



Press release

Embargoed – Not for publication or broadcast until 00.00 BST on Wednesday 25 April 2018

Whitley Award winner to create big cat corridor in Sri Lanka

April 2018

A wildlife ecologist committed to protecting the Sri Lankan leopard was yesterday (Wednesday 25 April) presented with a prestigious Whitley Award by HRH The Princess Royal.

Anjali Watson, Co-Founded the Wilderness & Wildlife Conservation Trust (WWCT) in 2004. Her project is located in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka, which is recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site, and is home to an extraordinary mix of flora and fauna.

As the second largest exporter of tea in the world, Sri Lanka is known for its tea production which supports the livelihood of many local communities. Space is at a premium and leopards frequently share territory with people, with the potential to result in losses to both parties as catchment forests disappear.

Anjali's primary aim is to develop an understanding of the ecology and behaviour of Sri Lanka's elusive leopard and establish a protected corridor that will connect two reserves and reduce human-leopard incidents in this landscape.

Her Whitley Award project will foster coexistence of people and leopards; training locals as 'leopard watchers' to respond to village incursions and reduce snaring of big cats. Participation in conservation will also help tea estates meet the criteria for environmental certification schemes, with the price premium channelled to local people. The corridor will also increase potential for payments for ecosystem services, such as downstream water provision from this watershed region.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "Anjali's project is a fantastic example of an integrated approach to conserve one of nature's most majestic cats in a landscape where people and leopards share space. This innovative project is leading the way to help us achieve coexistence. We are especially thrilled to be working with Anjali during our 25th anniversary and look forward to following her on this journey."

Anjali said: "My interest in Sri Lanka's wildlife parks was fostered from a very early age where I was lucky enough see leopards in their natural habitat. The vast highlands of Sri Lanka mean that these incredible species are often not seen by people which has ultimately instilled fear in local communities. Through our work, we hope to continue promoting human leopard coexistence, whilst identifying leopard populations and promoting their importance within the natural environment."

An annual event, often referred to as the 'Green Oscars', the 2018 Whitley Awards, are part of Whitley Fund for Nature's 25th Anniversary celebrations.

The winners will each receive £40,000 in funding to support their work to conserve some of the planet's most endangered species and spectacular places.

This year's Whitley Gold Award honours Pablo (Popi) Borboroglu, who is spearheading a campaign to protect endangered penguins across the globe. Pablo has already achieved dramatic conservation success, helping to protect more than 3.1 million hectares of marine and coastal habitats. The Gold Award, worth £60,000, will enable Pablo to justify ocean protection and underpin management for different species of penguins across Argentina, Chile and New Zealand.

The 2018 Whitley Award winners are:

Dominique Bikaba - DRC

Ensuring the survival of DRC's eastern lowland gorillas

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by Arcus Foundation

Kerstin Forsberg – Peru

Majestic giants: safe passage for manta rays in Peru

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by The Corcoran Foundation

Olivier Nsengimana – Rwanda

Conserving Rwanda's emblematic grey crowned crane

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by The Savitri Waney Charitable Trust

Shahriar Caesar Rahman - Bangladesh

Tortoises in trouble: Community conservation of Asia's largest tortoise

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by The William Brake Charitable Trust in memory of William Brake

Munir Virani – Kenya

Game of poisons: a strategy to save Kenya's threatened vultures

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by WWF-UK

Anjali Chandraraj Watson – Sri Lanka

Leopards as a flagship for wildlife corridors

Receiving the Whitley Award donated by Garfield Weston Foundation

Visit www.whitleyaward.org to find out more.

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Press materials available:

- Copyright-cleared photographs of this project are available here: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/51surKboKlbgsAys2>
- 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. This year the charity is marking its 25th anniversary.
- 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. The charity's patron, HRH The Princess Royal, presents the Awards annually at a special ceremony in London.
- 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 25 years ago, the Whitley Fund for Nature has given nearly £15 million to conservation and recognised more than 190 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) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). This year, WFN received 136 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. In addition 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 winner's 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 Balcombe Trust; The William Brake Charitable Trust; The Byford Trust; The Corcoran Foundation; Earlymarket; The G D Charitable Trust; The LJC Fund; Britta & Jeremy Lloyd Family Charitable Trust; Lund Trust, a charitable fund of Peter Baldwin and Lisbet Rausing; The Foundation for the Promotion of Wellbeing; The Rufford Foundation; The Schroder Foundation; Fondation Segré; The Shears Foundation; The Constance Travis Charitable Trust; Savitri Waney Charitable Trust; Garfield Weston Foundation; Whitley Animal Protection Trust; WWF-UK; the Friends and Scottish Friends of Whitley Fund for Nature; all our partners and supporters and those donors who have chosen to give anonymously.