



Press release

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Peruvian conservation champion receives 2018 Whitley Award for her work with the ocean's largest manta ray

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A Peruvian conservationist leading the way to protect giant manta rays was presented last night (Wednesday 25 April) with a prestigious Whitley Award by HRH The Princess Royal.

Kerstin Forsberg, Founder of Planeta Océano, received her award at the Royal Geographical Society, London at a Ceremony in front of 500 guests. Kerstin is one of six Whitley Award winners recognised for their work with local communities to protect threatened wildlife and their habitat around the globe.

Kerstin's passion for the environment began as a child and later saw her working with sea turtles as an undergraduate biology student. In 2011, she became involved in manta ray conservation in Peru, working with local fishers and volunteers to study and conserve these marine titans.

Peru and Ecuador are thought to be home to the largest giant manta ray population in the world. With extremely low reproduction rates, mantas are at greater risk of extinction and their 7-metre wingspan makes them prone to becoming tangled in fishing gear. Targeted for local consumption and for their gill plates (which are used in Chinese medicine), the last 75 years have seen localised population declines by up to 80%.

Whilst a dead manta is worth \$40-500 USD, manta ray tourism can bring in \$1 million USD during the life of a single ray. For the first time in Peru, fishers are being supported by Planeta Océano to develop responsible manta ecotourism. With new income streams from tourism, fishers are starting to release incidentally-captured mantas with the knowledge that they are worth more alive.

Kerstin's NGO has already gained legal protection for giant manta rays in the Peru. Her Whitley Award work will continue to tackle threats to mantas and reduce accidental bycatch of the species. Fishers will be given technical and financial

support to benefit from ecotourism, 100 citizen scientists will be engaged with monitoring and education programmes scaled up to reach youth in Peru & Ecuador.

Edward Whitley, Founder of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: “Kerstin’s commitment to marine conservation has helped mobilise action to ensure that giant manta rays persist in our oceans, and is using her entrepreneurial spirit to demonstrate they are worth more alive. We are especially pleased to be recognising Kerstin, as part of our 25th anniversary, and wish her every success.”

Kerstin said: “My passion for environmental conservation has been an important part of my life since I was a child. I didn’t imagine that my passion would have such an impact on marine life. We are all part of this planet ocean and it depends on all of us to conserve it.”

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/Evw0qI09oWxowhdv1>
- 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.