



Press release

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Conservation charity honours campaign to save hammerhead sharks from illegal fishing

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A conservationist striving to protect hammerhead sharks in Costa Rica has been honoured with a prestigious Whitley Award by HRH The Princess Royal tonight (1 May).

Ilena Zanella, Co-founder of marine conservation organisation Misión Tiburón, is working to protect scalloped hammerhead sharks from illegal fishing.

Her work is based in the Golfo Dulce, one of the only four tropical fjords in the world where the nutrient cycle means its waters teem with wildlife, including whales and dolphins. Following nine years of research and shark tagging in the area, Ilena proved the site is a crucial nursery habitat for young scalloped hammerhead sharks. The site was declared a Scalloped Hammerhead Shark Sanctuary in May 2018 due to her research, including a 4,000-hectare “no-take” zone – this is the first shark sanctuary in Costa Rica.

Sharks are under constant threat from illegal fishing in the coastal wetlands of Golfo Dulce. Young sharks are vulnerable to a variety of nets, while in oceanic waters, adults are captured by longlines.

With her Whitley Award, Ilena will work with local communities to reduce the use of juvenile scalloped hammerheads as fishing bait and improve detection of illegal fishing activity. She aims to strengthen relationships between coastguards and

fishers to halve illegal catch of hammerheads, and plans to establish an Education Station to engage students in conservation.

Ilena said: “During my early work I visited many fishing communities, and in almost every community I visited, I found dead juvenile hammerhead sharks. This alarmed me a lot and, since then, I started to work on the identification and protection of hammerhead nursery areas. With my Whitley Award, I hope to engage communities in the protection of the scalloped hammerhead shark and I would like the local people to feel proud of the new Golfo Dulce sanctuary.”

Ilena collaborates with other Whitley Award winners to strengthen protection for hammerheads throughout their life across the Eastern Tropical Pacific corridor – a swim-way which connects migratory shark populations in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Colombia and Panama.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: “The conservation of marine life has been a popular topic in the media thanks to programmes like Blue Planet II. We’re especially honoured to be supporting Ilena and her organisation, which is committed to protecting sharks from the beginning of their life, ensuring safe natural habitats for them to grow and develop, in collaboration with other Whitley Award winners in Latin America.”

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.

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/k8FXbfv9kYFCmymQ9>
- 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.