

## Princess gives top nature award to tapir-led initiative by Brazilian biologist

**EMBARGO: Not for publication, please, before 20:00hrs GMT (9pm, BST) on 21 May 2008**

**LONDON, UK: 21 MAY 2008** - HRH The Princess Royal (Princess Anne) tonight presented one of the world's top environmental awards – a Whitley Award - to Dr Patricia Medici, of Brazil, for a project that uses tapirs as ambassadors for grassroots nature conservation.

Dr Medici, 35, a founder member of the Brazilian conservation organization, IPÊ, was one of 11 people honoured at the ceremony, held at the Royal Geographical Society, London, by The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) – the UK-based charity which administers the international awards programme.

Dr Medici's prize includes a Whitley Award project grant of £30,000 (*US\$60,000 approx*), donated by The Friends of WFN plus long-term support and the opportunity to seek further WFN funding, worth more than £0.4m a year (*US\$0.8m*).

In all, HRH The Princess Royal gave out prizes worth £350,000 (*US\$800,000*). For the first time in the charity's history, the judges picked two winners for the schemes top prize - the Whitley Gold Award – which went jointly to Rodrigo Hucke-Gaete (Chile) and Çağan Şekercioğlu (Turkey), along with £60,000 (*\$US120,000*) project funding each. Other Whitley Award winners came from Chile, China, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Peru and Turkey.

In addition, there was a Associate Award of £10,000 for another Brazilian scientist, Carlos Peres, for his innovative approach to deforestation around Alta Floresta.

The Whitley Award to Patricia Medici recognised her work in the Atlantic Forests of Brazil. There, she is using lowland tapirs as ambassadors for conservation, introducing them to local communities and so capturing interest and support for active habitat conservation of benefit to many wildlife species. One of the project's greatest achievements is its agri-forestry work with landless communities. They are creating forest corridors that link up fragmented wildlife habitats while also giving themselves an income by selling excess saplings. Plans are now in hand to roll-out the model to other parts of Brazil, starting in the world's largest freshwater wetland, the Pantanal.

For Carlos Peres, 44, his Associate Award provides £10,000 to help him and colleagues from the Fundação Ecológica Cristalino (FEC) to develop a pioneering project in the 'Arc of Deforestation at Alta Floresta. FEC is working with 230 landowners, to assess both the cash and crop yields of sites per hectare and their biodiversity and ecosystem benefits, to build a scientific and economic case for more environmentally-sensitive landscape management plans.

Speaking before the results were announced, WFN's founder, Edward Whitley, said: "The aim of the Whitley Awards is to find and support the environmental leaders who are helping to build a future where nature and people co-exist in a way that benefits both. Once again, this year's finalists have risen to the challenge. They have impressed and heartened us by telling us their conservation success stories, and by showing what can be achieved when vision, passion, intelligence and determination are brought to bear. An added bonus is that they give us hope. The example set by people like Patricia Medici and Carlos Peres is an inspiration for us all."

The awards ceremony was co-hosted by BBC broadcaster Martha Kearney and held in front of a 350-strong audience that included Sir David Attenborough, embassy representatives leading scientists and celebrity conservation supporters.

Edward Whitley added: "As well as providing our winners with a substantial financial prize, we also strive to support them in wider ways – for instance, by offering them opportunities to seek further funding in future years and by uniting them with other donors and conservation organisations. They also become part of the Whitley Fund for Nature's network of past finalists which, after 15 years, now takes in over 100 dynamic environmentalists in more than 50 countries, making it an invaluable source of experience, ideas and best practice."

The Whitley Awards are sponsored and supported by a range of corporations and individuals including WWF-UK, Sting and his wife, Trudie Styler, and HSBC. To find out more about the Whitley Fund for Nature and past Whitley Award recipients, please see: [www.whitleyaward.org](http://www.whitleyaward.org)

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### **Media enquiries**

*For more info, interviews, or photos, please contact:*

Pam Beddard, (tel) +44 (0)117 987 0442 ; (mobile) +44 (0) 7767 621207  
(e) [pam.beddard@btinternet.com](mailto:pam.beddard@btinternet.com); (w) [www.whitleyaward.org](http://www.whitleyaward.org)

### **Notes to Editors (including the 2008 short-list)**

1. **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, of £15,000 (US\$30,000) was given in 1994. Since then, the number, value and reputation of the prizes has grown so that the programme is now one of the world's

best known and respected, working with more than 100 international conservation leaders from 50-plus countries. Award-winners are also invited to bid for continuation funding. This year, the extra funding is worth around £400,000.

2. **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. For more information about the judging process and past winners, please see: [www.whitleyaward.org](http://www.whitleyaward.org)

3. **Photographs** from tonight's awards ceremony can be obtained from Pam Beddard, (t) +44 (0) 117 987 0442; or +44 (0) 7767 621207, or (e) [pam.beddard@btinternet.com](mailto:pam.beddard@btinternet.com) .

4. **More details** about the people and projects short-listed for Whitley Awards 2008 are given here:

**Deepak APTE** (India), a marine biologist using the giant clam as a flagship for creating India's first network of marine protected areas in the sealife-rich Lakshadweep archipelago, which lies around 220kms to the west of Kerala.

**Rodrigo HUCKE-GAETE** (Chile) who helped to locate a previously unknown breeding ground for the rare and enigmatic blue whale (as seen in the BBC's Planet Earth) and now wants to get the area protected as a marine reserve

**Zahirul ISLAM** (Bangladesh), who is educating Bay of Bengal fishing communities and beach users about sea turtles, and who now wants to expand to other beaches and islands along the Cox's Bazar coast.

**Denny KURNIAWAN** (Borneo) who is enabling indigenous tribes to live and work sustainably in the Sebangau National Park – a crucial carbon store and home to the world's largest population of wild orang utans

**LIU Yi** (China), a young environmental activist whose student efforts to raise awareness about the need to safeguard mangrove swamps have grown into an officially-backed protection project covering five south-eastern provinces.

**Patrícia MEDICI** (Brazil) who is expanding an initiative where tapirs as ambassadors for conservation, environmental education and agri-environment schemes.

**Carlos PERES** (Brazil) who is pioneering an approach to Amazonian conservation that is taking economic drivers into account in land management plans for the 'Arc of Deforestation', around Alta Floresta.

**Ernesto RAEZ-LUNA** (Peru), an ecologist, who is educating and rallying local people and regional decision-makers in the Tambopata river basin to prevent its destruction by gold-mining, and oil boom and a new Peru-Brazil Highway.

**Marleny ROSALES-MEDA** (Guatemala) is weaving the traditional, subsistence, hunting customs and knowledge of Maya-Q'eqchi' communities into sustainable conservation plans for the Laguna Lachua National Park.

**Çağan ŞEKERCIOĞLU** (Turkey) who is enlisting locals to reduce overgrazing, end hawk poaching and encourage wildlife tourism in a bird-rich wetland, in a region of eastern Turkey made famous by Orhan Pamuk's novel Snow.

**Jean WIENER** (Haiti), a marine biologist, working to protect his homeland's coral reefs and mangrove swamps by involving local fishing and farming families in education, replanting and reef restoration projects.