



Press release

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Venezuelan wildlife champion wins prestigious Whitley Gold Award for outstanding commitment to conservation

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A conservationist who has brought Venezuela's yellow-shouldered parrot population back from the brink of extinction has won Whitley Fund for Nature's prestigious Gold Award.

Jon Paul Rodríguez was tonight presented with the Award by HRH The Princess Royal at the Royal Geographical Society for his tireless work to protect yellow-shouldered parrots from poaching and habitat loss on Margarita Island, Venezuela - the largest and most biologically diverse among the Venezuelan Caribbean Islands.

The charity's top prize, worth £60,000 in project funding, will expand Jon Paul's work as he develops the first Conservation Action Plan for this beautiful parrot, protecting the species across its entire range in collaboration with other Whitley Award winners.

The support of the Whitley Fund for Nature is crucial at a time when social and economic crisis in Venezuela is forcing conservation into the background.

Jon Paul co-founded Provita - an NGO that has spent the last 30 years working to safeguard not only the yellow-shouldered parrot, but all endangered wildlife in Venezuela.

Provita works with communities and local authorities to tackle poaching and restore natural habitat. They've played a key role in combatting the illegal trade in threatened yellow-shouldered parrot chicks, and work with local people to challenge the cultural tradition of keeping these charismatic birds as pets. Jon Paul won his original Whitley Award in 2003 in support of this work and has received several further funding grants from WFN since.

Jon Paul said: "Personally and professionally, the support from WFN greatly contributed to increasing my international visibility and projecting me to the global conservation arena."

Jon Paul and Provita's intervention has been instrumental in the population recovery of yellow-shouldered parrots. Since Provita began their work, the population of yellow-shouldered parrots on Margarita Island has nearly tripled, from 650 parrots to about 1,700 currently. Last year, 126 fledglings were recorded - the highest number in the project's history.

Elsewhere throughout their range, however, yellow-shouldered parrots have declined, and have even faced local extinction, which makes Jon Paul's range-wide plan a critical next step for conserving this species.

In 2016, Jon Paul was elected Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission - the first person from outside of Europe or North America to hold this position. This influential role means he is uniquely poised to convene experts – including Whitley Awardees - test new approaches locally and contribute to international species conservation and environmental policy.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "Jon Paul's work has been crucial in turning the situation around for the yellow-shouldered parrot. He has worked with local communities for more than 30 years and has led his team with commitment as his career has gone from strength-to-strength. The illegal trade in wildlife is one of the most urgent challenges we face in the 21st century and Jon Paul and his Eco Guardian team at Provita provide a beacon of hope in the ongoing mission to protect endangered species."

Six other conservationists were presented with Whitley Awards, receiving £40,000 in funding to support their work to conserve some of the planet's most endangered

species and spectacular natural habitats. The prize is accompanied by a boost in profile, helping winners to leverage new connections and further funding.

The 2019 Whitley Award winners are:

- **Caleb Ofori-Boateng** – Critical refuge for the Togo slippery frog, Ghana
- **Nikolai Petkov** – Wetlands on the brink: conserving the red-breasted goose, Bulgaria
- **Vatsoa Rakotondrazafy** – MIHARI: a civil society movement to safeguard marine resources, Madagascar
- **José Sarasola** – The Chaco eagle: a flagship for semiarid wildlife conservation, Argentina
- **Wendi Tamariska** – Protecting orangutans and rainforests through sustainable livelihoods, Indonesia (Borneo)
- **Ilena Zanella** – Strengthened sanctuary for the scalloped hammerhead shark, Costa Rica

The 2019 Whitley Gold Award winner is:

- **Jon Paul Rodríguez** – A range-wide plan for the yellow-shouldered parrot

Visit www.whitleyaward.org to find out more.

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Press materials available:

- Photographs of this project are available here. Please credit photographers where named in file: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/dF6CaBbxD69vQeTw7>
- 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.
- The Whitley Awards – also known as Green Oscars - 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 the charity's top prize. Worth £60,000 it recognises a past Whitley Award Winner who has gone on to make an outstanding 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 founding in 1993, the Whitley Fund for Nature has given nearly £16 million to support the work of over 200 conservation leaders benefiting wildlife and communities in over 80 countries.
- WFN operates a rigorous application process involving expert panel representation from international NGOs including WWF-UK and Fauna and Flora International (FFI). This year, WFN received 110 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. 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 winners' 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 Badenoch Fund, The Balcombe Trust; The Frank Brake Charitable Trust; The William Brake Charitable Trust in memory of William Brake;; The Constance Travis Charitable Trust; The Corcoran Foundation; Earlymarket; Fondation Segré; The Foundation for the Promotion of Wellbeing; The G. D. Charitable Trust; Garfield Weston Foundation; The Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation; The LJC Fund; The Britta & Jeremy Lloyd Family Charitable Trust; Lund Trust – A charitable fund of Peter Baldwin & Lisbet Rausing; Charles and Ruth Plowden; The Rabelais Trust; The Reece Foundation; The Rufford Foundation; The Savitri Waney Charitable Trust; The Schroder Foundation; The Shears Foundation in memory of Trevor Shears; The Whitley Animal Protection Trust; WWF-UK; The Friends of the Whitley Fund for Nature; and all our partners and supporters and those donors who have chosen to give anonymously.