

## **Princess presents top conservation accolade to PNG's Mathew Akon**

**EMBARGO: Not for publication, please, before 20:30hrs GMT on Wednesday 12 May 2010**

**LONDON, UK: 12 MAY 2010** - HRH The Princess Royal (Princess Anne) tonight presented one of the world's top prizes for grassroots nature conservation – a Whitley Award – to Mathew Akon, of Papua New Guinea, for his work in the Torricelli Mountains to conserve one of the world's most endangered marsupials - the little-known tenkile, or Scott's tree kangaroo.

Mr Akon, who works for the Tenkile Conservation Alliance (TCA), received his honour during a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, hosted by The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) – the UK-based charity behind the international awards scheme.

The Whitley Award for Mathew Akon includes a project grant of £30,000 - donated by WWF-UK - an engraved trophy, membership of the influential network of past Whitley Award winners, international recognition and leadership development training.

The award to Mathew Akon recognises his efforts to interest and involve some 10,000 local people in safeguarding the rich and rare wildlife of the mountainous area where he was born and brought up and, particularly, his work on behalf of tenkiles whose habitat has shrunk to barely 150 square kilometres of Torricelli rainforest.

The evening's top prize - the £60,000 Whitley Gold Award – went to Dr Angela Maldonado of Colombia for her efforts around the Colombia-Peru border to end the illegal capture of night monkeys for biomedical research, including by developing alternative, sustainable, ways for rainforest communities to earn a living.

In addition, Her Royal Highness also presented six other Whitley Awards worth £30,000 each to conservation leaders from Argentina, Cameroon, Colombia, Russia, Uganda and Uruguay.

*For more details about the finalists and their projects, please see the Notes overleaf.*

Commenting on Mathew Akon's success, Georgina Domberger, Director of the Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "The aim of the Whitley Awards is to identify and fund leading grassroots conservationists from around the world who are using their scientific expertise and local knowledge to inspire real and positive change for people and wildlife and the habitats they share.

"In the case of Mathew Akon, the judges were particularly impressed by the high level of support he is gathering from local people, by the connections he is demonstrating between improved livelihoods and nutrition and wildlife conservation, and by the commitment of the region's communities to creating a protected nature area in the heart of their mountains."

The ceremony at which Mathew Akon received his accolade was co-hosted by BBC wildlife presenter Kate Humble and witnessed by a 350-strong audience which included embassy representatives, Whitley Fund for Nature donors, including HSBC, and WWF-UK, and leading environmentalists.

In all, grants worth £270,000 were presented, bringing the total amount distributed by the Whitley Awards since their inception to £6m across 55 countries.

The Whitley Awards scheme is an annual competition, now in its 17<sup>th</sup> year. It exists to identify, fund and encourage inspirational local conservation leaders and their teams in developing countries. 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 winners receiving their Whitley Awards from HRH The Princess Royal will be available from [http://whitleyaward.org/awards\\_ceremony.php](http://whitleyaward.org/awards_ceremony.php) the day after the ceremony, alongside a selection of project pictures and portraits .

### **Notes to Editors**

**The Whitley Awards** are the flagship grants of the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN), a UK-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 GBP. 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. For more information, please see [www.whitleyaward.org](http://www.whitleyaward.org).

**The full list of £30,000 Whitley Awards winners this year is:**

**Mathew Akon (Papua New Guinea)** who is enlisting one of the world's most endangered marsupials - the little-known tenkile (or Scott's) tree kangaroo - to inspire villagers in Papua New Guinea's remote and wildlife-rich Torricelli Mountains to agree hunting limits and support habitat protection. **Whitley Award donated by WWF-UK.**

**Diego Amorocho (Colombia)** who is teaching Pacific coastal fishing communities how to reduce the accidental bycatch of sea turtles, become turtle first aiders and earn money as conservation supporters and from beach care.

**Pablo Borboroglu (Argentina)** who is establishing the world's first coalition to use penguins as ambassadors for global ocean conservation, highlighting the need to mitigate threats to marine wildlife and habitats from over-fishing, oil pollution and climate change. **Whitley Award donated by Natasha and George Duffield.**

**Susana Gonzalez (Uruguay)** who is combining scientific research with public outreach to safeguard Uruguay's two remaining Pampas Deer populations and reverse the trend which has seen the country's grasslands dwindle to 1% of the area covered in 1900. **Whitley Award donated by The Garfield Weston Foundation.**

**Vadim Kirilyuk (Russia)** who is working on the vast steppe grasslands at the Russian-Mongolian frontier to win better protection for the Mongolian gazelle and its migration routes, including through the opening up of international border fences and greater community understanding and support. **Whitley Award donated by The William Brake Charitable Trust.**

**Angela Maldonado (Colombia)** who is exploring community-backed alternative ways for the impoverished people of the Colombian Amazon to earn a living, to end the illegal capture of night monkeys for biomedical research and raising awareness of the violation of international wildlife trade laws. **Whitley Award donated by HSBC Private Bank + extra £30,000 as Whitley Gold Award winner.**

**Jimmy Muheebwa (Uganda)** who is inspiring communities in Lake Victoria's catchment zone to use the wetlands sustainably, to improve livelihoods and save the region's local wildlife, including Uganda's national bird, the grey-crowned crane. **Whitley Award donated by The Shears Foundation.**

**Louis Nkembu (Cameroon)** who is introducing community-based landscape and biodiversity management to the Lebialem Highlands – a refuge for many rare plants, birds and other animals, including chimpanzees and Africa's most endangered great ape, the cross river gorilla. **Whitley Award donated by WildInvest.**