



Press release

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A great leap forward for conservation: Whitley Award for rare amphibian champion

May 2019

A conservationist dedicated to protecting a Critically Endangered species of rare frog in West Africa has been honoured with a prestigious Whitley Award by HRH the Princess Royal tonight (1 May).

Caleb Ofori-Boateng, Director and Founder of Herp Conservation Ghana, and the first formally trained amphibian biologist in the country, is working to reverse the misfortunes of the Togo slippery frog. Known locally as the 'whistling frog' due to its unique calls, this species was thought to be extinct by scientists for nearly 40 years until Caleb and his team discovered a population living in remote rainforests in eastern Ghana.

His work is crucial, as whistling frog populations in West Africa have declined rapidly. Only five decades ago, there were tens of thousands and now numbers are in the low hundreds.

The frogs face threats from deforestation and hunting for human consumption. This species was historically an important part of the local diet, and today is still viewed as a delicacy.

At first, Caleb's work attracted ridicule from local people who could not understand his passion. However, he has worked tirelessly to challenge attitudes, and has gained tremendous respect in the communities where he works.

Established in 2010, Herp Conservation Ghana uses a suite of conservation tools including habitat restoration, training local conservationists, provision of livelihood alternatives, behaviour change campaigns, and the establishment of legally designated protected areas – including Ghana’s first protected area for endangered frogs.

Caleb’s Whitley Award will allow his team to restore degraded amphibian habitat, expand community protected areas for the whistling frog, and continue to encourage local behaviour change through campaigns and education initiatives.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: “Caleb’s persistence and commitment has gone a long way in demonstrating the importance of this unique frog species and the surrounding ecosystem in Ghana. It is a privilege to support Caleb and we look forward to following him on his journey to bring this species back from the brink.”

Caleb said: “The only world I knew for the first 7 years of my life, was one in which humans lived so successfully with wildlife in a protected area setting; a beauty that I now strive to recreate in my adult life.”

Whitley Award winners each receive £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.

Caleb recalled the first time he encountered the whistling frog. He said: “It was at about midnight, the breeze on the mountains was cold and a strange creature whistled periodically breaking the silence of the night, each time it did. Little did we know we had discovered a previously unknown population of a rare and critically endangered frog.”

This year’s Whitley Gold Award honours Prof Jon Paul Rodríguez of Venezuela who co-founded his NGO, Provita, 30 years ago to conserve the country’s threatened wildlife, including the nationally Endangered yellow-shouldered parrot. After receiving his Whitley Award in 2003, today the parrot is on the road to recovery in Jon Paul’s project site – with record numbers of parrots flying the nest in 2018. Elsewhere however, populations continue to fall due to heavy poaching of this pretty polly for the pet trade. With his Whitley Gold Award, Jon Paul will scale up his work by developing

a multi-country strategy to protect the yellow-shouldered parrot across its entire range, working in collaboration with other Whitley Award winners. Jon Paul is Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, an internationally influential role in conservation which makes him uniquely positioned to deliver this project.

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/MhTYKJdzNN5qnS6BA>
- 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.