



## Press release

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### **Battle to save the eastern lowland gorilla earns 2018 Whitley Award throwing a lifeline to critically endangered ape**

**April 2018**

A conservationist battling to a great ape from extinction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was yesterday (Wednesday 25 April) presented with a prestigious Whitley Award by HRH The Princess Royal.

Dominique Bikaba, Executive Director and Founder of NGO Strong Roots, promotes conservation education with the aim of protecting the eastern lowland gorilla in an area ravaged by civil unrest and intensive mining for resources used in our mobile phones and laptops.

Dominique's team are working with local people to create a protected forest corridor with the aim of connecting gorilla populations in the Kahuzi-Biega and Itombwe nature reserves.

Numbers of eastern lowland gorilla - also known as Grauer's gorilla - are estimated to have fallen by 77% over the last 20 years and the animal, the largest of the four gorilla subspecies, faces extinction by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century without determined efforts to conserve habitats. Now considered critically endangered, DRC represents the species last remaining habitat on Earth.

Dominique's landmark achievements include getting communities to agree to commit 3,000sq km of forest for gorilla conservation, but for wildlife to survive, people must have access to livelihoods and future development.

His Whitley Award project will secure legal protection of this vital habitat corridor and improve local food security to reduce pressure on forest resources. Dominique's team will help to increase crop production and train people in more sustainable farming techniques like agro-forestry. A Primate Monitoring Team made up of ex-poachers and local women will gather data on these little known primates, and local

committees will be set up to create a management plan for the area with the aim of boosting gorilla numbers.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: “Dominique’s inspirational work will help to stem the rapid decline of the eastern lowland gorilla in DRC. It is remarkable what has been achieved against the most challenging backdrop of military conflict, poaching, deforestation and speculative mining. We’re especially honoured to working with Dominique as we celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.”

Dominique said: “We have moved, and continue moving, policies in DRC in a way that our community-based conservation approaches are legally secured, including community-based forest governance and management.

An annual event, often referred to as the ‘Green Oscars’, the 2018 Whitley Awards, are part of Whitley Fund for Nature’s 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.

The winners will each receive £40,000 in funding to support up 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](http://www.whitleyaward.org) to find out more.

### **Press materials available:**

- Copyright-cleared photographs of this project are available here:  
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/fBDslaQnNYCinHz33>
- 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. This year the charity is marking its 25<sup>th</sup> 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.