

THE WHITLEY LAING FOUNDATION

ISSUE 2

JANUARY 2003

2003 Gold Award Shortlist

The Whitley Awards received over 70 applications this year so it's been no easy task to hone the list down to just eight Gold Award finalists.

Of these, five will go on to receive an award from Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal at this year's ceremony – the tenth Whitley Awards – on March 13 at the Royal Geographical Society. The ceremony will be compered by Amanda Vincent, our first ever Gold Award Winner (see also back page).

All those shortlisted fulfil our core aim, that is, involving local communities in wildlife and habitat conservation.

Our finalists are:

Gustavo Kattan, whose Fundacion EcoAndina is helping to define a system of protected areas in the Andes of Colombia, an area of extraordinary biodiversity. The region – a major coffee-growing area – is severely deforested and heavily populated, but, under mandate from the Columbian government, Kattan's scheme will determine which ecosystems are currently under-represented and where new protected areas can best be established.

Dale Lewis, a 51-year-old American-born environmentalist resident in Zambia, who has successfully managed to convert poachers to farming by teaching them new skills. Lewis now plans a regional trading centre to support local farmer groups – boosting their agricultural skills and encouraging their involvement in wildlife production. Lewis was an Ashden Award finalist in 2002.

Raman Sukumar, 47, who has devoted his life to saving elephants in the Nilgiri region of Southern India, a biodiversity hotspot now home to the

world's largest single population of Asian elephants. Sukumar plans detailed mapping of land-use in the area as well as education and training initiatives to help promote elephant conservation amongst local people. By leveraging private enterprise and community involvement, Sukumar hopes to mitigate elephant-human conflict with schemes such as electric fences or ditches.

Victor Vera, a 40-year-old Paraguayan who is fighting to save one of the most threatened and biologically diverse ecosystems in the world. Paraguay is losing forest faster than any other Latin American country but, with 97% of land

privately owned, conservation depends on private co-operation. Vera's Natural Land Trust works with land-owners and farmers in the San Raphael area to create private reserves and help develop sustainable economic alternatives.

Jon Paul Rodriguez, whose ambitious programme of conservation and education initiatives on the Venezuelan island of Margarita ranges from monitoring the yellow-shouldered parrot to encouraging locals to protect sea turtle nests. Margarita is the only island in the Caribbean with native carnivore

[continued on page 2](#)

HRH Princess Royal attends our annual fundraiser



Our Patron, Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, joined 30 current donors and potential supporters at our 2nd annual fundraising dinner, held in November at Sir John Soane's Museum in London.

We heard updates from

2000 Gold Award winner Gargi Banerji, who is working on medicinal plants and community development in the Himalayas, and Laury Cullen (Gold Award 2002) who works with local landless people to restore the

Brazilian Atlantic Forest, both pictured above. It was inspiring to hear how they've progressed since receiving their Awards, and guests enjoyed a broad-ranging discussion of conservation and development issues.

Ruffords go from strength to strength

Big award winners may grab the headlines but Rufford Small Grants are conclusive proof that a little can go a very long way.

In this second Whitley Laing Foundation newsletter, we are highlighting the activities of a select group of Rufford Small Grant recipients to show just how much impact a £5,000 grant can make when placed in the hands of a highly-motivated and resourceful environmentalist.

The four projects featured here demonstrate the wide range of Rufford Small Grant-supported campaigns – both geographically and in scope. They include: Solomon Kyalo, working with local communities in Kenya to save the endangered Hrola antelope; Valentius Heri's project to develop honey-harvesting in the swamp forests of Borneo; Shai Einbinder's efforts to unite Israel and Jordan in a study of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Aqaba and Anna Asatryan's research into large-flowered poppies in the Caucasus mountains of Armenia.

Rufford Small Grants are primarily aimed at small conservation programmes and pilot projects, but one of our hopes is that recipients will progress to such a

degree that they later go on to apply for a main Whitley Award.

The Small Grants have proved highly popular since their launch with support from the Rufford Foundation in 1999. 103 grants have been handed out amounting to more than £345,000. This quarter we received more than 65 applications compared with the 10 we averaged only two years ago.

The Rufford Foundation is a charitable grant-making foundation established in

June 1982 by one of our Trustees, John Laing. It assists a variety of charities and has a special interest in nature conservation, the environment and sustainable development.

"Rufford Small Grants play a very useful role in getting small projects underway"

said John Laing. "We are continually impressed by just how much our recipients achieve. We hope to see many more projects sponsored by Rufford Small Grants take off over the coming years."

"We are continually impressed by just how much our recipients achieve."



Rufford Small Grant Poppy collection

200 years ago, the seeds of the large-flowered East Poppy were brought from the Caucasus mountains to decorate the Georgian gardens of Chelsea. Today its seeds are being brought to England once again by an Armenian biologist desperate to save the flower from dying out completely.

Thanks to a Rufford Small Grant, Anna Asatryan has launched the first comprehensive modern study of the Large-flowered Poppies of Armenia. It is estimated that over 60% of all Caucasian flora species are found in this tiny mountainous country with poppies one of the brightest and most beautiful components of this stunning landscape.

Asatryan said: "The condition of the environment in Armenia is alarming. The recent fuel and energy crisis and the population's poverty have led to mass felling – nearly a third of Armenia's forests have now been destroyed. The collection of medicinal, edible and decorative wild plants has increased, and plants with big and beautiful flowers are under particular threat. And of course the poppies grow mainly in areas subject to intensive grazing and mowing."

Asatryan's project will investigate the distribution and condition of these poppies in Armenia, collect seeds

continued from page 1

populations, including the ocelot, but at least seven endemic birds and mammals are under threat.

Inés Hinojosa, a 38-year-old Bolivian, who is helping the isolated Ayoreo community of Santa Cruz state protect the last fragment of the Chiquitano-Chaco transitional forest. The area is under pressure from large commercial soybean operations but local people are keen to develop sustainable economic activities, such as weaving, that are more in keeping with their way of life.

Gregor MacLennan, who is helping

local Panoan rainforest people living in the remote headwaters of the Amazon in south east Peru protect and secure their land and resources against increasing exploitation by oil, gas and timber companies. The remoteness of the region and the lack of state or NGO presence means violations of environmental and human rights frequently go unreported.

John Waithaka, who is developing a community-based ecotourism business in the Greater Amboseli region of Kenya. The development of such programmes linking economic activity to conservation means that agricultural development and land use changes pose less of a threat to the large mammals, their habitat and the Maasai culture.

The panel which judges applications for Whitley Awards includes the Whitley Laing Foundation trustees, experts from WWF-UK, Wildlife Trusts and Fauna & Flora International as well as authorities from Newcastle and London Universities.



for seed reproduction at the Institute of Botany, transplant plants to Yerevan Botanical Garden for ex-situ conservation, prepare plans for their conservation in their habitats and publish an illustrated booklet about the poppies for wide distribution at home and abroad.

Asatryan has galvanised local people into action by recruiting them as guides, and her plan to grow poppies at the Botanical Garden is reaping rewards – over 70% of the seeds sprouted.



Rufford Small Grant
Coral consensus

Israel and Jordan are joining forces in a unique bid to protect the marine habitat of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Coral reefs are suffering globally from pollution and the impact of humans, but the Aqaba reefs, one of the most popular dive destinations in the world, are under particular pressure. The region depends on divers for its economic survival yet the enthusiasts who flock to places such as Eilat in Israel and Aqaba in Jordan are helping devastate the very reefs they have come to admire. During the 90s, some 250,000 dives a year took place here, contributing to the reefs' rapid decline from 70% living cover in 1996 to just 30% in 1999.

Both Jordan and Israel have responded by creating "artificial reefs", by sinking ships or other objects in order to conserve and restore marine habitats. However, little is known about how these artificial reefs affect the natural reefs that they neighbour.

Young Israeli marine biologist Shai Einbinder will be using his Rufford Small Grant in a unique study of the Gulf's coral community structure. He said: "Artificial reefs may well be a solution for protecting natural coral reefs, but it's vitally important we find out first what effect they have on their surroundings. This unique project is also promoting scientific co-operation between Israel and Jordan to achieve cross-border conservation goals."

Rufford Small Grant
Busy Borneo bees

In the swamp forests of Borneo's Danau Sentarum National Park, local people have been cutting down trees for thousands of years. The impact used to be minimal but in recent decades, thanks to both logging and the devastating effect of forest fires, the forest area has been dwindling steadily.

Valentius Heri won a Rufford Small Grant last year for a project aimed at helping the park's 7,000 or so inhabitants find alternative sustainable economic activities. He found that an amazing source of wealth was literally buzzing around people's ears and that, of all the non-timber forest products at hand, it is honey from the Asian Giant Bee that offers the greatest potential.

Honey-harvesting is nothing new to the region's inhabitants. Fishermen have been supplementing their incomes this way for centuries but in recent times, forest fires, smoke pollution and the erosion of the bee's natural habitat have drastically reduced the honey harvest. Heri believes that new techniques could turn honey into a far more significant source of income.



Four villages participated in a project to try these new methods. Measures such as harvesting by day instead of night, using new equipment for smoking and cutting the honeycomb and decontaminating honey and beeswax more thoroughly during processing have all shown huge potential for improving yield and quality. By collaborating rather than competing, villagers have been able to increase their prices, getting up to three times more for their product than before.

Now other villages in the park are keen to join in the project and those already taking part have seen the value of habitat conservation in helping to keep up bee numbers. Many have already taken measures to reforest patches of past fire sites with species favoured by wild honey bees, and to form their own fire patrol groups to prevent further devastation.

Rufford Small Grant
Helping the Hirola

The Hirola Antelope, found only in the Garissa and Tana River districts of Kenya, is critically endangered. Only a small population of perhaps 1,500-2,000 individuals remains, despite efforts in the past to transplant populations to other areas such as the Tsavo East National Park. In-situ conservation is now seen as the species' best hope for survival.



Solomon Kyalo aims to strengthen recent conservation efforts by the local communities through

integrating traditional and scientific knowledge of the species. By working with existing conservation groups in the Hirola's home range, he is documenting traditional knowledge of the Hirola in an effort to explain the past population decline. Then, to put this information in context, he is investigating local communities' perceptions of the Hirola and its place within their culture, and exploring how these perceptions have changed with time. He will use this traditional knowledge to develop community conservation measures, and will then recommend interventions and strategies towards longer-term Hirola recovery.

Solomon describes his work as "easy if the local community can conceptualize conservation benefits and at the same time very difficult if they can not."

Plunder: The Silent Destruction of Liberia's Rainforest

Silas Siakor, the 31-year-old winner of the £20,000 2002 Sting and Trudie Styler Award for Human Rights and the Environment, has published a damning 22-page report on the threat posed to Liberia's rainforest by industrial logging.

"Plunder: The Silent Destruction of Liberia's Rainforest" is the result of two years' research by the young environmentalist into an industry which is devastating both the natural environment and the survival prospects of indigenous rural communities.

At the report's launch in September, Siakor described his findings as a "testimony of plunder, deprivation, discontentment, conflicts and environmental degradation".

Liberia hosts the last two significant blocks of the remaining closed-canopy tropical rainforest within what is known as the Upper Guinea forests of West Africa. Recognised as one of the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots, the Upper Guinea forest hosts some 550 different species of mammal and is a unique ecological niche for some of the rarest species in the world, such as Jentink's duiker, the pygmy hippo, the Liberian mongoose and the giant forest hog.

The forest now measures less than 13 per cent of its original size, with nearly half this remaining forest in Liberia. Yet logging has increased here by more than 1,300 per cent in the last five years.

Siakor is now calling on



the international community to lobby the Liberian government to implement his recommendations, including commissioning an independent enquiry into the "corrupt practices" practiced by the logging companies and an end to all round log export. He urged the government to prosecute logging companies involved in illegal forest activities, including indiscriminate logging and human rights abuses.

Siakor said: "We're not opposed to

logging but we are opposed to the unsustainable practices employed by some logging companies and the apparent lawlessness that characterises their operations. Logging companies remain the single most destructive force and are responsible for the larger percentage of deforestation."

Siakor described his findings as a "testimony of plunder, deprivation, discontentment, conflicts and environmental degradation".

Further success for Whitley winners

Lindy Rodwell, a Whitley Gold Award winner in 1999 and Continuation Award winner in 2002, has received an extra \$100,000 boost to her funds by winning the Environment Award in the annual Rolex Awards for Enterprise. Lindy has spearheaded crane and wetland conservation in Southern Africa and has spent ten years building an ambitious conservation network across 11 countries.

Professor Amanda Vincent, our very first Gold Award winner, became a Rolex Laureate in 1999 for her work in protecting seahorses in Vietnam, and received her Pew Fellowship in 2000. Her efforts through Project Seahorse have resulted in 160 countries around the world voting in November 2002 to start controlling the trade in seahorses to ensure their continued survival in the world. Seahorses are the first marine fish species of commercial importance to be listed on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

In Sri Lanka, Kanchana Weerakoon Ranasinghe, runner-up in last year's Whitley Awards, has been named "Outstanding Young Person of the Year" in the environmental leadership category of a national award scheme. Kanchana, 31, has a regular radio slot to discuss environmental issues. She has also set up a volunteer network to protect the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary. The reserve is home to all the country's endemic birds as well as elephant, leopard, reptiles, amphibians and fish but also home to Adams Peak, one of the holiest sites in Sri Lanka, which attracts some two million pilgrims a year.

To read Silas Siakor's report visit www.whitleyaward.org

Issue 2 January 2003
Published by

THE WHITLEY LAING
FOUNDATION

UK Registered Charity Number 1081455

139 Elgin Crescent
London W11 2JH
T 020 7229 7554
F 020 7229 7578
info@whitleyaward.org
www.whitleyaward.org