



Press release

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Conservationist wins top award to protect Brazil's Amazon using tapirs as flagships for habitat protection

April 2020

Leading conservationist Patrícia Medici has been honoured with the prestigious Whitley Gold Award – the Whitley Fund for Nature’s top prize.

The Award - worth £60,000 in project funding - recognises Patrícia’s outstanding dedication to conserving the lowland tapir and its habitat across Brazil.

Tapirs are the largest land mammals in South America and are considered living fossils having survived several waves of extinction over millions of years. However, they now face a variety of man-made threats including habitat destruction due to expansion of large-scale agriculture, cattle-ranching, and mining.

A campaigner and co-founder of Brazilian NGO IPÊ (Institute for Ecological Research), Patrícia leads the largest tapir study in the world, working across the Atlantic Forest, Pantanal and the Cerrado ecosystems. With the Whitley Gold Award, Patrícia will now expand her work to the Amazon.

The largest tropical forest in the world, the Amazon is home to half of the species on Earth but faces unprecedented deforestation rates, with more than 14.4 million hectares of forest cleared since the 1970s. Last year the Amazon saw devastating fires tear through the forest, with calls for President Jair Bolsonaro to step up conservation efforts and protect indigenous rights hitting international headlines.

WFN has supported Patrícia’s work over the last 12 years. On receiving the Whitley Gold Award Patrícia said: “I’m delighted to be a winner of the Whitley Gold Award. Whitley Fund for Nature has always been behind the expansion of our tapir conservation efforts in Brazil. Following our initial programme in the Atlantic Forest, we won the Whitley Award in 2008 and used it to expand our work to the Pantanal, the world’s largest freshwater wetland. Additional funding from WFN in 2014 allowed us to bring our efforts to the Cerrado grasslands. This Gold Award will expand our work to the Amazon.

“The timing could not be more appropriate, given the current political situation in the country, the complete dismantling of our environmental legislation and destruction of all governmental agencies focused on environmental conservation. Taking action now is particularly important to avoid wildlife and climate emergencies and conservationists like me must help set the tone and agenda for environmental steps in the decade ahead.”

Patrícia's work includes mapping routes used by tapirs and reforesting these corridors to connect fragmented areas of forest and tackle climate change. Patrícia, who won her original Whitley Award in 2008, also uses tapirs to spark the interest of local communities in conservation, through environmental education programmes, training and capacity-building.

The new funding from WFN will support the creation of conservation strategies for tapirs in each of the four habitats. It will also fund the continuation of other programmes, including reassessment of the tapir population in the Atlantic Forest, 10 years on from the first study. In the Pantanal, the tapir population will continue to be monitored through camera tracking technology. The Cerrado programme will work to prevent tapirs being killed or injured by traffic, pesticide contamination, and poaching in a landscape facing increasing threats as the epicentre of Brazil's development. Patrícia's new work in the Amazon will focus on studying and reducing threats to tapirs along the southern arc of deforestation in Mato Grosso and Para states.

Edward Whitley, Founder of WFN, said: "Patrícia's work is vital to combatting deforestation in Brazil and to protecting tapirs. The work of IPÊ's Lowland Tapir Conservation Initiative and its dedication to research, education and capacity-building is a shining example of effective community conservation work. Patrícia is a strong voice for conserving Earth's forests and carbon sinks. We are privileged to be able to continue our support."

Six other conservationists have received Whitley Awards worth £40,000 in funding to support their work with a range of threatened species. While normally presented to winners by charity Patron HRH The Princess Royal at an annual Ceremony in London, the 2020 Whitley Awards Ceremony was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the winners will receive their funding now, they will be invited to attend a ceremony and related events in London later this year to highlight their achievements, should the situation allow.

Visit www.whitleyaward.org to find out more.

The 2020 Whitley Award winners are:

- **Abdullahi Hussein Ali** – A landscape-level approach to conserve the hirola antelope, Kenya
- **Gabriela Rezende** – Connecting populations of black lion tamarins in the Atlantic Forest, Brazil
- **Jeanne Tarrant** – A country-wide strategy for South African amphibians
- **Phuntsho Thinley** – Stepping up patrols to preserve the endangered alpine musk deer, Bhutan
- **Rachel Ashebofe Ikemeh** – Advancing participatory conservation action for rare chimpanzees, Nigeria
- **YokYok (Yoki) Hadiprakarsa** – Saving the last stronghold of the Helmeted Hornbill, Indonesia

The 2020 Whitley Gold Award winner is:

- **Patrícia Medici** – Tapirs as conservation flagships, Brazil

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Press materials available:

- Copyright-cleared photographs of this project will be available here: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/PTMj8M7XmeF3z5aD7>
- Tailor-made films featuring the winner narrated by WFN Trustee, Sir David Attenborough, will be released later this year. Contact Chloe Baker e: chloe@weareliquid.com or Becky Jukes e: becky@weareliquid.com for more information.

Notes to Editors:

- The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) is a UK registered charity that provides funding, profile and training to grassroots conservation leaders across the Global South.
- The Whitley Awards 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.
- Whitley Awards are normally presented to winners by charity Patron, HRH The Princess Royal, at an annual Ceremony in London. In 2020, the Ceremony has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be instead held in December, if the situation allows.
- The Whitley Gold Award is worth £60,000 and recognises an outstanding past recipient of a Whitley Award who has gone on to make a significant 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 beginnings 27 years ago, the Whitley Fund for Nature has given £17million to more than 200 conservation leaders in over 80 countries.
- WFN operates a rigorous application process involving expert panel representation from international NGOs including WWF-UK, Fauna and Flora International (FFI), the Durrell Institute for Conservation and Ecology (DICE) at the University of Kent and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). This year, WFN received 112 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.
- Whitley Award winners receive professional media and communications training, network 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 winner's home countries.
- The 2020 Whitley Awards week events are generously sponsored by Earlymarket LLP, Whitley Awards Partner.
- 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.

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