

# Conservation news

## The Whitley Awards 2024

The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) has announced the six conservation leaders receiving the Whitley Awards 2024. The Whitley Awards ceremony was held at the Royal Geographical Society and was also broadcast online. These awards are worth GBP 50,000 each in project funding over 1 year. The 2024 Whitley Award Winners are Leory Ignacio, Guyana (Red alert: land and fire management to protect Guyana's red siskins); Naomi Longa, Papua New Guinea (Empowering women to conserve coral reefs); Kuenzang Dorji, Bhutan (Living with langurs: promoting co-existence); Aristide Kamla, Cameroon (Restoring Lake Ossa: improving freshwater management for African manatees); Raju Acharya, Nepal (An Action Plan to safeguard Central Nepal's owls); and Fernanda Abra, Brazil (Building bridges: primate canopy crossings in the Amazon).

In addition, a Whitley Award alumnus is chosen to receive the Whitley Gold Award in recognition of their outstanding contribution to conservation. Worth GBP 100,000, this prize was presented to 2017 Whitley Award winner Purnima Devi Barman of the Indian NGO Aaranyak for her work to conserve the greater adjutant stork *Leptoptilos dubius*—known locally as Hargila—whose numbers have quadrupled in Assam to more than 1,800 thanks to a dynamic campaign she masterminded and that she is expanding to include 20,000 women. This stork was re-categorized from Endangered to Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List in December 2023 in a success story that has transformed the outlook for the bird as well as the lives of rural women known as 'stork sisters'. Purnima aims to increase the stork's population from the estimated global population of 3,180 to 5,000 by 2030, expanding conservation efforts across its range to Cambodia and the state of Bihar in East India. She will also establish a collaborative network to expand conservation education and knowledge exchange, joining forces with the Ethical Conservation Alliance, pioneered by fellow WFN alumni. This alliance aims to support conservation practitioners around the world to build respectful partnerships with local and Indigenous communities.

The Whitley Fund for Nature was established to accelerate the work of grassroots conservationists, and has funded more than 200 conservationists in Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia since it was founded by Edward Whitley OBE 30 years ago. It has awarded GBP 23 million in conservation grants. By including local people as stakeholders in saving ecosystems, today's conservationists are helping the world's most vulnerable people to tackle climate change, land grabs, food insecurity and water scarcity.

The Whitley Fund for Nature has a long-term commitment to conservation leaders. Winners can apply for

Continuation Funding grants of up to GBP 100,000 over 2 years to scale up their work or respond to new threats. Winners also gain lifelong membership of the global alumni network, giving them access to like-minded leaders and opportunities to foster collaborations. For more information on the Whitley Awards or how to apply, visit [whitleyaward.org](http://whitleyaward.org).

KASIA BROOKES  ([kasia@whitleyaward.org](mailto:kasia@whitleyaward.org))

Whitley Fund for Nature, London, UK

This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## Four new records of *Griffinia ornata*, a rare and threatened Brazilian species of Amaryllidaceae

*Griffinia ornata* T. Moore, one of the c. 20 species of *Griffinia* endemic to Brazil, has attractive lilac or white flowers and ornamental foliage, grows to c. 1 m tall and has leaves > 1 m long. It was described in 1876 from plants imported from Rio de Janeiro and introduced into cultivation in London a year earlier. A more detailed description of the species, accompanied by a colourful illustration, was published in 1878, but since then *G. ornata* has not been observed in the wild.

However, in 2017 we discovered a natural population of the species, comprising c. 20 mature individuals in a forested area of the coastal plain in Ubatuba, a municipality in the state of São Paulo that borders Rio de Janeiro. More than 85% of Ubatuba comprises remaining Atlantic Forest, and most of this is included in fully protected conservation units, but the municipality is threatened by real estate speculation and urban development.

Since 2017, via citizen science platforms and social media groups, we obtained information on four potential new localities for *G. ornata* in Ubatuba, all of which we were able to confirm through field investigations in November 2023. These new localities comprise small groups of 3–10 mature individuals in lowland forests (< 50 m altitude), one of the least protected vegetation types in the municipality. All five known populations are outside conservation units, and four are on the edge of residential areas. As the population found in 2017 was reduced by 50% in the year following its discovery, as a result of damage by larvae of the noctuid moth *Xanthopastis timais*, and currently comprises c. 10 mature individuals, we estimate that the total number of known mature individuals of *G. ornata* is c. 30.

Although most species of *Griffinia* are categorized as threatened in Brazil, the risk of extinction of *G. ornata* has not been assessed and it is not legally protected. We recommend that urgent measures are taken to ensure the



*Griffinia ornata*: (a) a clonal clump with flowering individual, and (b) detail of inflorescence. Photos: J.A. Gomes.

conservation of the known populations, with active involvement of both regional and local public authorities, and civil society.

ANTONIO CAMPOS-ROCHA<sup>1</sup>  ([camposrocha@hotmail.com](mailto:camposrocha@hotmail.com)), ALAN MEEROW<sup>2,3</sup> , LUCAS RAMIRO<sup>4</sup> , JOSÉ ATALIBA GOMES<sup>5</sup> , INGRID KOCH<sup>1</sup>  and JULIE DUTILH<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, Brazil.

<sup>2</sup>Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA.

<sup>3</sup>Montgomery Botanical Center, Miami, Florida, USA.

<sup>4</sup>Centro Universitário Módulo, Caraguatatuba, Brazil. <sup>5</sup>Rede Brasileira de Jardins Botânicos, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

### **iNaturalist record of the threatened aroid *Philodendron spiritus-sancti***

*Philodendron spiritus-sancti* is an aroid (family Araceae) endemic to the Atlantic Forest of the central mountainous region of Espírito Santo state, Brazil. The species is known for its unusual leaf shape and is highly coveted by horticulturists and private collectors for its ornamental value. It is rare



*Philodendron spiritus-sancti* in the wild. Photo: Vagner Faller.

in nature and is categorized as Endangered nationally and Critically Endangered in Espírito Santo but has not yet been evaluated for the IUCN Red List. Until 2023 only three natural populations were known, with a very restricted distribution that may be partly a result of overexploitation.

Following the recent global increase in the purchase of houseplants to create so-called urban jungles, the species began to gain more prominence in newspaper articles and social media. This attention resulted in a new observation recorded on iNaturalist ([inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)), by author RdS, south of the known records of the species. In February 2024, we confirmed this record in Monumento Natural da Serra das Torres, a protected area of forest with mountainous and rugged terrain.

The newly discovered population of *P. spiritus-sancti* is 128 km from the previously known records. We recorded at least 50 well developed individuals and many seedlings. The most impressive groups of individual plants are rupicolous, growing on a rocky wall. They dominate the wall and grow directly on the rocks, with associated rupicolous species such as *Philodendron edmundoi*, *Griffinia concinna*, *Begonia* spp. and bromeliads. The population has plants with both narrow and broad leaves growing together in a morphological gradient, resembling the species in the central mountainous region. *Philodendron spiritus-sancti* was previously considered a hemiepiphyte of the high forest canopy.

Our finding expands the known distribution of the species, demonstrates that it has more than one growth habit, and illustrates the potential of iNaturalist and citizen science as sources of data for improving knowledge of threatened species. This new record of *P. spiritus-sancti* also highlights the crucial role of protected areas for conservation.

LUANA S.B. CALAZANS<sup>1</sup> , ALEXANDRE MAGNO<sup>1</sup> , VAGNER S. FALLER<sup>2</sup> , RAFAEL DOS SANTOS<sup>3</sup>  and RODRIGO T. VALADARES<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, Brazil.

<sup>2</sup>Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo, Alegre, Brazil.