



Press release

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Giving Chaco eagles a chance to soar: Argentinean conservationist honoured with ‘Green Oscar’

An Argentinian conservationist leading the fight to protect the Endangered Chaco eagle has been honoured with a prestigious Whitley Award by HRH The Princess Royal tonight (1 May) at The Royal Geographical Society, London.

José Sarasola, Director of the Centre for the Study and Conservation of Birds of Prey in Argentina (CECARA), is challenging negative perceptions of the eagle, which has been wrongly blamed for killing young livestock by local *gauchos*. A mistake easy to make given the Chaco eagle is one of the largest birds of prey, with a wingspan of 1.8 metres and an average weight of nearly 3 kg.

Established in 2001, CECARA aims to protect and conserve native birds of prey, and promote understanding of the important role they play in this fragile grassland ecosystem.

José’s particular focus is on the Chaco eagle – a flagship species for this habitat. The global population of this spectacular pale grey bird of prey is thought to be fewer than 1,000 adults, with numbers in decline.

The threats facing Chaco eagles are not limited to illegal killing. José discovered that electrocution from overhead powerlines, and drowning in water storage tanks commonly used in this dry area are responsible for 70% of eagle deaths. Research indicates that in La Pampa province 300,000 birds, including Chaco eagles, drown annually in water tanks alone.

To combat these challenges, José conducts educational campaigns to demonstrate to the local communities that the eagle does not prey on livestock. Additionally, wildlife friendly pylons have been installed to prevent electrocutions and rescue ramps have been fitted in 60 water tanks, halving fatalities from drowning.

Today many of La Pampa's *gauchos* support José in the Chaco eagle's protection. In recognition of José's work, a sculpture of a Chaco eagle has been erected in the main square of Santa Rosa, the capital city of La Pampa – a symbol of renewed pride in this bird.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "José's commitment to the Chaco eagle has helped raise awareness of this endangered bird. The shift in opinions in the local area is testament to his work. The project demonstrates that simple interventions can have a big impact for conservation - we are honoured to be supporting his ongoing work to aid recovery of the Chaco eagle in Argentina."

José said: "We need to be creative to find the smartest and most practical solutions to stop species extinctions."

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.

The first time José saw the Chaco eagle was when he came across a young bird that had been shot and impaled on a wire fence, acting as a warning to predators to keep away. José said: "Local people used to shoot the eagle because they thought they harmed livestock. I wanted to change this."

With his Whitley Award, José will expand his project to a total of 20,000 square kilometres within the Argentinian provinces of La Pampa and Mendoza working with communities, *gauchos* and power companies to address threats to these birds of prey and the many other species inhabiting this region.

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/nm24vJPp68cB298Q7>
- 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.