



Press release

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Asia's largest tortoise slowly wins the race with the help of Whitley Award winner

April 2018

A conservation biologist specialising in reptiles was yesterday (Wednesday 25 April) presented with a prestigious Whitley Award by HRH The Princess Royal.

Shahriar Caesar Rahman, Co-Founder of the Creative Conservation Alliance is working to preserve Asia's largest tortoise in a remote corner of Bangladesh.

In 2011, Caesar began exploring the Chittagong Hill tracts (CHT) to survey for rare reptiles and amphibians. Sitting on the Bangladesh and Myanmar border, the CHT is one of the least explored, but most biodiverse areas on the planet. Caesar's team made a ground-breaking discovery of the wild Asian giant tortoise, previously thought to be extinct and uncovered a new species of forest turtle.

Caesar has since set up an initiative to protect tortoise populations and their surrounding habitats and his team has invested time to build a rapport and gain trust within the local communities.

Caesar has trained former Mro hunters as biologists who are helping to deter poachers and document the region's wildlife including Menni Mro, a 50-year-old village chief, who is now protecting nearly 100 hectares of forest, and is utilising skills to track rare animals, a move that led him to be given a Nature Guardian Award.

With his Whitley Award, Caesar will work with Mro people to establish community conservation areas to safeguard forest habitat from being lost and curb hunting by training more ex-hunters as 'parabiologists' employed to monitor and protect turtles.

Caesar's team have created a market for the sale of indigenous crafts – reviving cultures on the verge of being lost – which will now be expanded to benefit women from 12 villages who receive training and income from the programme.

Dialogue with national government has also been initiated to gain support for conserving the area – as its importance is as yet unrecognised.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: “In an area of Bangladesh that has faced decades of social and political conflict, Caesar has become a figurehead and has made huge steps towards bringing these reptiles back from the brink. We are especially thrilled to be supporting Caesar during our 25th anniversary year and look forward to following him on this journey.”

Caesar said: “What began as a personal interest and exploration, has advanced into a fully-fledged conservation program. From helping to construct schools and educate future generations, to empowering local communities and reviving traditional cultures, I have been able to touch the hearts and lives of many people through species conservation. With the support of this Whitley Award, I can continue to make a difference to the future of both the wildlife, my fellow man and entire cultures.”

An annual event, often referred to as the ‘Green Oscars’, the 2018 Whitley Awards, are part of Whitley Fund for Nature’s 25th Anniversary celebrations.

The winners will each receive £40,000 in funding to support their work to conserve some of the planet’s most endangered species and spectacular places.

This year’s Whitley Gold Award honours Pablo (Popi) Borboroglu, who is spearheading a campaign to protect endangered penguins across the globe. Pablo has already achieved dramatic conservation success, helping to protect more than 3.1 million hectares of marine and coastal habitats. The Gold Award, worth £60,000, will enable Pablo to justify ocean protection and underpin management for different species of penguins across Argentina, Chile and New Zealand.

The 2018 Whitley Award winners are:

Dominique Bikaba - DRC

Ensuring the survival of DRC’s eastern lowland gorillas

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by Arcus Foundation

Kerstin Forsberg – Peru

Majestic giants: safe passage for manta rays in Peru

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by The Corcoran Foundation

Olivier Nsengimana – Rwanda

Conserving Rwanda’s emblematic grey crowned crane

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by The Savitri Waney Charitable Trust

Shahriar Caesar Rahman - Bangladesh

Tortoises in trouble: Community conservation of Asia’s largest tortoise

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

Munir Virani – Kenya

Game of poisons: a strategy to save Kenya's threatened vultures

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by WWF-UK

Anjali Chandraraj Watson – Sri Lanka

Leopards as a flagship for wildlife corridors

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by Garfield Weston Foundation

Visit www.whitleyaward.org to find out more.

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Press materials available:

- Copyright-cleared photographs of this project are available here: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/HxLwO4fOg0CQfZ1y2>
- Video footage of the Awards Ceremony and individual films featuring the award winner narrated by WFN trustee, **Sir David Attenborough** will be available upon arrangement with Liquid: contact Madeline Arnold, t:+44 (0) 121 285 3760, e: madeline@weareliquid.com or Chloe Baker, t:+44 (0) 121 285 3760, e: chloe@weareliquid.com

Notes to Editors:

- The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) is a UK registered charity that champions outstanding grassroots leaders in nature conservation across the Global South. This year the charity is marking its 25th anniversary.
- The Whitley Awards are prestigious international prizes presented to individuals in recognition of their achievements in nature conservation. Each Award winner receives a prize worth £40,000 in project funding over one year. The charity's patron, HRH The Princess Royal, presents the Awards annually at a special ceremony in London.
- The Whitley Gold Award is worth £60,000 and recognises an outstanding past recipient of a Whitley Award who has gone on to make a significant contribution to conservation. Joining the Judging Panel to assist in selection, the Gold winner also acts as a mentor to Whitley Award winners receiving their Awards in the same year.
- Since its beginnings 25 years ago, the Whitley Fund for Nature has given nearly £15 million to conservation and recognised more than 190 conservation leaders in over 80 countries.
- WFN operates a rigorous application process involving expert panel representation from international NGOs including WWF-UK, Fauna and Flora International (FFI) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). This year, WFN received 136 applications which passed through four stages of assessment, reviewed at every step by expert screeners and panellists who kindly offer their expertise voluntarily.

- The Whitley Awards are open to individuals working on wildlife conservation issues in biodiversity-rich, resource poor countries. Further eligibility criteria are available from Liquid.
- During their trip to London for the Awards week finalists have the opportunity to meet the judges, WFN's trustees including Sir David Attenborough, and patron HRH The Princess Royal. In addition they participate in professional media and speech training, attend networking receptions with leading conservation organisations, meet WFN donors and are interviewed by the media. The associated publicity of winning a Whitley Award puts a spotlight on their important work, boosting profile both in the UK and winner's home countries.
- Whitley Award winners join an international network of Whitley alumni eligible to apply for Continuation Funding grants. These follow-on grants are awarded competitively to winners seeking to scale up their effective conservation results on the ground over multiple years.

WFN is generously supported by: Arcus Foundation; The Balcombe Trust; The William Brake Charitable Trust; The Byford Trust; The Corcoran Foundation; Earlymarket; The G D Charitable Trust; The LJC Fund; Britta & Jeremy Lloyd Family Charitable Trust; Lund Trust, a charitable fund of Peter Baldwin and Lisbet Rausing; The Foundation for the Promotion of Wellbeing; The Rufford Foundation; The Schroder Foundation; Fondation Segré; The Shears Foundation; The Constance Travis Charitable Trust; Savitri Waney Charitable Trust; Garfield Weston Foundation; Whitley Animal Protection Trust; WWF-UK; the Friends and Scottish Friends of Whitley Fund for Nature; all our partners and supporters and those donors who have chosen to give anonymously.