



Press release

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Guardians of Madagascar's seas: Marine conservationist wins Whitley Award

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A conservationist leading a movement with Madagascar's fishing communities to protect marine wildlife and resources across the country has been honoured with a prestigious Whitley Award by HRH the Princess Royal tonight (1 May).

Vatsoa Rakotondrazafy is the National Coordinator for MIHARI, Madagascar's national network of Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs). MIHARI was created in 2012 as a way of linking up isolated coastal communities and conservation organisations to allow the sharing of knowledge and successful techniques for managing and protecting the marine environment.

Madagascar's coastline runs for over 5,000 kilometres, and more than 500,000 people rely on marine biodiversity for livelihoods and food security. But coastal resources are being depleted rapidly, and formal marine management systems are lacking.

Vatsoa and her team recognise that successful conservation needs to engage local communities in management. Under Vatsoa's coordination, the MIHARI network have taken steps to connect over 200 community fishing associations, giving isolated communities a say in the future of the coastal waters that surround them.

Under Vatsoa's leadership, the MIHARI network has provided community members with a united voice. This is leading decision makers to recognise them as legitimate stakeholders in the development marine management legislation for the benefit of

both people and wildlife. In 2018 the Malagasy government made a commitment to work towards reserved areas for small scale fishers, making this an opportune moment to act.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: “To see what Vatosoa and the team have achieved in a few years is astounding. The network has grown into one of the largest civil society movements in Madagascar and the results demonstrate how groundswell support can make a huge difference in helping to safeguard wildlife and translate into policy change.”

Vatosoa said: “I’ve always known that Madagascar was a special place to live, but I quickly learned to appreciate just how special my home country really is - it’s the fourth largest island in the world and one of the most important biodiversity hotspots, with 90% of its species found nowhere else on Earth.”

She continued, “Madagascar’s coastal communities are amongst the most isolated and vulnerable in the world. I realised that more than anything I wanted to work with communities to help them protect and conserve their fisheries.”

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.

With her Whitley Award, Vatosoa will expand the MIHARI network to cover 13 of Madagascar’s coastal regions, and will work with government partners to secure legal status for community managed LMMAs, ensuring a sustainable future for Madagascar’s marine areas.

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
- **Vatosoa 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/3t2quSxo9TCFeW5CA>
- 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.