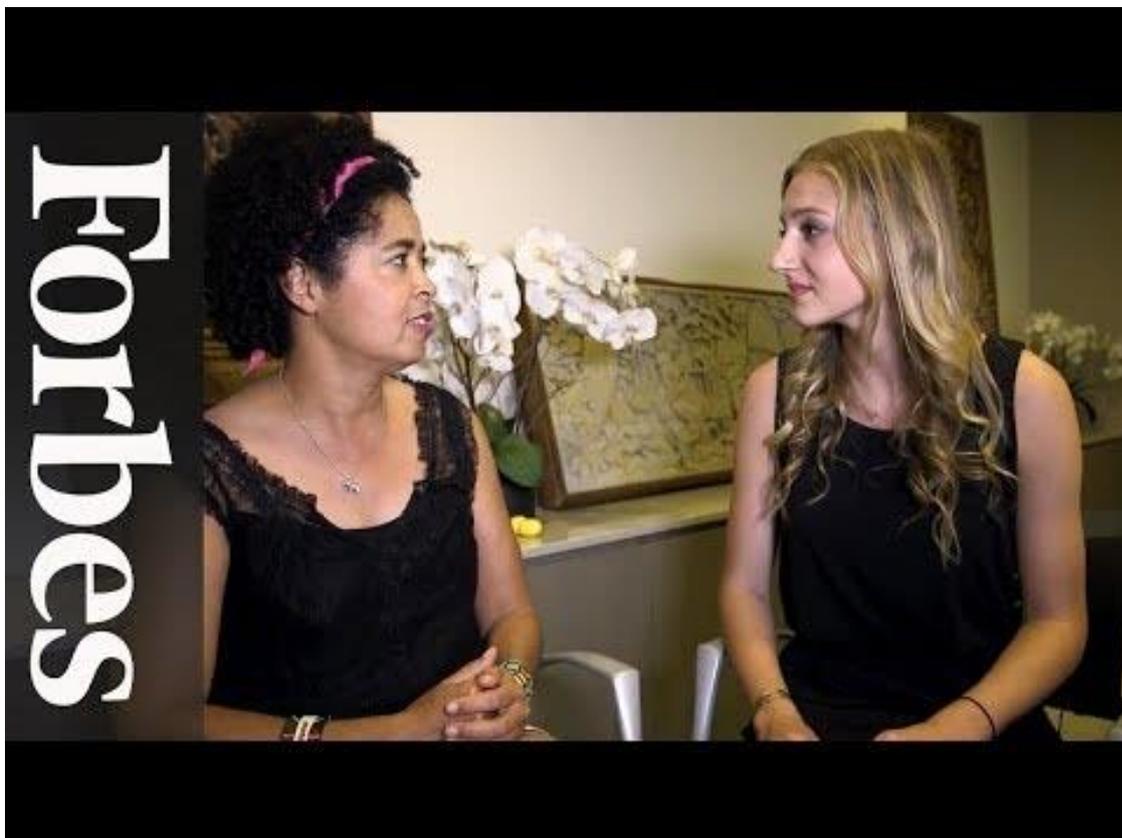
Dr. Paula Kahumbu

There are only approximately 400,000 African elephants remaining in the entire world, as one elephant is lost every 15 minutes to poaching. The biggest problem? A lust for ivory, according to renowned conservationist and elephant expert Dr. Paula Kahumbu. "The demand [for ivory] is so huge that if all Chinese people who wanted ivory could get what they wanted," she says, "the elephants in Africa would be finished in a year." Her efforts to reverse the extinction of the world's elephants have had a major impact around the

globe, but she knows the work will continue forward as the battle against poaching continues to be a global challenge.

Kahumbu grew up in Kenya just outside of a city surrounded by animals and knew she wanted to work with animals by the time she graduated high school. "I knew what I wanted to be: I wanted to be a ranger. That's where it started, and of course, a ranger is not considered the most prestigious job in the world." Instead, she was encouraged to study science. By the time she finished her PhD, it appeared inevitable that elephants would soon be extinct, spurring Kahumbu to focus her attention on reversing their downfall. Their efforts were successful, spurning Kahukmbu's belief that conservation not only can be successful, but that it's essential.

Now, after spending decades on the ground working with and on behalf of animals, Kahumbu continues to expand her reach through her work as CEO of WildlifeDirect, a Kenyan nonprofit that works to help protect the critical species of Africa. We spoke about her efforts to battle ivory trade both in Kenya and around the world leading up to World Elephant Day, which she'll celebrate in New York City. WildlifeDirect's current project, in partnership with South African liquor brand Amarula, highlights the rapid disappearance of elephants around the world—at an eye-opening rate of 8% per year. Learn more about Kahumbu's work by watching the full interview below or on YouTube.



Fox 4 - Television Channel, US
15 August 2017

<http://www.fox4now.com/the-morning-blend/amarula-wildlife-direct>



Amarula Wildlife Direct



Dr. Paula Kahumbu is the CEO of WildlifeDIRECT. The goal of this organization is to change minds, hearts and laws to protect Africa's critical species, such as elephants. It has been internationally recognized for its efforts to protect wildlife heritage as an important global heritage. Dr. Kahumbu is regarded as one of the world's leading experts on elephant conservation. She holds a PhD from Princeton, where she studied Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and over the years she has garnered many accolades for the impact she has made in conservation. She is the winner of the Whitley Award 2014, Brand Kenya Ambassador (2013), Presidential award Order of the Grand Warrior (2013), winner of the National Geographic/Howard Buffet Conservation Leader for Africa (2011) and is a National Geographic Emerging Explorer (2011). Most recently, she received a Special Commendation at the UN Person of the Year Award. In addition to running WildlifeDIRECT, Dr. Kahumbu lectures undergraduate community conservation at Princeton University during an annual field course. She is also the brainchild of the HANDS OFF OUR ELEPHANTS campaign, which she established with Her Excellency Margaret Kenyatta, the First Lady of the Republic of Kenya. The campaign has resulted in great successes in advocacy and the engagement of the people of Kenya to support the protection of elephants. Dr. Kahumbu lives and works in Nairobi.

Previous winner

Shivani Bhalla

Kenya

2014

**Warrior Watch: Enabling the coexistence of people
and lions**

**Winner of the Whitley Award donated by The Garden House
School Parents' Association**

Shivani featured in four pieces of press this year, including the following article on environmental website, Earth Island Journal. Shivani's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/elist/eListRead/samburu_warriors_are_safeguarding_kenyas_lions/

Earth Island Journal

Samburu Warriors Are Safeguarding Kenya's Lions

BY KARI MUTU – JANUARY 30, 2017

Community-based program engages pastoralists in conservation work to reduce human-wildlife conflicts

Among the Samburu people, a pastoral tribe of north-central Kenya, warriors have traditionally hunted lions to prove their bravery or to protect their cattle, which form the basis of wealth and social rank in the community. But for nine years now, Jeneria Lekilelei, a Samburu warrior, has been doing the opposite, working to protect lions from being killed by his own people.



photo by Tony Allport Ewaso Lions trains Samburu warriors to do field work, conduct bush patrols, and help reduce conflicts between lions and pastoralists in north-central Kenya.

Lekilelei, 27, dropped out of high school many years ago for lack of funds. Most of his adolescent years were spent herding the cattle within the Westgate Conservancy, a community-owned group ranch that borders the semi-arid Samburu National Reserve. In 2008, when he was 19, he joined Ewaso Lions, a conservation group based in the Conservancy, as a field data collector. At the time, he knew nothing about lions and found the idea of protecting the large carnivores shocking.

Founded in 2007 by conservation biologist Shivani Bhalla, Ewaso Lions works to protect Kenya's wildlife by involving communities in solutions that promote peaceful coexistence between people and wild animals. The organization fills a critical need in the country: According to Ewaso, Africa's lion population has declined by some 90 percent over the past 75 years, primarily due to loss of habitat and human-animal conflict. In Kenya, there are fewer than 2,000 lions left.

Bhalla quickly realized that understanding lion movements throughout the park, and beyond, was essential to the conservation work. "We'd see lions, then they'd disappear. Clearly, they were going outside the park," Bhalla says. "I realized we need[ed] to be living outside and understanding whether lions and people can actually live together." In need of more information in order to create solutions for protecting lions, she shifted her focus from the park to surrounding community lands and recruited three young Samburu men to assist her, including Lekilelei.

In the first year working for Ewaso Lions, Lekilelei quietly recorded general field information about the ecology and different kinds of animals in the area surrounding Samburu and hardly spoke a word to Bhalla. In his second year, he accompanied her on a research trip to the Shaba National Reserve, an even drier and more rugged region of Samburu. For a week, he sat on a vehicle roof under the scorching sun searching for lions. Undeterred by the heat or rough conditions, he was animated by the work, and not long after the trip, Bhalla offered him a job as a lion scout, to track their numbers, movements, and cases of human-wildlife conflict. He seized the opportunity and has never looked back.

To expand Ewaso Lion's fieldwork program, Lekilelei came up with the idea of recruiting more Samburu warriors. Nobody, after all, knows the landscape better than they do. In 2010, the organization expanded further by establishing Warrior Watch, a program of twenty-odd Samburu youth engaged as ambassadors for wildlife. The additional warriors were trained on how to identify individual lions, monitor problem animals, collect data, and conduct wildlife surveillance through GPS, camera traps, vehicle patrols, and old-fashioned tracking.

Dressed in their traditional attire and beaded jewellery, the expanded team of warriors conduct bush patrols every day, liaise with herders, carry out anti-poaching work, and spread conservation awareness in what has become an extension of their traditional role as guardians of the community.

Because harm to livestock is a major source of human-wildlife conflicts in the region, Warrior Watch responds quickly to predation events to speak with the affected people,

avert retaliatory killings, and help recover missing animals. Responders also support families to improve their animal husbandry practices and minimize the risk of wildlife attacks. In return, the warriors receive stipends, meals, and basic education since many of them did not complete school.



photo by Tyrel Bernardini Samburu warriors receive lessons in reading and writing, along with stipends and meals, for their work with Ewaso Lions.

The warriors have developed a special bond with the lions of Samburu. One of their favorites is a 16-year old lioness called Nashipai. Unfortunately, Nashipai has a penchant for attacking domestic animals. “She’s got no teeth. I think that’s why she is going after easier prey,” explains Bhalla. “But ... [the warriors have] saved her hundreds of times. Every time someone wants to kill her, they are there.”

Over the years Lekilelei and Bhalla have come to realize that the future of lions depends on changing the attitudes of those who only come into contact with wildlife following attacks on their cows and goats. “My community was killing [lions] for lack of understanding. All they want to do is to reduce a problem to their livestock,” explains Lekilelei, now the field operations and community manager for Ewaso Lions. “Warriors want to hold onto their culture by killing a lion, that’s what is in their minds,” he adds. Consequently, Lekilelei sees his role as that of educating the community and preserving the Samburu culture in ways that protect wildlife and their habitats. “You tell them that there are only like 10 lions in the whole of Samburu area, that lions are going to be extinct if we can’t conserve,” he explains.

In his new role, he participates in discussions with the local elders who are the decision-makers of the community. The elders often reminisce about the disappearance of rhino in Samburu because of hunting and poaching in the 1970s and 1980s. They would not wish to see lions go the same way. Lekilelei and the Ewaso team also interact with women and children who have historically been left out of the conservation discussion. Ewaso Lions has expanded since 2007, and is now working in the Kalama, Nakuprat Gotu, and Ol Donyiro Community Conservancies of Samburu as well as Westgate, an area covering over 5,000 square kilometres and home to the third largest population of lions in the country.

The large study area allows the organization to explore the connectivity between different regions in the wider Samburu ecosystem and how lions disperse through existing corridors, information that can help inform conservation work. Lions will habitually migrate to find ideal conditions for food and water. Unfortunately, human development, new roads, and new settlements coming into marginal areas are cutting off traditional migration routes for lions and other wildlife. “The main thing is to make sure the corridors are kept open,” Bhalla says.



photo courtesy of Ewaso Lions A lion in Samburu National Reserve.

Lion numbers in the region have increased since Ewaso Lions began its work in 2007. As the organization has grown, Westgate has served as a sort of laboratory for Ewaso Lions to test different conservation program with the local community. Since the start of their work nine years ago, Bhalla estimates that the lion population has grown from 11 individuals to around 50 animals moving in and out of Westgate, and that numbers are stable at present. She is confident that the Westgate lions are safe for now because of successful wildlife management models based on community partnerships.

Just last year they heard lions roaring in Westgate conservancy for the first time, a rare occurrence outside of state parks. “That’s a sign that they feel safe. It’s exciting for us that even a lion can sense that there’s a change out here,” said Bhalla.

Nevertheless, challenges do remain, such as the building of national infrastructure in Samburu County. During years of drought, nomadic people from other areas frequently move into Samburu lands in search of pasture. “They come from far away where conservation hasn’t reached and people still practice killing of lions,” explains Lekilelei. The future plan for Ewaso Lions is to replicate the Westgate model elsewhere and to engage with other communities living in lion habitats in order to build up tolerance for wildlife.

“I am very proud to see how we have changed the whole face of the community towards conservation,” says Bhalla. “Warriors who were hunters or killers of lions have become conservationists.”

Previous winner

Arnaud Desbiez

Brazil

2015

**Giant armadillos as a flagship species for the
conservation of tropical scrublands in the Cerrado,
Brazil**

**Winner of the Whitley Award donated by The Garden House
School Parents' Association**

Arnaud was featured in the highly successful BBC documentary 'Hotel Armadillo', narrated by David Attenborough, earlier this year. This generated 15 pieces of coverage in the UK and international media. The following is a selection of this coverage. Arnaud's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

Hotel Armadillo – BBC Two Documentary, UK
7 April 2017

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08ltnyp>

The screenshot shows the BBC Two Natural World website interface. At the top, the 'TWO' logo is on the left, and 'NATURAL WORLD' is centered in large, bold letters. Below the title is a navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'Episodes', 'Clips', 'Galleries', and 'BBC Earth'. The main content area features a large image of an armadillo. To the right of the image, there is a 'On TV' section with the BBC Two logo, the date 'Fri 7 Apr 2017', the time '21:00', and the text 'BBC TWO EXCEPT NORTHERN IRELAND, WALES'. Below this is a 'More episodes' section with a 'PREVIOUS' label, the title 'Puerto Rico: Island of Enchantment', the years '2017-2018', and a play button icon. At the bottom of the main content area, there is a section for 'Hotel Armadillo' with the years '2017-2018', a description: 'David Attenborough looks at the giant armadillo and examines how this seldom-seen animal provides scores of other creatures with the hotel and restaurant services they need to thrive in earth's biggest natural wetland - the Pantanal of Brazil.', and a duration of '59 minutes'.

TWO NATURAL WORLD

Home Episodes Clips Galleries BBC Earth

On TV
BBC TWO Fri 7 Apr 2017
21:00
BBC TWO EXCEPT NORTHERN IRELAND, WALES

More episodes

PREVIOUS
Puerto Rico: Island of Enchantment
2017-2018

See all episodes from Natural World

This programme will be available shortly after broadcast

Hotel Armadillo
2017-2018

David Attenborough looks at the giant armadillo and examines how this seldom-seen animal provides scores of other creatures with the hotel and restaurant services they need to thrive in earth's biggest natural wetland - the Pantanal of Brazil. 59 minutes

The Sun – National Newspaper, UK
7 April 2017

<https://www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/3282048/hotel-armadillo-natural-world-bbc-two/>



WELCOME TO THE HOTEL ARMADILLO

The new film will explore the world of armadillos in the wild

By Tilly Pearce

7th April 2017, 7:14 pm

DAVID Attenborough will be taking on the world of armadillos in his brand new series tonight.



What is Hotel Armadillo: Natural World about?

Hotel Armadillo is part of the Natural World series - a collection of one off films about wildlife and families.

In this instalment, viewers will see how giant armadillos have become restaurant owners of the animal kingdom in the Pantanal of Brazil.

As well as providing room and board for the animals around them, the audience at home will get a unique insight into what to expect in the future.

Baby giant armadillos will also be given a look at, as well as "hotel visitors" including birds, lizards and snakes dropping by at their leisure.

Who hosts Hotel Armadillo: Natural World?

David Attenborough will be narrating the new show - after years and years in the trade. The 90-year-old TV veteran has been making documentary films since 1952 - and last year earned over £1million for his films with the BBC.

In fact, the wildlife and nature documentaries he creates has since been scientifically proven to lower stress and boost happiness in their viewers.

Researchers quizzed 7,500 people on their mood before watching BBC's smash-hit nature series', news stories and drama shows.

They were then given psychometric tests and monitored with facial mapping.

Prof Dacher Keltner also reviewed 150 studies into the effects of wildlife on human emotion.

He found nature boosts attention and thinking skills, promotes calm, makes people more social and effective team-workers and improves physical health.

People aged 16-24 showed the biggest reduction in how tired and nervous they felt.



Arnaud Desbiez and Danilo Kluwyber release a giant anteater after fitting it with a GPS collar

When is Hotel Armadillo on?

Hotel Armadillo will air tonight at 9pm on BBC Two.

It will be uploaded shortly afterwards on the online streaming service, BBC iPlayer.

Those who have a TV licence will be able to view the show for free.

All previous years instalments are also available on the site - including the Himalayas, Nature's Perfect Partners and Africa's Fishing Leopards.



A giant armadillo is released after samples have been collected

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/apr/08/hotel-armadillo-review-natural-world-bb2-david-attenborough-brazil>

theguardian

Hotel Armadillo review – Attenborough checks in to an amazing animal AirBnB

David Attenborough narrates a fascinating detective story about the hunt for the rare armour-plated kittens who hold the key to Brazil's fragile ecosystem

Tim Dowling | Saturday 8 April 2017 07.00 BST

Conservationist Arnaud Desbiez worked in the Brazilian Pantanal for eight years before he set eyes on a giant armadillo. On one level this is surprising: a giant armadillo is about the size of a pig. But it's also rare, solitary and nocturnal, spending up to three-quarters of its life underground. The giant armadillo is considered a ghost species – you know they're there, even if you can't find any.

Narrated by David Attenborough, Hotel Armadillo: Natural World (BBC2) was first and foremost a detective story, a lesson in the judicious laying of camera traps. Giant armadillos reside in deep burrows, and they dig a new one every two days. If you find that your armadillo is not at home, chances are he ain't coming back.

In the armadillo's absence, however, the vacant burrow serves as a hotel for other creatures: porcupines, peccaries, foxes, ocelots, tapirs and other, smaller armadillos who forage for roots and bugs in the newly turned earth. A sort of anteater called a tamandua uses the ex-burrow as a nursery. All in all, 80 species have been recorded either dropping by or moving to the Hotel Armadillo, making the giant armadillo a pivotal component of a fragile ecosystem. "The battle to save the giant armadillo is the battle to save biodiversity," said Desbiez. "It's all the same."

The footage, when they got it, was amazing. You might imagine that an armadillo the size of a pig suffers from a deficit of the cuddliness so vital to preserving species, but that's because you've never seen a baby giant armadillo (not many people have until now, to be fair), which is as cute as a dinosaur in a kid's cartoon – an armour-plated kitten. As is the form these days, one had to wait until the final "how we did it" segment to discover just how thankless a task filming giant armadillos is. The comings and goings of 80 species exponentially increases the odds of something kicking your equipment over in the dead of night. But if you like the idea of being dangled by your ankles into an armadillo burrow that may or may not contain rats, a career in wildlife filming could be for you.

<http://www.radiotimes.com/tv-programme/e/fmxtkd/natural-world--s36-e2-hotel-armadillo-natural-world>

RadioTimes

S36-E2 Hotel Armadillo: Natural World



REVIEW

by Alison Graham

Giant armadillos look like huge moving footstools, but they are industrious creatures, digging deep burrows in the Pantanal wetland of Brazil that become home to scores of other species.

Cameras film the visitors to the so-called Hotel Armadillo (the imagery is overworked) including a delightful little furry thing that's comically cute when it feels threatened by a predator sniffing around outside the tunnel. His display of aggression is pure "angry Clanger".

The man from the Giant Armadillo Project is clearly smitten by the animals, who are notoriously shy of appearing in public and have to be corralled and drugged so they can be fitted with trackers. "What keeps us going is that we love what we do," he says.

SUMMARY

The giant armadillo, an animal so elusive few have ever seen it wild in the Brazilian wetlands region known as the Pantanal. David Attenborough reveals how the burrows the armadillos dig create homes for hundreds of other animals. Until recently man knew virtually nothing of this species, but Arnaud Desbiez, the founder of the Giant Armadillo Project, has changed all that.

Previous winner

Jayson Ibanez
Philippines
2015

**Preventing further decline of the Philippine eagle on
Mindanao Island, Philippines**

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

Jayson received eleven pieces of press coverage this year; the majority focused on the rescue of a young eagle that was rehabilitated by Ibanez and his team. The following is a selection of this coverage. Jayson's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://www.mindanews.com/environment/2017/01/year-old-philippine-eagle-rescued-in-maitum-sarangani/>



Year-old Philippine Eagle rescued in Maitum, Sarangani

By CAROLYN O. ARGUILLAS

-
JANUARY 4, 2017

DAVAO CITY (MindaNews /04 January) — An estimated year-old Philippine Eagle (*Pithecophaga jefferyi*) rescued in Barangay Batian in Maitum, Sarangani Monday arrived at the Philippine Eagle Center here at 2 a.m. Wednesday, for examination and rehabilitation. The rescued national bird, a critically endangered species, was brought to the Center by representatives from Maitum and Sarangani province, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and Dr. Jayson Ibanez, Director for Conservation of the Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF).



Philippine Eagle “Maitum,” rescued in Barangay Batian, Maitum, Sarangani, is now at the Philippine Eagle Center in Malagos, Calinan, Davao City for examination and

rehabilitation before it will be returned to Maitum, hopefully within three weeks. Photo courtesy of Rey Balazon/Maitum Information Office

The Sarangani Information Office quoted Maitum Mayor Alexander Bryan Reganit as saying the eagle's rescue "only proves that Maitum still has a thick forest that we ought to preserve and protect."

"I will do my best to protect the endangered species of Maitum as our legacy to the future generations," he said. Reganit expressed hope the rescued eagle would be named "Maitum."

Farmer Gibson Badal, 26, of Barangay Batian found the eagle standing in his area at around 9 a.m. on Monday. He said the bird appeared weak and did not move when he approached it.

The bird was fed live chicken. It ate half on Monday and the other half on Tuesday. Alver Caasi, who happened to visit Batian on Monday was informed by residents that they were selling the bird but he warned them they would be jailed if they did that. Caasi took photographs and a video of the eagle and sent it to Maitum Information Officer Beth Ramos, who happens to be his relative.

Ramos told MindaNews that she immediately informed the DENR which immediately sent a team to rescue the eagle. The DENR suggested to the mayor to bring the eagle to the Philippine Eagle Center in Davao City.

MindaNews forwarded to Dennis Salvador, Executive Director of the Philippine Eagle Foundation which runs the Philippine Eagle Center, the photographs and video Ramos sent to MindaNews.

Salvador told MindaNews on Tuesday that he would send a team to Maitum to fetch the bird or if the team had left for Davao, to meet them halfway.

Ramos said PEF director for conservation Ibanez proceeded to Maitum, arriving there at 8 p.m.. The team left Maitum for Davao City at 9 p.m. and dropped by a hospital in Calinan, Davao City for an X-Ray of the bird. The team arrived at the Philippine Eagle Center at 2 a.m. Wednesday.

Ibanez told MindaNews in a telephone interview Wednesday morning that the bird, estimated to be a year old and still dependent on its parents for food, will undergo examination and rehabilitation. He said the X-Ray results show a pellet in the left groin area. The bird was also severely dehydrated.

Ibanez said they hope to return "Maitum" to Maitum within three weeks to reunite with its parents.

<http://news.mb.com.ph/2017/02/08/philippine-eagle-freed-in-saranganis-last-frontier/>

Philippine eagle freed in Sarangani's 'last frontier'

Published February 8, 2017, 10:01 PM



Philippine Eagle / Credit: PEC

A rehabilitated juvenile Philippine eagle was recently released to its habitat less than a month after being found in Mt. Busa, a key biodiversity area in Maitum town in Sarangani.

The eaglet, named Sarangani Pride by Senator Manny Pacquiao, was found dehydrated and malnourished in the upland village of Batian on Jan. 2 and was brought by the municipal government staff to the Philippine Eagle Center (PEC) in Davao City.

The release team is composed of Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF) director for conservation Dr. Jayson Ibanez, PEC executive director Dennis Salvador, Maitum OIC Menro Nanette Nacional, CENRO Kiamba Jhing Guilao, DENR Region 12 representatives, and Sarangani Information Office.

Salvador said the eagle was released on the basis of its health and physical conditions. During its rehabilitation, an X-ray result showed an embedded pellet in its left groin and had to be nurtured into prime condition.

A team of biologists will be monitoring the bird's condition for 10 days.

“Our staff will be monitoring this eagle post-release via satellite and radio transmitter. We want to make sure that this eaglet will be accepted back by its parents and fed until it fully fledges,” Salvador said.

According to Sarangani Environmental Conservation and Protection Center (ECPC) executive director Emma Nebran, the forest where the eaglet was released is considered the last frontier of the province.

“Mt. Busa is the remaining forest we have here in Sarangani, and we must protect, conserve and preserve the biodiversity that we have here,” she revealed.

She added that the Provincial Government, headed by Governor Steve Solon, supports efforts in protecting Mt. Busa and has committed funds to support conservation initiatives in the area.

The 114,000-hectare Mt. Busa, which covers the towns of Maasim, Kiamba, and Maitum, is threatened by land conversion (to farmland), kaingin (slash-and-burn), wildlife hunting, illegal logging and mining.

In a related development, Maitum Mayor Alexander Bryan Reganit said the municipal government will declare the barangays of Batian and Tuanadatu as protected areas.

He pointed out that the presence of the Philippine Eagle in the forest of Maitum shows that it is still pristine, healthy and is worth conserving.

He said local communities can help in the conservation by informing local authorities in case of sightings of birds in distress.

The PEC estimates that there are only about 400 pairs of eagles left in the wild, and can be found in Mindanao, Samar, Leyte, and Luzon.

Previous winner

Panut Hadisiswoyo

Indonesia

2015

Conservation villages: building local capacity for the protection of Sumatran orangutans and their habitat, Indonesia

Winner of the Whitley Award for Conservation in Ape Habitats donated by the Arcus Foundation

Panut received 17 pieces of press coverage this year, with a particular focus on the news that the UNESCO World Heritage Committee voted to keep the Tropical Rainforest of Sumatra on the List of World Heritage In Danger, something that Panut had been campaigning for. The following is a selection of Panut's coverage. His WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/03/11/national-park-fights-back-against-illegal-plantations.html>

The Jakarta Post

National park fights back against illegal plantations

Apriadi Gunawan

Medan | Sat, March 11, 2017 | 01:20 pm



The aerial photo shows the damage and impact of forest burning at the Leuser Ecosystem Zone in East Aceh of Aceh Province on March. 21. There had been forest damage of 13,700 hectares of the area from 2014 to 2015 according to data from Leuser Conservation Forum. (Antara/Syifa Yulinnas)

Thousands of hectares of forests in Mount Leuser National Park in North Sumatra and Aceh are reported to have been illegally encroached upon and converted into widespread plantations of oil palms, rubber trees, cacao trees and coffee plants.

To restore the natural functions of the protected forests, the park management office is planning to curb the rampant spread of the illegal plantations.

A joint team of the park's officials and security apparatus had reconverted some 75 hectares of plantation in Sei Lapan district, Langkat regency, North Sumatra last month, cutting down the commercial vegetation and replanting indigenous flora. In the near future, the same measure would also be taken on another 80 hectares that had been turned into plantations in Southeast Aceh regency, said Joko Iswanto, the spokesman of the Mount Leuser National Park office.

The reconversions are aimed at restoring the natural functions of the whole area within the national park where the officials would clear the plantations and replant them with forests trees.

Joko expressed regret that the conversions had been going on in the area for years, but so far no measures had been taken to restore its function as a protected forest. More than 2,000 hectares within the National Park had been converted into plantations, which were mostly spread throughout Langkat, North Sumatra and Southeast Aceh.

The forest conversions were mostly committed by local people who were supported by payments from outside investors.

“Most of the investors come from Medan,” Joko said.

Joko also said that the national park had been intensively conducting preventive measures using persuasion to stop local people from destroying the protected forests. Thanks to the measures, 18 encroachers had voluntarily handed over their illegal plantations to be restored back into protected forest.

He said various kinds of vegetation had been replanted in the area after hundreds of two- to five-year-old palm trees were all cut down.

Very recently, seven non-governmental organizations grouped under the Mount Leuser National Park rescue coalition asked President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo to save the park from rampant encroachments.

Panut Hadisiswoyo of the coalition said the encroachments were massive in the national park, illegally converting the forests into plantations and housing for local people.

He said the total area of the park was 838,872 hectares, but it continued to decrease because of the encroachments, especially in Langkat regency, North Sumatra.

“The area in Langkat is the worst encroached,” Panut said.

The most massive conversions occurred in the Barak Induk area in Sei Lengan and in Lapangan Tembak in Besitang district in Langkat. He claimed that some oil palm plantations in these areas were under the control of some companies.

“Some palm oil companies have been operating in the national park area for years. Surprisingly, no one has the guts to get rid of them,” he said.

The park had been listed in UNESCO’s World Heritage in Danger list in 2011 following rampant encroachments along with two other national parks in Sumatra: Kerinci Seblat National Park in West Sumatra, Jambi, Bengkulu and South Sumatra, and Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park in Lampung and Bengkulu provinces. The three national parks were declared by UNESCO to be World Heritage Sites in 2004.

According to UNESCO, Sumatran tropical rainforests are home to 10,000 plant, 201 mammal and 580 bird species. They also serve as a habitat for mammals that needed a large range for roaming, such as Sumatran tigers, orangutans, elephants and rhinos.

Punut said that if by 2018 the encroachments could not be settled, the Mount Leuser National Park most likely could be excluded from UNESCO's list of world's heritage sites.

“If that is the case it will be a bad record for Indonesia as it is not capable of preserving the area already declared as a part of the world's heritage,” he added.

<https://time2transcend.wordpress.com/2017/07/07/sumatran-rainforest-remains-on-list-of-world-heritage-in-danger/>

CHANGING TIMES

HOLISTIC JOURNALISM THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Sumatran rainforest remains on List of World Heritage In Danger

BY ANNETTE GARTLAND ON JULY 7, 2017



The UNESCO World Heritage Committee has voted unanimously to keep the Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra (TRHS) on the List of World Heritage In Danger. At its 41st session, taking place this week in Kraków, Poland, the committee heard submissions from the Indonesian government and from the founder and director of the Medan-

based Orangutan Information Centre (IOC), Panut Hadisiswoyo.

Welcoming the vote, Hadisiswoyo said: “The World Heritage Committee has confirmed the need to take decisive action to address current and emerging threats facing world heritage rainforests in Sumatra.

“We are very appreciative that the committee has retained the Tropical Rainforest Heritage Sumatra site on the List of World Heritage In Danger as destruction driven by illegal activities continues to this day.”



Hadiswoyo (*pictured left*) also welcomed an announcement by the Indonesian government that it will not allow a proposed geothermal project to go ahead within the TRHS.

“The Indonesian government’s announcement, categorically ruling out geothermal development within the world heritage property, is welcomed.

“We stand ready to work collaboratively to protect the property’s rainforests and realise alternative development that protects the greater Leuser Ecosystem whilst securing the integrity of the TRHS World Heritage Site.”

A Turkish company, Hitay Holdings, wanted to build a geothermal plant in the Gunung Leuser National Park (GLNP).

The site the company had targeted was in the Kappi Plateau region, which is the core of the only remaining major habitat corridor connecting the eastern and western forest areas in the GLNP.

Logging, poaching, and palm oil

The TRHS was nominated as a World Heritage Site by the Indonesian government, and was accepted onto the heritage list in 2004.

The site has been on the List of World Heritage in Danger since 2011 because of the ongoing destruction of its ecosystem. This has included illegal logging, wildlife poaching, oil palm expansion, and fragmentation of the rainforest for new roads. There have also been proposals for three large hydroelectric dams on the site.

A large part of the TRHS lies within the Leuser Ecosystem, an area of tropical lowland rainforest that straddles the provinces of Aceh and North Sumatra and is the last place on Earth where orangutans, rhinos, tigers, and elephants can be found living together in the wild.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has identified Leuser as one of the world's "irreplaceable protected areas". It is home to the densest populations of orangutans anywhere in the world, and plays an important role in mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration.

Given its designation as a National Strategic Area, the Leuser Ecosystem should be protected from development.



The entire TRSH site covers 2.5 million hectares and comprises three national parks: Gunung Leuser, Kerinci Seblat, and Bukit Barisan Selatan.

UNESCO says the site "holds the greatest potential for long-term conservation of the distinctive and diverse biota of Sumatra, including many endangered species".

The area is home to some 10,000 plant species, including 17 endemic genera;

more than 200 mammal species; and about 580 bird species, of which 465 are resident and 21 are endemic, UNESCO states.

Hadisiswoyo says that, while local NGOs are ready to work with the Indonesian government to conserve the TRSH, they want to see proper law enforcement to tackle the unacceptable levels of illegal logging, poaching, and encroachment.

Like the Indonesian government, he says, the NGOs are committed to seeing the TRSH come off the danger list, "but not until all the threats it faces have been addressed".

The TRSH could only be removed from the danger list "when the clear and present danger to the Outstanding Universal Value of the TRHS has been removed and current destruction has been reversed", Hadisiswoyo told committee members.

"We will continue to work collaboratively with the government to address these threats, but there is only so much that we as NGOs can do. It is the government that is responsible for proper law enforcement, including the prosecution of offenders. It is the government that is responsible for stopping new roads, industrial developments, and encroachment."



A bulldozer moves earth within the Leuser Ecosystem.

Hadisiswoyo added later: “We commend both the Indonesian Minister of Environment and Forestry and Governor Irwandi Yusuf of the Aceh provincial government, who now have made unequivocal statements ruling out geothermal proposals in the heart of Leuser, but we still have much work to do to reverse the damage that

has already been done and block any attempts at building any new roads or hydrodams in the Leuser Ecosystem.”

In its January 2017 report to the World Heritage Committee, the Indonesian government reiterates its commitment “to ensure the sustainability of the TRHS and restore it to such a state that the property may be removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger”.

It lists the measures it has taken, which include establishing a programme to increase the population of Sumatran tigers, elephants, rhino, and orangutans; conducting training in wildlife monitoring; improving monitoring equipment; identifying and mapping human-wildlife conflict areas; developing a rhino sanctuary; and conducting Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) patrols.

It also said it was committed to not granting any concessions or permits for geothermal exploration or the construction of new roads within the TRHS site.

In the report they submitted to the World Heritage Committee, the Indonesian NGOs highlighted the ongoing failure of law enforcement in the TRHS site.

The NGOs say there has been a failure to prosecute and sentence the perpetrators of poaching, illegal logging, encroachment, and other forest crimes.

They say that, although Indonesia’s report to the World Heritage Committee documents an increase in the number of patrols, the “arrest” rate is three percent and the prosecution rate unknown.

This week, Hadisiswoyo delivered petitions to the 21 members of the World Heritage Committee on behalf of 14,000 concerned global citizens who are part of the growing movement to “Love The Leuser”.

In his speech to the committee, he called on the global community to join the NGOs and support the Indonesian government to protect and restore the TRHS and the Leuser Ecosystem.



Water in the Gunung National Park has already been badly polluted by palm oil companies.

Spatial plan

An additional threat to the Leuser Ecosystem is the new spatial plan for Aceh, which would open up swathes of the Ecosystem for roads, mining, and palm oil and timber concessions and threatens to destroy the area's biodiversity and increase the risk of flooding and landslides.

An alliance of concerned citizens – Gerakan Rakyat Aceh Menggugat (GeRAM) – has been battling for more than two years against the proposed plan.

GeRAM says the Aceh governor and the Aceh parliament wrongfully excluded the Leuser Ecosystem from the spatial plan.

The chairwoman of the NGO Forest, Nature and Environment Aceh (HAKA), Farwiza Farhan, says the spatial plan will “whitewash crimes of the past and pave the way for a new wave of catastrophic ecological destruction”.

Millions of people in Aceh and North Sumatra depend on the rivers of the Leuser Ecosystem, not only for fresh drinking water, but also to sustain their livelihoods as farmers.

Plaintiffs in a class action against the spatial plan are demanding its cancellation and “a thorough and comprehensive revision” of its proposals, which they say must include the recognition of the Leuser Ecosystem's special status.

Previous winner

Rosamira Guillen

Colombia

2015

Proyecto Tití: expanding conservation efforts to protect the cotton-top tamarin in northern Colombia

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by Sarah Chenevix-Trench

Rosamira received 20 pieces of press coverage this year, including several pieces covering her being awarded a prize by the National Geographic Society and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation. The following is a selection of Rosamira's coverage. Her WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<http://www.biographic.com/posts/sto/guardian-of-the-cotton-top>



The landscape architect who became the unlikely steward of Colombia’s critically endangered one-pound monkey

Story by Aleszu Bajak

Rosamira Guillen’s first job back in Colombia wasn’t very glamorous. In 1995, fresh off a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship to study landscape architecture in the United States, she returned home to Barranquilla, a port city on the country’s northern coast, to work in a zoo. But the task of remodeling a small, putrid lagoon had Guillen swiftly lamenting the zoo’s deteriorating condition. “It was a zoo of the ’60s, with iron cages that looked like jails,” she recalls.

One of those enclosures housed a colony of small monkeys with dark, leathery faces and a puffy white mane. For Guillen, the squirrel-sized creatures, called cotton-top tamarins (*Saguinus oedipus*), were a respite from the otherwise dreary zoo. Their raucous chatter, jittery energy, and Einstein-like heads of hair captivated her. She was surprised to learn that the tamarins were native to her country, and in fact were found in the wild only in a few forested patches of land, near the Caribbean coast of northwestern Colombia. Not only were the tamarins rare, they exhibited unique behaviors, including a complex language that contained close to 40 distinct chirps, squeals, and whistles that the monkeys delivered in grammatical sequences—almost like sentences. And unlike most other primates, tamarins displayed an altruistic streak, raising their young in groups, rather than leaving each mother to fend for her own young. For such a small monkey, Guillen thought, they had huge hearts.

Though Barranquilla, Guillen’s hometown, was just a short drive from the forests that echoed with the monkeys’ bird-like whistles and chirps, she had never heard of this tiny primate, nor how rare it was. “I grew up and was born here, and they never taught me any of this!” she says. “I thought that was terrible.”

Over the next few years, that initial astonishment grew into a consuming fascination. Guillen devoured all the literature she could find on the tamarins—or titís (pronounced tee-TEES), as they’re called in Colombia. She learned that the species was endangered and that the titís were fast losing their forest home. And yet most Colombians didn’t know the monkey was anything special. The local *costeños*—coastal folk—didn’t know that cutting down the forests for charcoal, fence posts, and pasture was, tree-by-tree and acre-by-acre, backing the tamarins into a corner, eliminating the very habitat they required.

When Guillen was named director of the Barranquilla Zoo in 2001, she made the little monkey its emblem and embarked on a mission to conserve the cotton-top tamarins' remaining forest—and to educate Colombians about just how special the titís are.

But she knew changes at the zoo wouldn't be enough. Securing the titís' survival would depend on turning the monkeys' human neighbors into allies. To truly help the monkeys, she had to meet them—and the *costeños*—out in the wild. In speaking with people who lived on the fringes of the tamarins' habitat, she says, she stressed that the titís' conservation, by preserving forests and natural resources like water, would benefit both the monkeys and Colombians. It would be a win-win, she told them. Like many conservation projects, says Guillen, keeping the needs of humans is paramount. “We don't want to tip the balance only for the titís and the forest, because you can't leave the human component out.”

Today, Guillen is one of the cotton-top tamarins' most vocal guardians. In 2008, she was hired to run Proyecto Tití, a non-profit based in Barranquilla that's dedicated to protecting the cotton-top tamarins and their habitat. She is the first to admit that, as an architect with no scientific background, she was an unlikely choice to lead efforts to protect the monkeys. But those who have worked with her say that what she lacks in formal scientific qualifications she makes up for with confidence, charisma, and negotiating savvy. “Stealing” Guillen from the Barranquilla Zoo was “the best thing I ever did,” says conservation biologist and Proyecto Tití founder Anne Savage. “I knew she would be perfect. She's a great leader, she's bilingual, and she's an architect, which really helps with a lot of things.”

One key to Guillen's success, many colleagues say, is her persistent yet gentle style of diplomacy. In 2011, she blocked construction of an airport that would have destroyed critical tití habitat and come uncomfortably close to one of Proyecto Tití's major study sites. Diana Guzman, president of the Colombian Primatology Association, says she asked Guillen how she'd pulled off this feat—it seemed incredible. Guillen replied that instead of being confrontational, she had “kept her enemies close,” meeting many times with developers and government officials until she eventually convinced them of the need to protect the forest.

Guillen's dedication has won her recognition not only from colleagues like Savage, but also from the wider conservation community. In 2015, she won a Whitley Fund for Nature Award, sometimes known as the “Green Oscar,” for her work with the monkeys.

With Guillen at the helm, Proyecto Tití is taking a three-pronged approach to cotton-top tamarin conservation: engaging rural Colombians, protecting the monkeys' remaining forest, and curbing the illegal pet trade. One of Guillen's most ambitious projects is a new system of wildlife corridors just west of the town of San Juan Nepomuceno, in the department of Bolívar. Those corridors will reclaim an additional 80 hectares (198 acres) of tití habitat.

Cotton-top tamarins are one of the world's most endangered primates, with fewer than about 7,400 remaining in the wild. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) designates them as Critically Endangered, in part because 92 percent of their historical habitat—the dry tropical forest with its towering ceiba and fruit-bearing yellow mombin trees—has been replaced with cow pasture, farm plots, and, most recently, palm oil plantations. The titís have gone from enjoying an estimated 9 million hectares (35,000 square miles) of forest, a region about the size of the state of Maine, to roaming a patchwork that totals just 720,000 hectares (2,800 square miles). But while deforestation may be the cotton-top tamarins' most present danger, it isn't the only threat they've faced.

Decades ago, biomedical researchers discovered that titís were suitable subjects for studies of colitis and colon cancer treatments. In addition, behavioral scientists have long been interested in studying the monkeys' cooperative breeding habits and reproductive hormones. But sustaining a lab colony of tamarins wasn't a matter of making a one-time visit to the Colombian jungle, says Charles Snowdon, a professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin who has studied cotton-top tamarins for decades. Because it's hard to breed the species in captivity, Snowdon explains, researchers kept going back to the wild for more research subjects. From the early 1960s through the 1970s, an estimated 20,000 to 40,000 cotton-top tamarins were exported from Colombia to Europe and the United States, putting a significant dent in the wild population.

The *costeños*, it seemed, were never told that their primate neighbors were in trouble. When Snowdon first traveled to Colombia in the late 1980s, villagers he met thought the monkeys were as plentiful as squirrels—and they had no idea titís were unique to Colombia. “They thought we had them in the United States,” he says. Had the locals known, he believes, they might have protested the mass export.

In 1982, in response to the combined impacts and threats of habitat destruction and biomedical plundering, cotton-top tamarins were listed as endangered, and their export for medical research was halted. Despite their ongoing protected status, and their listing as a top-priority species by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), however, titís continue to be illegally captured and moved out of Colombia. A simple Google or YouTube search will reveal how popular and far-flung the monkeys are as pets—for the same reasons Guillen fell in love with them. “Their sin is that beautiful white mane,” she says.

Once a week, Guillen travels to the bush to find wild cotton-top tamarins. Usually she heads to a small ranch in Santa Catalina, in the Colombian department of Bolívar, an hour-and-a-half drive southwest of Barranquilla. A few kilometers off the main road into the stubby hills, Guillen walks into the forest. The terrain is dry and sepia-colored for half the year, moist and verdant otherwise. Regardless of the season, what Guillen invariably stumbles onto is another chapter of the cotton-top histrionics that she and Proyecto Tití's biologists have been following for more than a decade.

One member of troop in this patch of forest is an individual Guillen calls “Tamara,” a crabby old cotton-top she’s known for most of the monkey’s life. Now, at 16—an age seldom seen in the wild—Tamara has almost 30 offspring to her name. For years, like most cotton-tops, she was monogamous. But now she has a new partner: “Octavio,” a strapping three-year-old. Guillen says Tamara also has a history of strong-arming females who get in her way, including her own mother.

“It’s like sitting down to watch a soap opera,” says Guillen. “Oh, check out Tamara, she’s being soannoying,” she says, recounting a recent episode in which the matriarch was being particularly crotchety. Then, as if the camera were panning over to a young tamarin nearby, she continues: “Look at the young one, no one’s paying attention to him!” And then, as if suddenly recognizing the significance of the young tití’s solitude, she corrects herself: “No, what’s happening is they’re leaving him to learn things on his own.”

As the youngest of 10 children—8 of them boys—Guillen is no stranger to complex family dynamics. Seeing so many human-like behaviors exhibited by one-pound monkeys never ceases to fascinate her. In fact, tití’s social structure is in some ways much like our own, most notably in how families share the responsibility of raising young, a practice known as cooperative breeding.

Cotton-tops typically give birth to twins, each weighing about 10 percent of the mother’s weight. Tití mothers rely on their mates, brothers, and other relatives to help staff the tree-top daycare. Savage, who has been working with cotton-top tamarins in Colombia since 1987, has found that sometimes, unrelated monkeys also chip in, an unexpected behavior in the primate world—most animals tend to raise only offspring they are closely related to. Gorillas, orangutans, and chimpanzees, for example, don’t engage in cooperative breeding. Among those apes, only the mothers care for young. That makes tamarins unusual. Add these selfless rearing habits to the tití’s complex repertoire of vocalizations, and interesting hormonal responses that are likely connected to their social behaviors, and there are plenty of reasons to continue studying them.

“After seeing these animals in captivity, there is nothing more fascinating or impactful than seeing the animals in their natural habitat,” says Guillen. That makes their precarious status all the more wrenching, she says. “Colombia is a beautiful country filled with natural landscapes, from snow-capped peaks to deserts, savannas to tropical forests. But it’s missing a lot of protection from the government.” Although Colombian officials have recently begun paying more attention to preserving the country’s natural resources, Guillen fears the protections needed to safeguard the tití’s may come too late. “It’s frustrating because by the time the government makes a decision, you’ve already lost the forest.”

An hour past the Santa Catalina field site, Guillen is leading a new project that she started more than two decades after she met her first cotton-top tamarins and launched a career in conservation. Outside Los Colorados National Park, in collaboration with farmers and landowners, Guillen is designing a web of forested corridors, each at least thirty meters wide, so the cotton-tops can travel between larger patches of habitat. “We want to reverse the process of fragmentation that has occurred due to cattle ranching,”

she says. “We’ve created a buffer around Los Colorados. The corridors we’re making are going to protect another 80 hectares.” Completing the project will require some land purchasing and negotiations with the local government and landowners, but Guillen is confident it will happen.

Once that’s done, Proyecto Tití’s tally of total forest it has protected will amount to more than 1,900 hectares, a little over 7 square miles. While Guillen knows that’s not a lot, it’s a start. After all, she says, protecting nature in Colombia is an uphill battle. As its decades-long civil war draws to an end, Colombia’s countryside is opening up to scientists, to tourists, and inevitably to business.

“We’ve been able to get to a lot of places we couldn’t before,” says Guillen. “But that’s a double-edged sword, because if we can get there, developers can get there too. Which is why we need careful planning from the government.”

Forest conservation isn’t the only tool in Proyecto Tití’s arsenal. At the heart of Guillen’s approach is her conviction that conservation work is synonymous with environmental education and income-generating community work. Towards that end, she is bringing the plight of the monkeys into the homes and schools of her fellow Colombians. Schoolchildren in the rural communities that abut the tití’s forests, for example, are learning about the cotton-top tamarins and the urgency of their conservation through coloring books, storytelling, and theater. Guillen and her team hope students will form an early bond with the monkeys and thus become a legion of stewards living near the titís. To combat the illegal pet trade, Proyecto Tití holds events boasting the virtues of keeping dogs rather than monkeys as pets. The wildlife trade is difficult to track, so it’s unclear how much these efforts have lowered the capture and sale of titís.

Proyecto Tití has also helped generate some modest income for people living near the tamarins’ habitat while also enlisting costeños to help draw attention to the animals’ plight and mitigate deforestation. Guillen says almost 100 local families are now involved in manufacturing tití-friendly products such as cotton-top tamarin plush toys and backpacks, plastic fence posts (to replace wooden fences), and cooking briquettes made from recycled organic waste instead of forest-sourced charcoal. Guillen hopes that all these activities will, by raising the profile of this special monkey, help stifle the pet trade, too.

The cultural sensitivity of Guillen’s approach has made it a model for animal conservation, says Guzman, of the Colombian Primatology Association. “What we’ve seen with Proyecto Tití is that they can change a paradigm, convince the community to value its natural resources, and make money off of the forest without defiling it,” she says. “They’re giving these communities a new identity.” Proyecto Tití’s model has also attracted attention from The Walt Disney Company, which has pledged money for the organization’s conservation and education programs. This is thanks in large part to Savage, Proyecto Tití’s founder and also the conservation director for Walt Disney Parks and Resorts.

The titís—and Guillen—still face an uphill battle. Proyecto Tití’s income-generating projects aren’t exactly get-rich-quick schemes—rural communities will need more support if they’re to resist the allure of deforestation. So far, the Colombian government has done little beyond preserving a few swaths of forest to support the cotton top tamarins’ conservation. And changing culture is a long process. Farmers have deeply held beliefs about the value of treeless pastures compared to intact forest; cattle ranchers know it’s cheaper to replace wooden fences twice a year than to invest in expensive plastic ones; and to many locals, the white-haired monkeys that swoop into their yards to steal fruit are nothing but a nuisance. For most rural Colombians, Guillen says, making ends meet will always outweigh protecting an endangered species.

“It’s a huge challenge,” she says as she prepares for another trip out into the field. “As with anything that depends on human nature in rural communities that have so many needs, it’s complicated.” That’s why conservation efforts need to include approaches that benefit everyone, she says. That message of mutual benefits of protecting the monkeys and the forest is what she brings to rural Colombians.

“What’s good for the tití is good for you, too. If you have forests, you have water, you have food sources, you have better climate regulation. And all that benefits us just like it benefits the tití. Don’t do this just because the tití is cute or Colombian. Do it because it will guarantee our food and physical security into the long term.”

<http://www.laht.com/article.asp?ArticleId=2440151&CategoryId=13936>

LATIN AMERICAN
Herald Tribune

Colombia Leads International Campaign to Save Cotton-Top Monkey

SANTA CATALINA, Colombia – The campaign launched by a Colombian architect to preserve the habitat of the cotton-top tamarin, an endangered monkey found only in the Caribbean region of her country, has won international recognition and the support of the entertainment giant Disney.

Behind this cause is Rosamira Guillen, an environmentalist who designed a multifaceted project that includes the protection of the tropical forests where the cotton-top tamarin (*Saguinus oedipus*) and another 800 species of plants and animals live, as well as programs to boost the economies of nearby communities.

Guillen was honored last month for the work she is doing with the annual prize awarded by the National Geographic Society and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, which promote conservation campaigns.

“The Tamarin Project Foundation combines scientific field research and strategies to protect the rainforests by means of environmental education and community development projects that make conservation of the region’s natural resources economically viable,” Guillen told EFE at the nature reserve in Santa Catalina municipality of Bolivar province.

Those backing the project include Walt Disney World’s Animal Kingdom theme park, along with wildlife and biodiversity protection organizations in Colombia, the United States, the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates.

In Colombia, the only country where this little monkey still exists, there are some 7,000 cotton-tops distributed across the Atlantico, Bolivar, Sucre and Cordoba provinces.

Guillen recalled that in the 1960s and 1970s, more than 30,000 of these animals were sent to the United States to be used for colon cancer research, which added to the ones exported to be sold as pets put the species in danger of extinction.

The Tamarin Project was started in 1985 in Coloso, a town in Sucre province, as a

research study by American biologist Anne Savage, but due to the raging violence and constant threats from guerrilla groups in that area, she had to move to Santa Catalina.

At the same time another project was started in San Juan Nepuceno, a town in the Montes de Maria mountains, which rise between Bolivar and Sucre provinces.

Guillen, who got involved in the project when she was working as director of the Barranquilla zoo, noted that this work “is focused on the preservation of the cotton-top tamarin as a symbol of the Colombian Caribbean, the only place in the world that is still home to the few remaining monkeys of this species.

<http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2017/06/16/national-geographic-buffet-awards-2017-rosamira-guillen-and-olivier-nsengimana/>



National Geographic Buffet Awards 2017: Rosamira Guillen and Olivier Nsengimana

by **David Maxwell Braun** of National Geographic Society in Explorers Journal on June 16, 2017



Colombian Rosamira Guillen, left, is executive director of Fundación Proyecto Tití, an organization dedicated to the protection and conservation of one of her country's most

endangered native primate species: the cotton-top tamarin. Olivier Nsengimana, a veterinarian and founder of the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association, designed a unique conservation project to save his country's endangered grey crowned-crane from the illegal wildlife trade. Photograph by Rebecca Hale/NGS.

What do two Endangered enigmatic animals — a majestic wading bird in Africa and an adorable monkey with a shock of white hair in South America — have in common at the National Geographic Explorers Festival? They each have a remarkable champion advocating and working for their survival who have been recognized with the 2017 National Geographic Society/ Buffet Award for Leadership in Conservation.

The annual National Geographic Society/ Buffett Awards for Leadership in Conservation were established by the Society and The Howard G. Buffett Foundation to recognize and celebrate unsung heroes working in the field. Two awards are presented each year: one for achievement in Africa (established in 2002) and the other for achievement in Latin America (established in 2005).

Meet the 2017 award-winners:

Olivier Nsengimana, a veterinarian and founder of the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association, designed a unique conservation project to save his country's endangered grey crowned-crane from the illegal wildlife trade.

Colombian **Rosamira Guillen** is executive director of Fundación Proyecto Tití, an organization dedicated to the protection and conservation of one of her country's most endangered native primate species: the cotton-top tamarin.

National Geographic Voices met with Nsengimana and Guillen during this week's National Geographic Society [Explorers Festival](#) in Washington, D.C. We were curious to know what they had in common and how they may learn from one another, and how the rest of the world may learn from them.

David Braun: Each of you has been inspired by a particular animal to go on to advocate and work for the greater cause of protecting their natural environment. How did those animals come to play such an important role in your life?



*A Critically Endangered cotton-top tamarin, *Saguinus oedipus*, at the Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington, Illinois, U.S. As few as 6,000 individuals may survive in the wild, according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Photograph by Joel Sartore, National Geographic Photo Ark. Click on the photograph to learn more about Photo Ark.*

Guillen: The [cotton-top tamarin](#) has very shocking white hair, crazy Einstein-style hair. That's the feature everybody remembers it by. But what really shocked me about it as a species is that it is found only in the very northern part of my country, Colombia, and that it is Critically Endangered. That's what really motivated and impressed me, not coming from a science background, to get involved, change my career so that I could devote my professional life to doing something about saving these species.

Nsengimana: My inspiration came from training to be a veterinarian, mostly in the livestock industry. I interned with Gorilla Doctors, working for mountain gorillas, and became inspired by doing something for a Critically Endangered species, a good cause. I realized that this was me, what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. As I worked with them, and started studying for my Master's, I realized that the species I grew up with, the [grey crowned-crane](#), a beautiful bird that I used to see in wetlands when I went to fetch water, were no longer there, and no one was doing anything to help them. So that's when I decided to do something to help make sure that this species did not become history in my country.

So both of you have latched on to a specific species that you are using almost as an icon or a big flag to encourage people to be aware and help care for the greater ecosystem?

Guillen: That's exactly correct. That's the link we make in all of our awareness programs with people and communities and the general audience, that the animal is a symbol, an ambassador, a spokes-species, for the whole ecosystem that is threatened, and if you save forests for these species, you save the forest for many other species of

the wildlife of Colombia— and the benefits that the forests provide to people, like water, food, shelter. We try to make that connection, but the charismatic species is a good way to generate attention and interest in every audience. The fact that is found only in this very little corner of one country...

Nsengimana: Yeah, it's the same for the grey-crowned cranes. These birds rely on wetlands for survival, and with such an increase in human population in our country, and the demand for more food, a lot of wetlands are being transformed for agriculture. In addition, there is a trade where people want them for pets, something nice for their garden. In my country, owning a crane is seen as a symbol of wealth and longevity, so many people want to have that status.

When we say we are saving the cranes, it is really that we are saving a whole ecosystem, because if we can save the cranes in their own habitat we are also saving so many other species, like amphibians and reptiles that rely on the same habitat. There are also ecosystem services, like water from wetlands and carbon sequestration. We try show people that saving the birds provides services for people. We try to give people ownership and pride in saving this bird in its ecosystem.

Braun: Is the crane the national bird of Rwanda?

Nsengimana: No, it's the national bird of Uganda. But in Rwanda it used to be a tradition that families were associated with specific animals. So the crane is a family bird for several families in Rwanda. My family, for example, used to have the wagtail as its bird. Other families had cranes, while some other families had animals such as frogs. When we were young the respect we showed for our friends and their families extended to respect for the animals associated with those families. If my friend's family animal was the leopard, I would not think or do any harm to a leopard, out of respect for that family. It was a nice concept for conservation.

Braun: How about in Colombia? Is there also an affinity with animals?

Guillen: Yeah, but it's more a lack of awareness that leads people to buying from wildlife traffickers species that are beautiful and different, so that you can brag that you have a pet no one else has. The cotton-top, because of its beauty and the lack of awareness that it is found only in this small region, drives part of the traffic. One of the things we are working on is just creating enough awareness that it takes for people to understand that this animal can become a symbol of Colombian biodiversity, because it is found only in this country, so it is our responsibility to care for it and protect it. It's the only place in the world where you can find this cute, crazy little monkey.

Braun: It sounds like you're both trying to turn exotic pets into national symbols of wildlife.

Guillen: Once you know and understand the cultural value, the biodiversity value of a species, you're more prone to do something about it. If you create the right conditions then that can happen, especially for those who hunt the animal. There is an economic issue there, generating an income from that, so it's hard work. But you have to find alternatives for these people to make a living in a way that doesn't harm the environment. That's part of the community work we do, to reduce the threat and then reduce the purchase. Try to work on both ends, where we see people buying animals and, in the rural areas, people hunting the animals for sale.

Braun: You did not know one another before winning the Buffet Award, but are you already discussing how you can help one another?

Guillen: We've been listening to each other, reading about the other.

Nsengimana: There are pretty similar issues, but we are listener to one another to see what we can apply to our situations.

Guillen: Meeting conservationists from different parts of the world makes you realize the challenges are the same, although you really need to take into account the context in which you work — some things work, some things don't. But it's great to see hoe creative people get around the world trying to approach the same issue, and you really learn from one another, and that has an amazing value.

Braun: We have heard from other explorers and projects, such as in the case of Pristine Seas, there is real economic value in creating special zones to protect wildlife and wild places, so that instead of there being a sink there can be places where wildlife can flourish and replenish adjacent areas. Those areas can also be sources of economic value, providing eco-services, not only in wetlands and canopies, but also in the form of eco-tourism. Do you think working to protect your special species can also create new opportunities for tourism?

Nsengimana: Yeah, this bird we are working with is iconic and lives in big wetlands. My country is trying to promote avitourism [tourism for birders] because we are really diverse in birds. We are trying to get the government to help with policies so that those communities living near wetlands can both help protect and benefit from ecotourism. We are trying to set up tourism infrastructure and marketing, training guides, even former poachers, training them to manage the whole thing. Research has shown that people who come for the gorillas stay only for a day and a half, see the gorillas and then go to another country. If we could hold them for more days, that's extra income, money the country is making, and benefits for everyone.

Guillen: Same on our end. Once you create visibility for the species, there is interest in visiting them. So we have to educate to create awareness, and also to generate income for the communities. We aren't doing this at the moment, but we are seriously trying to understand what it takes, but also finding out how to do it so that it doesn't affect the habitat, because the cotton-tops are found only in small fragmented habitat. We really need to be careful. It has to be something low-impact and low-scale. But yes, this is something that can really help create a sense of ownership on the part of the local communities.

Braun: How do you fell about receiving the Buffet Award?

Guillen: It is an important opportunity that give us both international visibility for our work, and also nationally, because sometimes we go quietly working, and because there are so many issues in both our countries, wildlife doesn't get enough attention, and people don't realize how important it is. Environmental issues are all over the place and affect everything humans do, so

Braun: Both your countries have had troubled pasts, so it's good to see this kind of work and recognition for the environment.

Guillen: Exactly, and still some of that going on, so biodiversity and environmental issues are at the bottom of the list of priorities, even though by law they are supposed to be on top of the agenda, so this kind of opportunity helps us increase the profile and generates attention, and the visibility and prestige we get from this award from National Geographic means a lot to us, and I know it means a lot to Olivier too.

Nsengimana: It's exactly what I want to say. For a country like ours, we have had a difficult time, but now we are really stable and trying to grow economically, so there are a lot of priorities. One of the priorities is conservation. We are looking at gorilla

conservation to provide funds to deploy to other areas, to other species and ecosystems in need. When they see someone like me being recognized with a great award it's good because it increases our profile and makes it easier for our work. Collaboration becomes easier. This is really so important for the work we are doing.

Braun: There are no strings attached to the award, but have you thought about what you might do with it?

Guillen: We've been struggling to find enough funds for a census of the cranes. The numbers we are using are based on estimates. We are going to hire a helicopter to do an aerial survey, but then do some ground surveys as well in some small fragmented areas.

Nsengimana: We want to build a research station to study the cotton-tops on a property we have, that can also serve as place where children can visit and see the research. It can also be a place where we can habituate= tamarin groups so that we can bring people in and generate this awareness we are hoping for.

Dr. Rosamira Guillen is a Colombian landscape architect and environmental designer-turned-conservationist. She cofounded and is now executive director of Fundación



Proyecto Tití, an organization dedicated to the protection and conservation of one of Colombia's most endangered native primate species: the cotton-top tamarin.

After training as an architect and pursuing a master's degree in landscape architecture at the State University of New York in Syracuse, Guillen was hired to design and implement a remodeling master plan for the Barranquilla Zoo in her hometown of Barranquilla, Colombia. In 2001, she was named director of the zoo. It was through her work there that she learned about wildlife issues and discovered cotton-top tamarins, a species native to

northern Colombia that is critically endangered due to deforestation and the illegal pet trade.

"Even though I was always interested in nature and the environment, I didn't know much about wildlife," Guillen said. "I couldn't believe that this primate species was only found in this region of my country and that, growing up, I had never heard about how special and important cotton-tops were for our biodiversity and for the conservation of their tropical forest home."

As director of the zoo, Guillen prioritized awareness and education efforts to support cotton-top tamarin conservation, highlighting wildlife issues and the challenges that Colombia's native species face due to the impact of human activities. Guillen's team built a new exhibit for the tamarins and conducted awareness, media and education campaigns for the zoo's visitors and local schools to draw attention to the charismatic primate.

In 2004, Guillen cofounded Fundación Proyecto Tití, a Colombian non-governmental organization created to lead conservation efforts on behalf of cotton-top tamarins and

their forest home. Initially volunteering as executive director, she joined the organization full-time in 2008.

Fundación Proyecto Titi has raised the profile of cotton-tops in Colombia and abroad while increasing the reach and scope of its conservation efforts. During Guillen's tenure, Fundación Proyecto Titi's research led to the International Union for Conservation of Nature classifying the cotton-top tamarin as "Critically Endangered" in 2008 and as one of the "World's 25 Most Endangered Primates" in 2009. The foundation also helped stop construction of an airport in critical cotton-top habitat; supported the designation of forest protected areas and creation of a biological reserve to protect cotton-tops in perpetuity; and established conservation agreements with 26 local landowners in 2016 alone.

Guillen also developed innovative projects to support the local communities living near cotton-top tamarin habitat. These include educational programs; teaching community members to use fuel-efficient stoves; and working with local women to create and sell tote bags made from recycled plastic bags found in the forest.

"Our intention is to protect cotton-top tamarins and guarantee a long-term future for this species," said Guillen. "We want to make cotton-tops a symbol of Colombia's biodiversity and thus generate pride in supporting the conservation of this amazing animal."

Guillen's many awards include the 2015 Whitley Award from the Whitley Fund for Nature and a Fulbright Scholarship from 1991 to 1993.

Previous winner

Alexander Rukhaia

Georgia

2016

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

**Winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Garfield Weston
Foundation**

Alex received five pieces of press coverage this year, including two appearances on Georgian television and an article in Geographical magazine. The following is a selection of his coverage. Alex's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

Real Space – TV Talk Show, Georgia
13 December 2017

<http://1tv.ge/en/videos/view/175277/294.html>

REAL SPACE

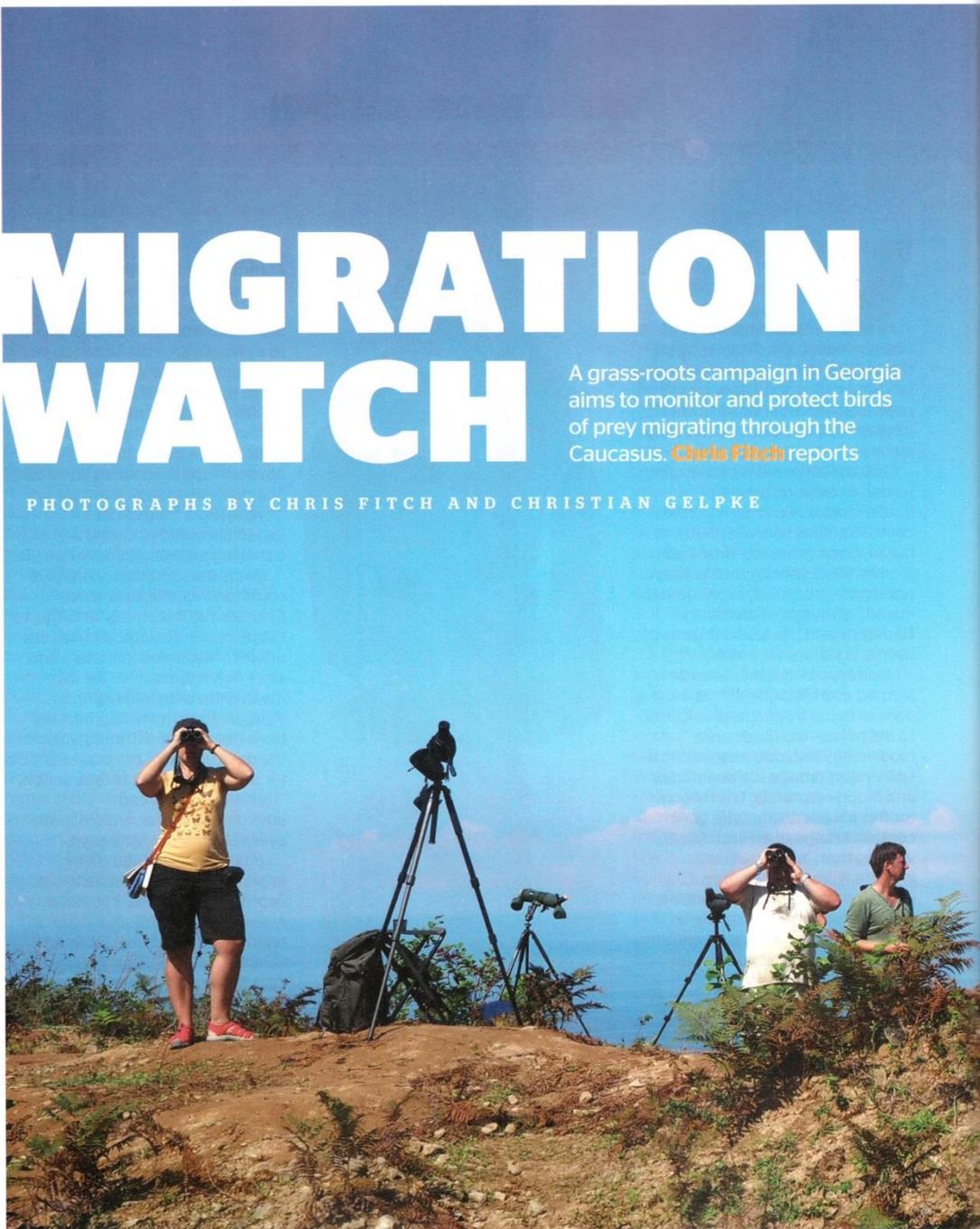
Real Space, a social talk show aired on the First Channel of Georgian Public Broadcaster.



MIGRATION WATCH

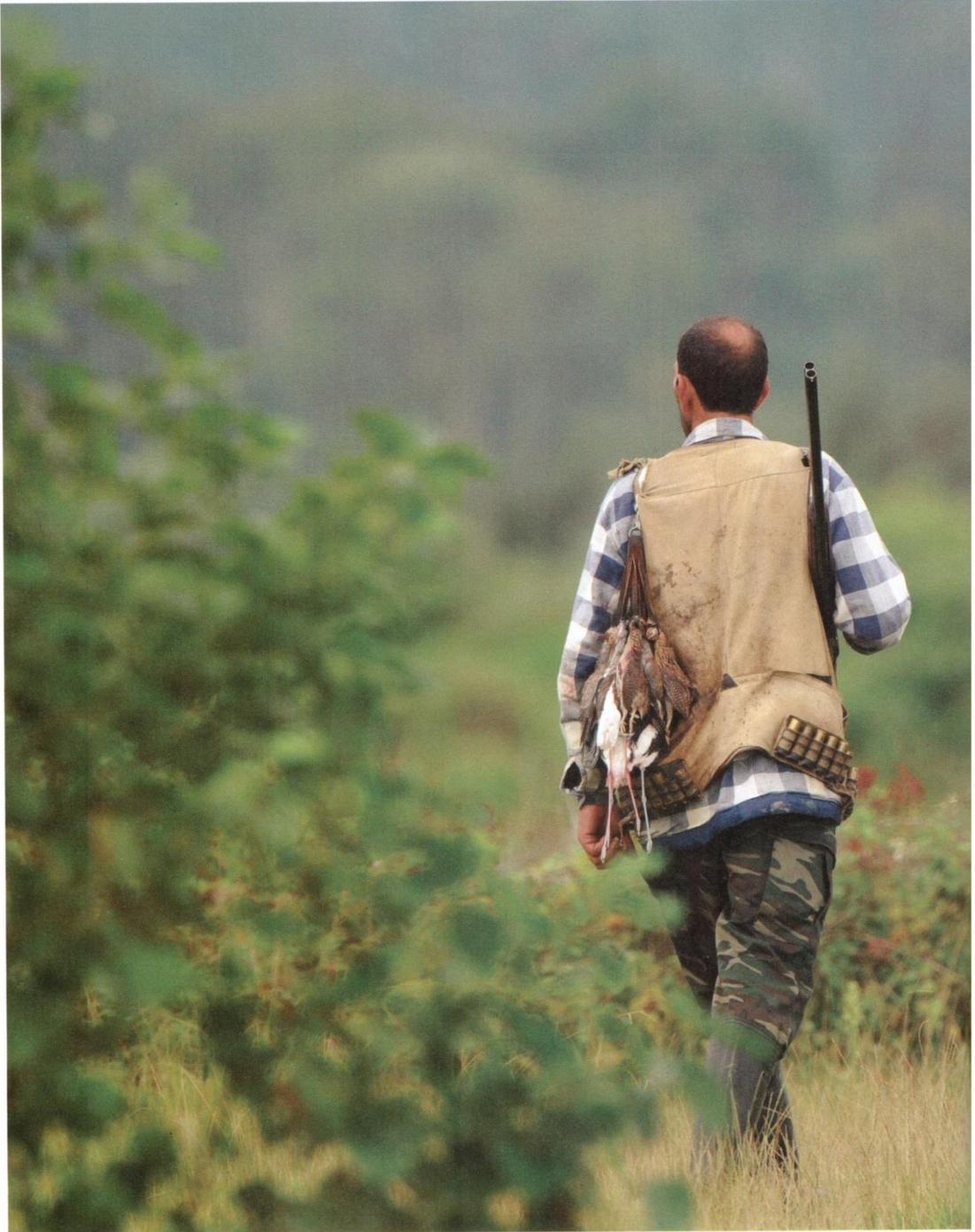
A grass-roots campaign in Georgia aims to monitor and protect birds of prey migrating through the Caucasus. **Chris Fitch** reports

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS FITCH AND CHRISTIAN GELPKE





Local organisation SABUKO promotes Batumi, Georgia, as a birdwatching hotspot, providing an alternative income for local hunters



While not a traditional pastime, hunting birds of prey has become increasingly popular despite being illegal



Twice a year, for up to eight weeks at a time, the skies above western Georgia darken, as thousands upon thousands of birds of prey fill the air. With up to 100,000 flying overhead daily, over a million birds will pass through each season. Depending on the time of year, they are either heading south to winter in Africa, or returning to Eastern Europe or Russia for summer - one of three main flyways between the two continents.

For species that rely on thermal air currents for gliding, such as buzzards and eagles, it is essential to utilise flat land routes for long-distance migrations. Thanks to the topography of the Caucasus region, these enormous numbers of birds passing overhead become channelled into a 10km wide narrow strip of land between the Black Sea and the mountains, known as the 'Batumi Bottleneck'. Unsurprisingly, it's a hotspot for birdwatchers. It also attracts local hunters.

'A very big percentage of the Georgian population hunts,' admits Alexander Rukhaia, director of SABUKO, a Georgian nature conservation organisation, 'especially along the Black Sea coast, where the migration is very active'. SABUKO is a leading voice in combating the popularity of illegal raptor hunting - primarily for sport, but sometimes also for food - in this part of the world.

KILLING GROUNDS

Rukhaia and his team agreed to let me tag along for a morning of surveying as they headed into the hills around Dagva, a popular spot for local hunters. As soon as we arrive, the evidence is all too clear to see. We have barely stepped out of our cars and shaken hands before Aslan Bolkvadze, a young, local SABUKO biologist, is calling us over to look at a cluster of feathers scattered on the ground. He leans down, and picks up a complete wing, glorious in colour and pattern, but hanging limp and pathetic without its owner.

'This was a honey buzzard, a female,' he says, parting the feathers to get a closer look. 'You can tell by the colours.' He pulls out his camera and snaps a few shots of the wing before taking a pair of scissors to the magnificent spread of feathers (by cutting off the ends, the team will know that this bird's death has already been recorded).

It's a predictable discovery. Honey buzzards are the most frequently observed raptors to migrate through the bottleneck; as many as half a million pass through each autumn. Over 250,000 steppe buzzards are the next most common, followed by around 50,000 black kites, and thousands of harriers, sparrowhawks, and eagles. These huge numbers - which first came to light when over 800,000 birds were counted in a single season in 2008 - are why the Batumi Bottleneck is likely Eurasia's most important autumn flyway.



As we hike up to the summit, we are continually forced to stop by fresh batches of feathers, sprayed across bushes and terrain as though the birds had spontaneously exploded. At each spot, Bolkvadze repeats his procedure: study, photo, cut. 'No identification,' he murmurs at one of them, sifting through the wreckage in search of some distinguishable marking. 'Maybe a sparrowhawk.' As we walk on, my boots can't help but crunch over the occasional discarded rifle cartridge, the colourful plastic casings standing out in sharp contrast to the natural foliage.

GROWING AWARENESS

Georgia is a party to the Bonn Convention, which commits it to suppressing the illegal 'taking' of listed migratory species through hunting, capturing or killing. However, the law is poorly enforced, especially in the coastal region of Adjara. Hunting birds of prey was allowed during the Soviet era, and growing wealth and prosperity in Georgia has seen an influx of guns flowing into the hands of hunters.

'Hunting, with guns, has never been a culture in Georgia,' insists Rukhaia. 'Many people are mistaken. Wild falconry, yes. Falconry has been a very long tradition. But now it's really disgusting. Hunting [with guns] has never been a tradition, so anyone who says this, it is a mistake.'

SABUKO's work involves everything from helping injured birds, like this Montagu's harrier, to counting the number shot from the sky, to hosting local educational seminars

SABUKO (sabuko.org) - which emerged in 2014 from what was once the Georgian Centre for the Conservation of Wildlife - is a small team funded by public memberships and donations. They focus both on raising awareness about the raptor migration, and educating local people about its importance; why it is something they should care about. By monitoring raptor numbers, observing shooting activity, and raising general awareness of the significance of the migration, they have overseen success stories such as an 80 per cent reduction in the number of birds killed in two key villages. They also arrange educational seminars for hunters and non-hunters alike, in an effort to spread the conservation word across the region.

What was undoubtedly helpful was a ceremony at the RGS-IBG in April 2016 that saw Rukhaia and SABUKO awarded £35,000 from the Whitley Fund for Nature. 'Everything good came after this,' he enthuses. 'It was very powerful.' With the publicity that followed the ceremony - which included photos of Rukhaia alongside patron HRH The Princess Royal, as well as a short film narrated by trustee David Attenborough - came a major influx of support, including official recognition from Georgia's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection. The award money will enable SABUKO to expand into six new villages, each with their own local hunting hotspots.

GATHERING EVIDENCE

'We call it the hunter trail,' Rukhaia says, pointing at a well-worn gap between a grouping of bushes. I follow his gaze, spotting a number of feathers on the floor leading up the same path into the surrounding vegetation. We continue up a steep trail, squeezing between the greenery, until we reach a small clearing near the summit. A series of thick poles lashed together with string forms a rudimentary shelter, surrounded by litter, indicating this is a favoured spot for local hunters.

Due to the need to access sites such as this for the annual count, SABUKO has a tense but working relationship with the hunters. 'Some of them might be aggressive,' admits Rukhaia, 'because they know everything they do is illegal.' On the walk up, it had been suggested that, with today being so hot, the birds might be flying higher than normal, making poor conditions for shooting. The emptiness of the hideout proves this to be correct.

Rukhaia begins peering through the surrounding bushes. In almost no time at all we find ourselves running over to where he has uncovered a huge pile of feathers and body parts - what must be several birds' worth - scattered in a giant pile all over the floor. A swarm of flies buzzes excitedly over the scene of the massacre.

Bolkvadze charges straight in, on the hunt for identifiable body parts. Like a stage magician pulling a chain of handkerchiefs from his pocket, he extracts more and more frayed wings from the pile, swearing increasingly loudly under his breath with each new discovery.

After finding as many complete body parts as he thinks he can, Bolkvadze takes various wings and attempts to pair them up. Out comes the bird identification book and frenzied discussions ensue over what exactly we are staring at, whether common kestrel, red-footed falcon, or others. Eventually, when all are happy with the decisions, Bolkvadze tapes together the parts he believes to be connected and drops them in a bag, ready to be taken away for further analysis.

I'm grateful for the shelter of the hunters' hide as protection from the heat of the rising sun. To the north, a few birds – two, three, four, begin soaring high above, their distinctive circling on display as they ride thermals upwards. My untrained eye is unable to tell what I'm looking at, but I'm soon informed they are two marsh harriers, one honey buzzard, and a Montagu's harrier. Binoculars held firmly to my eyes, I follow one individual as he works his way up the thermal, before suddenly taking off over the hillside, heading east.

Suddenly Bolkvadze bursts out of the bushes, clutching another clump of feathers. Except, these ones are still moving. It's a live bird, a Montagu's harrier, the size of a small rugby ball. One wing hangs limply from its side, a bloody smear running all the way up its body – the clear path of a bullet. Bolkvadze gently ties up its feet to stop it attempting to flee, carefully dabs some water on its beak, and sets it down in the cool shade. The animal's fear is obvious; its mottled light and dark body rapidly rising and falling with its quick breathing.

The exact numbers of birds like this one shot down during the migration periods is hard to know for certain, but estimates range from 7,000 to over 30,000, according to SABUKO and international conservation partnership Birdlife. These all just feel like abstract numbers until you find yourself sat next a potentially-mortally wounded individual, hurt and scared, entirely dependent on the healing of its damaged limb for survival.

TOURIST SEASON

Half an hour down the road, having dropped off the injured harrier at a makeshift bird hospital, Rukhaia and I enjoy some slices of fresh watermelon outside Ruslan Dilaverov, a guesthouse in the village of Sakhalvasho. Overlooking the Chakui lowlands, it's one of the two villages where raptor hunting has experienced a dramatic drop-off.

This is also the epicentre of SABUKO's sister organisation, Batumi Birding (www.batumbirding.com), which works to promote bird-watching in the region. 'The idea is that this is a travel agency for ecotourism, bird-watching, photography, eco-photography, nature photography, whatever,' Rukhaia explains. 'Then the profit of this company comes to SABUKO, to support its conservation activities.'

Batumi Birding also oversees the letting of houses in the village to guests arriving for the

main bird-watching seasons, helping local residents with the process of letting out their spare rooms to those visiting the region with aspirations of following the raptor migration. 'People have an alternative source for income, an alternative to hunting,' he explains, pointing at various houses perched on the side of the hill, signalling which are the twenty-five Batumi Birding guesthouses. 'Those are all former hunters, two or three hunters in a family, so a few generations of hunters. They've never run a guesthouse business before. We've taught them.'

Exact numbers of birds shot down during the migration periods is hard to know, but estimates range from 7,000 to over 30,000 annually

Nearby sits Sakhalvasho watchpoint, one of two specially-run bird-watching points in the area (the village of Shuamta housing the other). As we walk up some battered steps to the top, I'm expecting to see one, maybe two, tourists who have made the trek to this sleepy mountain village. Instead, I'm amazed to see whole groups of people camped out on the summit, a hubbub of excitement simmering as professionals and amateurs alike scan the skies with their gigantic camera lenses, hoping to spot a rare species and willing those faintly visible in the distance to come closer. One man points far off towards the horizon, commenting loudly on the birds we can see flying high along the crests of the mountains.

A green string tied up between poles divides the official Batumi Raptor Count volunteer counters – whose job it is to keep an accurate and reliable count of the number of birds passing by here on a daily basis – from the tourists and bird-spotters from around the world who have made this relatively remote part of the world their destination of choice.

SPREADING WINGS

The next step for SABUKO is extending this tourism/bird-watching model into the six new villages. 'We know that the method is very successful,' says Rukhaia. 'This is a success story, a best practice which we would like to bring to all those places as well.'

Crucially, the educational events they host locally, where local hunters are urged to put down their guns and join the movement as a bird watcher or a tourist host, are focused largely on the youth. 'It's very important to work with the new generation,' he insists. 'They grow up together with us. They grow up with this idea. It's not going to happen in one or two days, but one day, you will see the results.'

Previous winner

Farwiza Farhan

Indonesia

2016

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

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

Farwiza received substantial press coverage this year, with 17 pieces in total. Media interest in her project to save the Leuser Ecosystem peaked when Leonardo di Caprio visited the area when filming his award-winning documentary, *Before The Flood*, in which Farwiza is featured. The following is a selection of Farwiza's coverage. Her WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

Time – Print & Online Magazine, US
17 January 2017

<http://time.com/4635994/leuser-national-park-unesco-sumatra-aceh/>

TIME | World



This picture taken in Leuser National park, South Aceh on April 16, 2016 shows Indonesian mahouts and elephants conducting a patrol along the Leuser Ecosystem corridor close to palm oil plantations in South Aceh. Chaideer Mahyuddin—AFP/Getty Images

A Provincial Government in Indonesia Wants to Develop UNESCO World Heritage Rainforest

Jonathan Emont / Banda Aceh

Jan 17, 2017

A burly russet-haired male orangutan swings through the trees of Leuser National Park, a massive rainforest habitat in Northern Sumatra, attempting to chase off a band of hikers who have appeared in his section of forest. Not far away, a massive blue-brown peacock

caws, seeking out a mate. It is just a few miles of hiking from the base camp of Bukit Lawang, but the Sumatran rainforest buzzes with the sounds of animal life: monkey's hoots, warbles of tropical birds, the buzzing of insects.

The Leuser ecosystem is the largest intact rainforest in Sumatra, and a UNESCO World Heritage site that is treasured for its extraordinary biodiversity: it's the only place left on earth where rhinos, elephants, tigers, and orangutans roam in a single forest. Leuser's international profile was raised last year when Leonardo DiCaprio visited the rainforest and included scenes of Leuser's forest in his climate-change documentary *Before the Flood*.

But according to the provincial government's most recent forest mapping, the Leuser ecosystem doesn't exist. The Acehese regional government's plan for developing the forest does not acknowledge Leuser as a cohesive habitat and earmarks more than half of the ecosystem for potential development, in a stark break from previous government plans for the forest. In late 2016, the Aceh governor's office even declared its support for a plan by a Turkish energy company, HT Hitay, to build a massive geothermal-energy plant in the heart of the ecosystem — including in parts that are part of protected national park.

“The government's orientation is towards money, not towards preserving the forest,” says Nurul Ikhsan, an environmentalist with Forest, Nature and Environment of Aceh, a local environmental NGO better known by its stylized Indonesian initials HAKA. “Once major development happens it's impossible to cancel the effects,” he says, sitting in HAKA's small office above a pharmacy in Banda Aceh, the regional capital.

Farwiza Farhan, the chairperson of HAKA, stands in front of a map in the office, showing how key paths elephants take through the forest could be disrupted by the intended plant. Her organization, along with a number of other local environmental groups, sued the regional government to rescind its spatial plan for forest development, arguing that it is incompatible with national regulations on forestry maintenance. In late November, a court rejected the suit, though the coalition of local environmental groups has since appealed.

“The question is, Is there a real willingness, a political desire, to protect the forest?” Farwiza asks.



Sumatran Orangutans Seen At Gunung Leuser National Park Sumatran Orangutans enjoy their day on the trees of Leuser National Park on May 18, 2016, in Indonesia Lana Priatna/Barcroft Images/Getty Images

There's reason to wonder. Indonesia, which has Asia's largest tract of forest, is destroying its rainforests at one of the fastest rates of any other country in the world. The WWF estimates that well over half of Sumatra Island's rainforest has been cut down over the past three decades, to make way for hardwood and palm-oil plantations. In 2015, massive man-made forest fires burned down more than 8,000 sq. mi. of rainforest, which led President Joko Widodo to respond with a series of forestry reforms, including a moratorium on new permits for palm-oil plantations.

The only reason Leuser has survived, alone among Sumatra's large rainforest ecosystems, is because of civil war. For nearly three decades, separatist Islamist rebels in Aceh hid out in the forest in their fight for independence from the national government, making development of the forest impossible. But after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami devastated Aceh province, killing around 230,000 Acehnese, the region's Islamist rebels sued for peace. Beginning in 2005, they left the forest, formed political parties, and began governing the province, which has special autonomy from Jakarta, and is the only province in Indonesia that has established Shari'a law.

“During the conflict, the historical logging and palm-oil concessions had been abandoned, the forests were actually regenerating quite healthfully,” said Shayne McGrath, an environmentalist from New Zealand who has worked closely with Sumatran environmental organizations for over a decade. “After the tsunami and the peace accords, trees started falling again.”

The destruction is happening quickly. The current governor, Zaini Abdullah, has been panned by local and international environmentalists for failing to protect the rainforest. He disbanded the province’s forest-protection unit immediately after becoming governor, and offered his written support for the development of the Turkish geothermal plant in the center of the ecosystem. (Both the governor’s and vice governor’s campaign teams turned down numerous requests for an interview.) Environmental groups have recorded substantial evidence of forest and peatland destruction in crucial areas of the Leuser ecosystem during Zaini’s term, including in the Tripa swamp region that has one of the worlds’ greatest density of orangutan populations.

Still, local politicians are beginning to speak up about preserving the forest. Irwan Johan, a young reformist politician dressed in a crisp gray suit, who heads the state parliament's recently created Sustainable Development Caucus, credits local environmentalists with educating him about the importance of protecting Leuser ecosystem. He refers to Leuser as “Aceh’s extraordinary treasure” and has spoken out strongly in the local media against the proposed geothermal plant. But he acknowledges it’s an uphill battle persuading voters and other politicians to embrace forest protection in this underdeveloped province.

“The local communities think, ‘If the geothermal plant is built, every household will have electricity.’ For the communities this [idea] is very positive.”

Regional elections are scheduled for February, and a new governor will almost certainly be sworn in. Aryos Nivada, who leads a politically independent polling operation, says the current governor, who has lost the support of even his own party, is polling in the single digits.

“A lot of it does hinge on the upcoming election. If you can get real leadership in Aceh, it will change the game,” says McGrath.

Some environmentalists have placed their hopes on the complex and colorful former governor Irwandi Yusuf, who is a leading candidate to regain his old seat. Upon taking office in 2007, Irwandi became known as the “green governor,” for placing a moratorium on unauthorized logging and expanding the area of the Leuser ecosystem that was protected from development.

In an interview outside his modest home, Irwandi says that the current governor, Zaini, overturned his efforts to protect his forest. “Every program that had to do with me, he got rid of,” Irwandi says of Zaini.

Irwandi said that if elected, he would review the government's plans to establish the geothermal plant, protect a greater swath of forest than is allowed for in the current governor's plan, and revive the forest-protection task force he established. Irwandi mourns what he says is a rise in illegal logging since he left office, and the ecological damage it causes.

"Now if there's lots of rain, there are floods everywhere. And if there isn't rain for two weeks, the rivers dry out," he says.

But his political opponents, as well as environmentalists, point out that Irwandi's environmental record is far from perfect. Toward the end of his term, he sold rights to develop a small portion of the Leuser ecosystem to developers, a charge Irwandi doesn't deny. Irwandi said he did this to send a message to international donors who didn't provide sufficient funds to be paid out as compensation in forest-protection schemes.

"They enjoyed the moratorium on logging, but they didn't join the effort. How can I be 'the green governor' [in that situation]?" he asked.

Irwandi is ahead in the race according to many polls, but elections in Aceh are rarely straightforward. Voter intimidation by former rebels could shift the election to Vice Governor Muzakir Manaf, a more conservative rival, who is backed by the Aceh Party — the main party of the former rebels. After the last election five years ago, where he was defeated in the polls, Irwandi was badly beaten by a group of men believed to support his political rivals.

Farwiza suggests it is unlikely that a leader with an ironclad commitment to protecting the forest will emerge from the possibly messy regional election.

"They say that Leuser is too large [so] we need to cut it. [But] Leuser is an ecosystem that's like a human body. You can't say you don't need your neck or you don't need your feet. You can't say we'll just take a little bit of your ear," she says. "You'll be impaired. You won't die, but you won't function properly."

[https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jun/26/palm-oil-business-consumers-sustainability-indonesia-leuser-mondelez-marks-spencer-
lush](https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jun/26/palm-oil-business-consumers-sustainability-indonesia-leuser-mondelez-marks-spencer-lush)



'It's up to us': why business needs to take a stand on palm oil

Consumers have long been encouraged to shop with sustainability in mind. But when it comes to palm oil, the power to effect industry-wide change is in the hands of business

While some companies have removed palm oil from their products completely, others have argued that a full boycott is neither possible nor desirable. Photograph: Hotli Simanjuntak/EPA

Dominic Bates

Monday 26 June 2017 11.35

For many ethical consumers, palm oil is a dirty word. Its association with deforestation, the destruction of local communities and forced labour – particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia – makes buying a jar of peanut butter no easy task. Some choose to look for assurances on the label that the palm oil inside has been ethically sourced, while others simply try to avoid buying products made using the commodity.

Palm oil is in more than half of all packaged goods, including makeup, cleaning products and numerous household-favourite foods. And its derivatives are often hidden on product labels under obscure names, such as “ethyl palmitate”. But even if you buy palm oil certified as sustainable, there are criticisms that the current industry standards still allow for rainforest destruction and poor practices.

With public confidence in palm oil fractured, should brands that make a point of sourcing sustainable palm oil even risk trying to engage with their customers on the controversial topic?

This was discussed at a seminar hosted by the Guardian and supported by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), a sustainability body for the palm oil industry. Both the smaller and multinational businesses represented on the panel, which was chaired by the Guardian's Laura Paddison, agreed that while public engagement is

still important, the responsibility for sourcing sustainable palm oil should fall on businesses, not consumers.

Take the burden off shoppers

Hilary Jones, ethical director at cosmetics company Lush, told the audience of experts at the event: “It’s up to us to make those decisions at company level so that the customer isn’t faced with: ‘Is this the good one or the bad one?’”

Fiona Wheatley, sustainable development manager for Marks & Spencer – which was recently heralded by WWF as one of the British companies “leading the way” on sourcing sustainable palm oil – was also in favour of taking the burden off shoppers. “We don’t believe there should be a choice between sustainable and non-sustainable palm oil. Sustainability should be viewed in exactly the same way as food safety: a non-negotiable that is embedded into every strand of how we do business.” It’s not just “a lovely little story” to tell customers, she said.

The real purchase power lies further up the chain, said Jones, who pointed out that companies are “far bigger consumers than the person trying to choose a jar of peanut butter”.

If leading companies are now committed to sustainable palm oil, are they doing enough to win the public’s trust on its provenance?

“It’s going to take a significant amount of time to transform an entire sector,” said Jonathan Horrell, director of sustainability at Mondelez International.

“One of the things that will drive that shift is transparency and much greater levels of traceability right back to the mill,” he said. Despite this, Mondelez doesn’t share details of its palm oil suppliers, which Horrell said is commercially guarded data.

Slow progress

When it comes to the numerous social issues around palm oil, such as land tenure, political corruption, forced labour and other human rights abuses, Horrell admitted that progress has been slow. “We have seen progress, but it isn’t happening fast enough and I think everyone feels frustrated.”

For Farwiza Farhan, chair of Yayasan HAka – an Indonesian NGO working to protect Sumatra’s Leuser Ecosystem – time is not something the orangutans, rhinos, tigers and elephants that live there have.

“I see the destruction first-hand that comes from the drive for palm oil plantations; we are losing species so fast,” she said, describing how elephants are poisoned every week and palm growers treat many animals like pests as they illegally clear forests to free up land.

Yet palm oil has brought huge wealth to the region. The industry accounted for \$12.3bn (£9.7bn) in exports for Indonesia in 2015, with the average income of palm plantations 10 times higher than that of rice plantations, according to the Zoological Society of London. But for Farhan, the comparative costs to the environment and local communities are not worth it.

“The smallest smallholders, who grow two hectares, don’t usually have their lives super transformed. They need to wait about three to five years for the palm to produce anything like \$100 per hectare,” she said. “Companies aren’t paying for the subsequent floods and destruction caused by the deforestation for plantations – that falls to the local communities and the government.”

Jones described destructive scenes on company visits to Indonesian palm oil suppliers. As a consequence, Lush has withdrawn palm oil from its products and invested in biodiversity projects in the region instead. “Our buyers said they didn’t see a single animal or a single human being while driving through a plantation for 10 hours – that can’t be right,” said Jones, citing “shoddy farming on a scale you wouldn’t believe” by the growers, including leaving slashed bags of fertiliser beneath every other palm tree. “If you don’t feel good about your products, you can’t encourage people to buy more of them,” she said. “I can’t see us returning to palm now we’ve formulated it out. For us it’s about biodiversity; monoculture crops and overconsumption are both problems when we all focus on one ingredient.”

A global tipping point?

But for the bigger companies, such as Marks & Spencer, a boycott is neither possible nor desirable. “We actually get up to 10 times as much palm oil from the same space of land as we would from alternative vegetable oils,” said Wheatley. She suggested the focus should be on getting more from current plantations and reducing their impact on the environment and communities.

The RSPO – with its more than 3,000 members – needs the confidence of its members and their consumers. But there have been examples of RSPO members failing to meet standards.

The IOI Group, for example, had its certification withdrawn last year for failing to protect peat areas and forests. It was reinstated just six months later. The RSPO said it was satisfied that IOI Group was now compliant with its sustainability standards and had set about compensating parties affected by its past actions.

But Marcus Colchester, from the charity Forest Peoples Programme, asked the panel whether brands that still buy from major palm oil producers which have had environmental damage complaints brought against them are complicit in their activities. “You can’t just go around and exclude everybody, otherwise you end up losing all of your influence,” said Horrell. “It’s an incredibly difficult judgment.” He pointed to a review of RSPO standards as a chance to push the organisation to speed up its complaint procedures and ensure proper consequences for members who fall short.

“Palm oil is not universally bad,” he insisted, but said it was a challenge to measure and show the progress that is actually being made. Despite the ongoing issues, Wheatley predicted there would eventually be a global “tipping point” on sustainable palm oil, but it would ultimately depend on China and India getting on board.

Farhan said perceptions are shifting in Indonesia. “There is an emerging understanding from people – we used to see forest destruction as normal, but no longer. When it comes to better management of our forests and land, our economy can’t afford not to do it.”

Previous winner

Gilbert Adum

Ghana

2016

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

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by Sarah Chenevix-Trench

Gilbert received four pieces of press coverage this year, including two videos made for German news site, Deutsche Welle. Gilbert's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

<https://www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/Mr-Adum-how-do-you-save-frogs.html>



Alexander von Humboldt
Stiftung/Foundation

Magazine Humboldt Kosmos

Mr Adum, How Do You Save Frogs?

By Kristin Hüttmann

Gilbert Adum is Ghana's frogman. Crawling through the undergrowth, diving into ponds, wading through rivers – this is his job. As one of the founders and head of the SAVE THE FROGS! Ghana organisation, he passionately campaigns for the survival of the amphibians in his native country. His aim is to save frogs from extinction and conserve their environment. To this end, he uses all his powers of persuasion to engage miners and loggers as well as villagers in nature conservation.



Gilbert Adum (Photo: Humboldt Foundation / Nikolaus Brade)

And who better than Gilbert Adum? His family descends from the Chiana-Gwenia, a tribe of hunters in northern Ghana. As a child, he catches frogs and eats them. The amphibians are part of the villagers' staple diet. The frog hunter, however, turns brilliant

schoolboy, quite capable of studying medicine. “But I could never imagine working as a doctor,” he says. “My love of nature was much greater.” So he studies natural resources management and soon discovers what an important role frogs play in the ecosystem. “Frogs are indispensable for the food chain in the forest and thus for us humans, too. On top of this, they eat disease-carrying mosquitoes.”

Today, Adum is one of the leading amphibian conservationists on the African continent. He has received numerous awards for his work, including the prestigious Whitley Award, the Green Oscar. One particular frog has a special place in his heart: the Giant Squeaker Frog. He has never met anyone, he likes to report, who was not captivated by the call of this frog. When he then grins and imitates its squeaky courtship cry, you believe every word he says.

The Giant Squeaker Frog was thought to be extinct – until Adum and his team rediscovered a small population in 2009; they have been fighting for its survival ever since. “We have to protect its habitat by stopping the environmental damage being done by mining and logging and restoring natural plant growth.”

Deutsche Welle – News Site, Germany
10 November 2016

<http://www.dw.com/en/a-superhero-for-ghanas-frogs/a-36338752>



A superhero for Ghana's frogs

Biologist Gilbert Adum loves Ghana's giant squeaker frog. He's doing everything he can to make sure the endangered species doesn't croak.



Previous winner

Hotlin Ompusunggu Borneo 2011, 2016

Local community health through forest stewardship

Winner of the Whitley Award donated by Goldman Sachs and the Whitley Gold Award donated by the Friends & Scottish Friends of WFN

Last year's Gold Award winner, Hotlin, received four pieces of press coverage this year, including being interviewed for BBC Radio 4's 'Costing The Earth'. The following is a selection of this coverage. Hotlin's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

Costing The Earth – Radio 4 Programme
15 March 2017

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08hnly0>

The screenshot shows the BBC Radio 4 website interface for the programme 'Costing the Earth'. At the top, the BBC Radio 4 logo is on the left, and the programme title 'Costing the Earth' is in large white text. To the right, there is a speaker icon, the text 'On Now: Money Box', and a 'LISTEN' button. Below the title, there are 'Home' and 'More' navigation links. The main content area features a large photograph of a woman with a red scarf, a play button icon, and the title 'Heroines of the Rainforest'. Below the photo, there is a short description of the programme, the text 'Available now 30 minutes', and a paragraph about the host Peter Hadfield and the subjects. At the bottom left, it says 'Producer: Alasdair Cross'. On the right side, there are sections for 'On radio' (showing 'Today 21:00 BBC RADIO 4'), 'More episodes' (with 'PREVIOUS Delivering Clean Air' and 'NEXT Trump's Big Clearance Sale'), and a link to 'See all episodes from Costing the Earth'.

BBC RADIO 4 Costing the Earth On Now: Money Box
LISTEN Money Box Live: Finances behaving bars

Home More

On radio
BBC RADIO 4 Today 21:00
BBC RADIO 4

More episodes

PREVIOUS
Delivering Clean Air

NEXT
Trump's Big Clearance Sale

See all episodes from Costing the Earth

Heroines of the Rainforest

The Indonesian rainforest has suffered enormous damage over the last few decades. Logged for timber and cleared for palm oil production, the habitat of remarkable creatures has declined at an extraordinary rate, leaving the region's iconic Orangutan critically endangered.

Peter Hadfield has travelled across Borneo to meet two remarkable women who have found a formula to reverse the decline. Dentist, Hotlin Ompusunggu and doctor, Kinari Webb set up a clinic which offered cheap healthcare to villages that agree to stop logging in their neighbourhood. The clinic also teaches low intensity farming practices, providing local people with fresh vegetables and a new income stream, bringing the traditional slash and burn agricultural techniques to an end.

Hotlin has been awarded one of the Oscars of the conservation world- a Whitley Gold Award- and the hope is that the formula can be rolled out to other regions of the world threatened by deforestation.

Producer: Alasdair Cross.

Available now
30 minutes

<http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2017/06/12/national-geographic-emerging-explorer-hotlin-ompusunggu-using-dentistry-to-stop-deforestation/>



National Geographic Emerging Explorer Hotlin Ompusunggu: Using Dentistry to Stop Deforestation

by **David Maxwell Braun** of National Geographic Society in Explorers Journal on June 12, 2017



Credit: Lauren Tobias

This post is part of an ongoing series of interviews with the 2017 class of National Geographic Emerging Explorers.

Dental surgeon and conservationist **Hotlin Ompusunggu** is one of 14 National Geographic Emerging Explorers for 2017. This group is being honored for the way its members explore new frontiers and find innovative ways to remedy some of the greatest challenges facing our planet. The 2017 class of Emerging Explorers will be honored at the National Geographic Explorers Festival in Washington, D.C. in June.

Ompusunggu combines conservation and healthcare through community-based projects, with a mission to break the cycle between poverty and illegal logging in Indonesia. Her innovative approach is having a measurable impact on both people and the environment. In that approach, the local communities who demonstrate care for the forest home of Borneo's endangered orangutans get health benefits in return for themselves, at the program's clinic. In recognition for her achievements in nature conservation, Hotlin won a 2016 Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) gold award.

Hotlin is the co-founder of Alam Sehat Lestari (ASRI), a nongovernmental organization in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. "Human health and environmental health are tightly linked. The key to global health is protecting the connection between human health and environmental health – at the local level," ASRI says on its website. The NGO works with the communities of around 60,000 people who live alongside Gunung Palung National Park in southwest Borneo. Gunung Palung is home to numerous endangered species, including some 2,500 wild orangutans, about 10 percent percent of the world's surviving population. One of the biggest threats to the park and these animals is illegal logging.

The intersection of human and environmental health is at the core of what drives Hotlin. She is hopeful that the success of ASRI can serve as a model to other endangered communities and environments worldwide.

National Geographic Voices interviewed Hotlin about her philosophy and her work.

What is the "elevator pitch" you use to describe your outlook?

Not only can we have both healthy people and a healthy environment, but the two are interlinked. In reality, we cannot separate one from the other.

What did you want to be when you were grown up? How did that change and why?

I always wanted to be like Margaret Thatcher when I was grown up. She was my model for a woman who broke the stereotypes: brave, a leader with power that women usually cannot achieve. She broke down many traditions. I remember reading that once, when she was going home with her father and they passed many kids playing, her father told her, "Do things because you really want to do them, not because everyone is doing that." I remember reading one of her rules to live by: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

However, my admiration for her faded away when I spent a year in England. I was told that during her leadership, the number of poor people increased while capitalism flourished. Later I understood that some of her policies were very unkind; the number of poor people grew.

What are the greatest opportunities for the rising generation of young people, and why?

The era where technology is enabling people to share ideas without limits will bring a new power to fuel the actions needed to take and connect people across boundaries, wherever connectivity is possible. Anyone can become well informed. Nobody is isolated. At ASRI we have a program called ASRI Kids, a program started by two girls who were visiting from the U.S. who could not speak Indonesian, and the local kids couldn't speak English. Somehow, they found connections. These two girls had the idea to share

experiences with their friends in Indonesia, and they started to raise their voice and reach out to their friends and family, raising funds to start this enrichment program.

The ASRI Kids program brings local children a wider world view. They were so proud to find out that the orangutan lives only in Borneo and Sumatra; they started writing blogs about how important the orangutan is, and about protecting its habitat. They urged their parents to stop illegal logging. The U.S. kids learned about the challenge and opportunity from the Indonesian kids and together they had a much greater impact.

Looking back on what you have done, what are the biggest lessons learned?

Opportunities taken and missed?

The biggest lesson learned is that saving the forest is not possible without listening to the community's voice. In planning the ASRI project, we spent more time to *listen*. Most of the time the solution is not "rocket science"; you just need a big and open heart — and to follow with action ASAP.

In the first year of our ASRI program, we did our forest monitoring system ourselves, consulting with patrol personnel from the Park Bureau. But that part of the program wasn't running well. After two years, in 2010, in our evaluation meeting, we asked the community members what we should do differently. They told us that *they* should be involved in forest monitoring. The park is so huge that it needs a lot of people to monitor what is going on; the ideal solution would be to have local people, who live right next to the forest, do the monitoring. This suggestion produced the Forest Guardian program that we started in 2011, and it is one of the best programs we have with their impact on community and the protection of the forest.

Who were(are) your heroes and mentors? Favorite authors and filmmakers? Who would you most like to meet?

I had many heroes growing up, especially my parents, who taught me to believe in myself and always do my best. My parents taught me passion and caring for others. Growing up, I was also inspired hearing stories of inventors, how they opened their minds and hearts to find new solutions.

Recently I met two new heroes: Sir David Attenborough is promoting saving the environment, endlessly. I met him just a few days before his 90th birthday and he was still very passionate and full of energy and charisma as he told me about his trip to Borneo, Indonesia. Another hero I recently met is Mr. Sadiman from Central Java, Indonesia, who planted trees by himself for over 20 years, and the impact of his work is now benefiting the community. Mr. Sadiman proves that you don't have to be famous or highly educated to give back to save our environment. Now many people look up to him and even learn from his work.

Favorite author: James Herriot, author of *All Creatures Great and Small*. I love his smart and funny way to express and relate the animal to human beings.

What is the best story you tell about yourself, a lesson learned, or a memorable (scary or thrilling) experience in the field?



Credit: Kinari Webb

In early 2005, about two weeks after Aceh was devastated by the tsunami, I volunteered to help organize a medical team. I found so many organizations doing medical aid. One day I was talking with a man in a camp set up for displaced people in Sigli, Aceh, who told me: “I lost everything in my life, my house washed away, and now I have to stay in this camp sleeping on hard wood and covered with sand. And can you imagine how miserable my life is now, *when I also have a toothache?*” He found out that I am a dentist, and I learned that no one was providing dental care for these people. So when I returned from Aceh, I told my team I thought we should start giving dental care to these people. They agreed, and we soon recruited dentists from the U.S. and Indonesia to help with the work. We served not only the people of the camp but also local workers and even the army. I learned that, when helping, we need to *listen*, because our perception of what needs to be done may be different from what the people really need.

What is your favorite species, and why? Your favorite place on the planet?

I don't have a particular favorite species; I love the community of species — monkeys, cats, all are part of the community.

I am not a very animal-oriented person, but I have learned that animals and human beings need to live harmoniously to the benefit of both. We are all interlinked.

My favorite places on Earth are not so much about the place itself but about the relationships, the surroundings and the human beings. Two places where I lived or visited reminded me how beautiful life is when human beings live harmoniously with animals, even wild and venomous animals

Living in Sukadana, the home of Project ASRI, I woke up one morning to see a snake hanging on my window. I slowly realized it was a big and venomous snake. I took a deep breath and then went to my neighbor to ask for help. My neighbor came in carrying a bamboo stick, and he walked toward my window. He placed the bamboo stick gently near the snake and talked to the snake, to coax it to slide on to the bamboo so it could be taken away. The snake moved to the bamboo and my neighbor walked out of my house carrying the bamboo with the snake; he then put it on the ground in the grass and sent the snake away. It was a very peaceful, yet for me quite intense. I was amazed how wisely, gently, and respectfully my neighbor treated the snake.

Another beautiful place I visited is Raja Ampat, in Papua. My team and I visited many islands and had discussions with them about health and conservation. I remember we were visiting a village head's house, sitting on the porch that was built on water. The water was crystal clear; you could see the bottom of the water from the porch of the

house. I was surprised when I saw a water snake. I told the village head. He was very calm: “It is ok, we are not disturbing them, they are not disturbing us, and leave them in peace.”

What are your fears and hopes for the future?

When I was in Seattle, I went to see a river that was dried for years, until people planted trees to try to bring the river back. I witnessed the salmon now swimming in the river. Similarly, in our reforestation work at ASRI, I have witnessed that replanting and caring for the forest succeeded in bringing back some of what was lost, and we occasionally have pictures of orangutan and other rare animals from our camera trap. So this is telling me that we can actually do something! But I am afraid that if we do not work fast enough, we will lose too much and we cannot bring it back. Too much thinking and too little *action*.

What should young people do if they want to pursue a career like yours?

Really go outside of the box and stereotypes!

I encourage people to do their best and believe in themselves. I don't want to ask them to pursue a career like mine, because it will limit their actions. They should do something they believe in, make connections, work together with others and act for real impact.

Tell us something that most people may not know about you?

I fought a forest fire in 2013, together with my team. One Saturday I was told there was a fire in our reforestation site. I drove the truck and we tried to beat out the fire with anything we had. As a dentist I have no training to fight fires, but I knew the staff needed me and my support and encouragement as their leader.

I run marathons. During my training, I once started running at 2 a.m. and I experienced many things I never saw before, in the village where I had lived for years. People in the village are mostly early risers, and so are their animals. But 2 a.m. was still too early, and sometimes that I woke up the cows, who were a bit confused and ran with me for a while!

What is one thing you would really still like to see or do?

I want to see the success we had in Borneo repeated in other parts of Indonesia, such as Raja Ampat and Aceh. It is a very threatened ecosystem, and I am working with Health in Harmony (ASRI's sister organization) to find all the solutions.

Previous winner

Juliette Velosoa
Madagascar
2016

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

**Winner of the Whitley Award donated by the Garden House
School Parents' Association**

Juliette received extensive coverage this year with 13 pieces of print and online coverage and 13 TV and radio appearances. She also featured in Earthwatch's Annual Report 2016. The following is a selection of her coverage. Juliette's WFN profile is available at this [link](#).

Earthwatch Annual Report 2016 31 December 2016

http://earthwatch.1kcloud.com/edlv_EW6SA/



AWARD-WINNING EARTHWATCH SCIENTIST



ENABLING SCIENTISTS | 11

In 2016 Juliette Veloso won the prestigious Whitley Award for Nature Conservation* in honour of her commitment to conserve the critically endangered side-necked turtle in Madagascar. Back in 2005, Juliette Veloso was one of 12 scientists from Africa to receive early career funding from Earthwatch's Capacity Development Fund.

During her Earthwatch training Juliette joined a research project led by Dr David Harper from the University of Leicester at Lake Elementeita in Kenya. This research helped to secure Ramsar status for the lake, identifying it as a wetland of international importance.

The ancient Madagascan 'rere' turtles Juliette is now studying were once found throughout western Madagascar.

Now only eight stable populations remain, due to over-exploitation and severe loss of wetland habitats.

Juliette encourages community-led resource management and restoration of wetlands using techniques that favour conservation and improve fish stocks for local people. Thanks to techniques such as nest protection and head-starting (where turtles are raised until big enough for release), rere populations are starting to show signs of recovery.

Her Whitley Award will fund the development of locally-led management plans to enable sustainable use of wetlands in two key sites. The project is also helping to deliver vital ecosystem services for local people and developing guidance for further replication at a time when Madagascar has declared 85 new protected areas.

*The Whitley Fund for Nature is a UK registered charity offering Whitley Awards and ongoing support to outstanding nature conservationists around the developing world.

TRIATRA

6 www.triatra.mg

SONGADINA

Soka-dranomamy na ny « Rere »

Miisa 25 isan-taona ireo aondrana any ivelany

Manan-danja lehibe eto amin'ny firenena ireo harena voajanahary, izay mampiasa an'i Madagasikara amin'ireo firenena hafa. Ao ireo biby sy zavamaniry izay fantatra fa tsy misy raha tsy eto an-toerana. Misy anefa ireo izay tia tena sy tsy mitsinjo ny harem-pirenena, fa dia minia mandika lalàna ka manondrana azy ireo, ahazoany ny tombontsoany manokana. Voakasika izany indrindra ny « Rere », izay soka-dranomamy tsy fahita raha tsy eto amin'ny Nosy. Ankehitriny mantsy dia fantatra fa ahiana mafy ho lany taranaka izy ireo, noho ireo karazana tsindry mahazo azy. Noho izany loza mitatao izany indrindra no antony nanatontosan'ny Ministeran'ny Tontolo iainana, ny Ekolojia ary ny Ala atrikasa ny Alarobia lasa teo, ho fanomanana ny drafitra paikady entina hiarovana ny Rere. Maro ireo mpiara-miombon'antoka izay miara-miasa amin'ny Ministera, toy ny orinasa tsy miankina amin'ny fanjakana na ny « *Organsiation Non-Gouvernementale* » (ONG) Durrell, ireo mpitandro ny filaminana, ireo tompon'andraikitra avy ao amin'ny ladoany, ireo siantifika ary ireo fiarahamonim-pirenena.

Raha ny nambaran'ny Sahondra Rabesihanaka, tompon'andraikitra



ao amin'ny Ministera, dia nodinina nandritra izany atrikasa izany ireo fomba entina hanatsarana ny Rere ao anatin'ny faritra misy azy ary koa ny ivelan'izay. Fantatra mantsy fa faritra 9 no misy ireo soka-dranomamy ireo amin'izao fotoana izao, izay hita manomboka any Sambirano ka hatrany Mangoky. Efa nisy moa ny hetsika nataon'ny fitondram-panjakana ny amin'ny fanorenana ireny faritra arovana ireny. Ho jerena ihany koa ireo vahaolana atolotry ny Ministera sy ireo mpiara-miombon'antoka isany, manoloana ireo tsindry mahazo ireo soka-dranomamy ireo. Satria, na dia misy aza anefa ny fiarovana ny toeram-ponenana, dia fantatra fa mitontongana izany ankehitriny noho ireo loza marobe

mahazo azy. Ao ireo izay minia mangalatra sy mihinana ireo Rere, na koa ny atodiny satria manatody an-tanety tokoa izy ireo. Misy ihany koa ny fahasimban'ny toeram-ponenany sy ny toera-panatodizany, vokatry ny doro tanety. Hany ka manjary mihena ny taha-pahafoizany. Nambaran'ity tompon'andraikitra ao amin'ity Ministera ity hatrany, fa misy ny fanondranana Rere ara-dalàna makany ivelany, ka 25 isan-taona no isan'izy ireo. Midika izany fa tsy ara-dalàna ireo izay mihoatra izany isa izany. Ary tamin'ny taona 2011 dia efa nametraka drafitrana ho fiarovana ireo sokatra rehetra eto Madagasikara ny Ministera, avaozina kosa izany fiaraha-miasa izany ankehitriny.

Anna

Previous winners

Combined Coverage – Winner Network

Inza Koné, RASAPCI (2012)
Inaoyom Imong, WCS Nigeria (2015)

Winners of the Whitley Award

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-017-02293-z>

nature.com

Home-grown scientists step up to save Africa's primates

Scientific network aims to train a generation of African leaders in primate research.

Declan Butler



The Western red colobus monkey (*Piliocolobus badius*) is found in Côte D'Ivoire's Taï National Park. Credit: W. Scott McGraw

Inza Koné, a primate conservationist at the Swiss Centre for Scientific Research in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, is used to overcoming adversity. During the country's bloody civil war in the 2000s, he and his colleagues managed to keep research going in conflict zones, even after most international scientists had fled, because of long-standing ties with communities in these areas. In the country's Taï National Park — one of the last vestiges of primary rainforest in West Africa — such relationships allowed long-running studies of chimpanzees and monkeys to continue safely, and largely spared the park from poaching.

As the first president of the African Primatological Society (APS), launched at a congress near Abidjan on 24–26 July, Koné will lead another hard task: training a generation of home-grown primate researchers. The aim is for them to start and lead efforts such as the Tai Chimpanzee Project — established in 1979 by researchers from Germany’s Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig — and to gain the institutional buy-in needed to protect Africa’s 200 or so species of apes, monkeys and lemurs.

Few primate-research and conservation efforts are currently led by Africans, and those run by scientists from elsewhere don’t usually last long enough to make a difference, notes Inaoyom Imong, director of the Cross River Gorilla Landscape Project in Nigeria. “Greater involvement in and leadership of primate-conservation projects by Africans has the potential to ensure the necessary long-term commitment to sites, stronger local ownership and sustainability of such projects.”

Continental Africa has an estimated 111 species of primate, with the greatest diversity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, Cameroon, Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea. Another 103 species are found in Madagascar, an island nation and biodiversity hotspot.

But many African primate species are at risk of extinction: 37% of species on the mainland and 87% of species in Madagascar are listed as threatened. This is largely a result of habitat loss caused by human activities, such as large-scale farming and logging, as well as overhunting of bushmeat.

The APS’s scientific congress will be an annual event. The first meeting brought together around 100 African primatologists and conservation biologists from across the continent, and some 30 non-Africans. “For African primatology to get its own society is tremendously important,” says Roman Wittig, a primatologist at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. “It’s a milestone.”

Most primate research and conservation in Africa over the past half-century has been done by overseas researchers, says Russell Mittermeier, vice-president of the non-profit environmental organization Conservation International in Arlington, Virginia, who attended the launch. “But the job is too big to continue in this way,” he adds. “We need a large community of African primatologists working in their own countries and helping to train new generations of specialists.”

That’s already starting to happen, says Wittig, who is co-director of the Tai Chimpanzee Project. “There is now a crop of well-trained African researchers who are taking the lead,” he says. Koné, who is involved in the Tai chimp study and a project with Western scientists focused on the national park’s monkeys, says that having local researchers as partners benefits international conservation efforts. “Local communities and decision-makers will be more sensitive to messages from nationals working in synergy with expats.”

“We can bring many more people to work on primate conservation in their own backyards.”

Although the prospects look bleak for primates in many parts of Africa, no species are yet believed to have gone extinct, says Wittig. But it will not be possible to rapidly solve major challenges such as habitat loss, so long-term planning is needed. Sustaining research and conservation in national parks is one of the best ways to protect vulnerable primate populations, he adds.

The biggest challenges facing African primatology are the lack of training and expertise for the continent’s researchers, says Rachel Ikemeh, principal investigator of the SW/Niger Delta Forest Project in Abuja, Nigeria, and a driving force behind the APS’s establishment. The society will therefore focus on training African scientists to start conservation efforts and to lead research projects.

“Increasing the roles and responsibilities of Africans is paramount, if we consider that Africans are essentially the main custodians of primates occurring within their natural habitat across the continent,” says Ikemeh, who saw plenty of future leaders in primate conservation and research at the congress.

For funding agencies, it can be more cost-effective to support nationals in countries with primate populations than to employ international researchers, says Mittermeier. “We can bring many more people to work on primate conservation in their own backyards.”

Mittermeier points to Brazil, a world leader in primatology, as an example of what can be achieved. Since its creation in 1979, the Brazilian Society of Primatology has spurred research and conservation efforts, supported hundreds of Brazilian primatology PhD students and helped to build extensive networks among non-governmental organizations, universities and government, he says. “Now is the time for Africa.”

-ENDS-

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