



## **Press release**

**Embargoed – Not for publication or broadcast until GMT 21:00  
on 1 May 2019**

### **Standing up for the “People of the Forest” Whitley Award winner fights for survival of orangutans**

**May 2019**

A conservationist battling to protect orangutans and their rainforest habitat in Indonesia has been honoured with a prestigious Whitley Award by HRH The Princess Royal tonight (1 May).

Wendi Tamariska, the Sustainable Livelihoods Manager for Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Programme (GPOCP) empowers local communities to protect their dwindling forests and the orangutans within them.

Wendi’s work is based in Gunung Palung National Park, Indonesian Borneo, which is home to the largest population of wild orangutans on the planet, and has some of the last stands of primary rainforest in the world. The 100,000-hectare Protected Area is threatened by illegal logging, mining and oil palm plantations, which have had a devastating impact on the rainforest and its wildlife.

The National Park is home to 5,000 Critically Endangered Bornean orangutans and a myriad of other endangered species including hornbills, pangolins and Malayan sun bears. In the last 60 years, it is estimated that orangutan populations have declined by over 50% and they could be wiped out in just 20 years if action isn’t taken.

Traditionally, communities living around Gunung Palung have relied on natural resources from the forest for subsistence. However, the expansion of illegal mining and logging industries in the area disrupted this, as local people were offered incentives for exploiting their forest's raw materials. Wendi's organisation works to reinstate traditional weaving practices, and provides local, national, and international markets for the sale of these items. The provision of this alternative livelihood offers communities the opportunity for economic development whilst keeping their forest intact.

As an indigenous Dayak himself, Wendi has built a strong rapport with local people. Through his work he has developed tremendous support from the government and has significantly grown the number of Non-Timber Forest Product artisan groups in his Sustainable Livelihood Programme. The project is showing strong results - community members involved with the initiative have agreed to halt illegal logging in exchange for livelihoods support.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "The conservation of orangutans has been a popular topic in the media with palm oil leading to the loss of rainforests across Indonesia. The work that Wendi does to keep forests standing is now more important than ever to ensure these great apes are around for generations to come."

When asked about his interest in nature and conservation, Wendi replied: "When I was 20 years old, living in East Kalimantan, I saw the local community struggling against the encroachment of a large mining company. This company wanted to take over their land and exploit the natural resources. As a local Dayak, our culture relies on healthy, thriving forests and it was then that I understood what this community was fighting to protect. These forests are not only homes to orangutans and other endangered animals, but also provide for the simple livelihoods of my people."

With his Whitley Award, Wendi and his team will now scale up their livelihoods programme and extend this successful model to more remote reaches of the National Park affected by logging.

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](http://www.whitleyaward.org) to find out more.

**ENDS**

**Press materials available:**

- Photographs of this project are available here. Please credit photographers where named in file: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/T7JRC9qS96sdtpn8A>
- 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](mailto:madeline@weareliquid.com) or Chloe Baker, t:+44 (0) 121 285 3760, e: [chloe@weareliquid.com](mailto: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.