

NEWS from the WHITLEY FUND FOR NATURE

## Princess presents top conservation prize to Sri Lanka's Prithviraj Fernando

**EMBARGO:** Not for publication, please, before 20:30hrs GMT on Wednesday 13 May 2009

**LONDON, UK: 13 MAY 2009** - HRH The Princess Royal (Princess Anne) tonight presented one of the world's top prizes for grassroots nature conservation – a Whitley Award – to Prithviraj 'Pruthu' Fernando, of Sri Lanka, for his work to expand elephant conservation efforts beyond the boundaries of protected areas by finding ways for the animals to co-exist beneficially with people.

Dr Fernando, chairman of the Centre for Conservation and Research, Colombo, received his honour during a ceremony held at the Royal Geographical Society, London, and hosted by The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) – the UK-based charity which administers the international awards programme.

The prize includes a Whitley Award project grant of £30,000 - donated by The Shears Foundation - an engraved trophy, membership of an influential network of Whitley Award winners and opportunities to apply for WFN Continuation Funding.

The evening's top prize - the £60,000 Whitley Gold Award – went to Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, of Uganda, for a health and conservation programme in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, which is helping local villagers and their wildlife neighbours - endangered mountain gorillas - by reducing the cross-infection risks that result from people/ape contact and their DNA similarities.

The Princess also presented four other £30,000 Whitley Awards to conservationists from Bulgaria, Kenya, India and Thailand. *[Please see the Notes, over, for more details].*

The award to Dr Fernando recognises his efforts to protect wild Asian elephants by better balancing their need to range outside of tight 'protected zones' with the needs of paddy farmers whose lives can be devastated by a single crop raid.

Commenting on Dr Fernando's success, Edward Whitley, who founded the fund and chaired the judging panel, said: "The aim of the Whitley Awards is to find and support conservation scientists whose vision, passion, determination and qualities of leadership mean they are achieving inspirational results in conservation. They are helping to build a future where nature and people co-exist in a way that benefits both. In Pruthu's case, we were especially impressed that his project is using an innovative, science-backed, approach to explore new ways for elephants and people to live together."

### International Awards for Outstanding Leaders in Conservation

Patron HRH The Princess Royal Vice Patron John Laing Trustees Sir David Attenborough Tim Dye Catherine Faulks Edward Whitley Director Georgina Domberger

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The ceremony at which Dr Fernando received his accolade was co-hosted by BBC wildlife presenter Kate Humble and held in front of a 400-strong audience that included embassy representatives, donors and leading environmentalists.

This year the charity is also helping another Sri Lankan conservationist with a human-elephant conflict resolution project by giving a £10,000 Associate Award to Ravi Corea to improve land use practices in areas shared by wild herds and people.

The Whitley Awards scheme is an annual competition, now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year. It exists to identify, fund and encourage inspirational conservation leaders and their teams in developing countries. This year, almost 100 applicants competed for a place on the shortlist to win a Whitley Award.

This year's Whitley Award donors include HSBC Private Bank (UK) and WWF-UK, as well as a number of family foundations. To find out more about the charity and its work please see: [www.whitleyaward.org](http://www.whitleyaward.org)

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**Awards Ceremony Photographs**

Copyright-cleared photographs of HRH The Princess Royal presenting each award will be available from <http://picasaweb.google.com/irving818> from Thursday 14 May or can be emailed direct on request (see contact details above). Project images are available to download already from: [http://www.whitleyaward.org/press\\_releases.php](http://www.whitleyaward.org/press_releases.php)

**Other 2009 winners**

The following people also won Whitley Awards and £30,000 project grants:

**M. D. 'Madhu' Madhusudan (India)**, Director of the Nature Conservation Foundation, who is working to reduce conflict between people and wildlife, including tigers, in the Western Ghats, the world's most densely populated biodiversity hotspot, by showing farmers how to reduce crop raids, improve their incomes and avoid park encroachment.

**Whitley Award donated by HSBC Private Bank**

**Dino Martins (Kenya)** who is working in and around the Great Rift Valley and Taita Hills to improve local understanding and awareness of the vital role insects play in crop pollination and encourage more sustainable methods of agriculture. **Whitley Award donated by The William Brake Charitable Trust**

**Jittin Ritthirat (Thailand)** who is leading efforts to reduce conflicts between people, wild elephants and domestic cattle, especially over access to water and grazing, and restore Salakpra, Thailand's oldest nature reserve. **Whitley Award donated by The Friends of The WFN**

**Emil Todorov (Bulgaria)** who is leading a Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds initiative to offer greater protection to the many thousands of wild migratory and breeding birds that depend on the lower reaches of the river Danube. **Whitley Award donated by Paula and Mario Frering.**

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## Notes to Editors

**The Whitley Awards** are the flagship grants of the Whitley Fund for Nature, (WFN) a UK-based registered charity. WFN's aim is to identify the world's most dynamic conservation leaders and support them in practical work that benefits both wildlife and local communities. The first Whitley Award was given in 1994 when a single winner received £15,000. Since then, the number and value of the prizes has grown so that the awards are now acknowledged internationally as one of most valuable accolades a conservationist can win.

To be considered for a Whitley Award, entrants need to display both a strong track record in science-based conservation work and a viable plan for taking their work further.

A hallmark of the scheme is that WFN seeks to remain in close contact with past winners and facilitates the sharing of best practice, lessons learned, contacts and ideas. In this way, WFN maintains links with more than 100 international conservation leaders from over 50 countries. Past award-winners are also eligible to be invited to apply for Whitley Continuation Funding.

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## International Awards for Outstanding Leaders in Conservation

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