

Conservation news

The Tony Whitten Conservation Award 2020

The panel of judges for the second year of this competition honouring Tony Whitten were again hugely impressed by the diversity and quality of the applications they received. This year's awards, worth GBP 2,000 each, have been made to five conservationists and field biologists from East and South-east Asia, all of whom are under 35 years old and doing ground-breaking work on the often overlooked species and habitats that Tony was most passionate about:

Areeruk Nilsai, for her work on troglomorphic Collembola in Thailand. Areeruk focuses on the taxonomy and adaptive radiation of cave springtails in the genus *Coecobrya*. She uses both morphological and genetic characters to understand their phylogenetic relationships and their adaptations to cave life. Her work also aims to support conservation of Thailand's karst and cave ecosystems.

Guoyi Zhang, for work on the taxonomy of snails of karst mountains in Northern China. Zhang's project uses DNA and morphological characters to resolve the relationships of snails in the family Camaenidae and shed light on the biogeography of these and related molluscs. Zhang has also exposed illegal collection and trading, and will use this award both to expand survey areas and to visit museums to check specimens.

Joseph B. Rasalan, for his work on tarantulas in Philippine cave and forest ecosystems. Joseph has been involved in the discovery and description of two cave mygalomorphs new

to science, in the formulation and implementation of cave ecosystem conservation policies, and in capacity building. Joseph will use his award to create online content about Philippine cave and spider biology.

Munkhnast Dalannast, for his research on Mongolian cave bats and invertebrates. An expert on Mongolian bats, Munkhnast will use his award to extend his research by studying the invertebrates living in Mongolia's extensive but overlooked caves.

Rena Tri Hernawati, for her work on freshwater shrimps of Java and Bali. Rena's research on DNA-barcoding the freshwater shrimps of Java and Bali has revealed several cryptic species, with discrete lineages in different drainage systems. Her award will support visits to important crustacean collections in Singapore and Leiden.

In addition, six applicants were highly commended: Jay S. Fidelino, for his work on the endemic mammals of Dinagat Island; Justine O. Magbanua, for his work on the Negros cave frog; Krizler C. Tanalgo, for his work on assessing the vulnerability of bat caves in the Philippines; Mya Bhone Maw, for her work on the genus *Begonia* in northern Myanmar; Nur Atiqah Bte. Abd Rahman, for her work on the publicizing the wonders of the Batu Caves and their bats; and Wendy A. Mustaqim, for his work on the orchids of Buru Island.

The third and final round of Tony Whitten Conservation Awards will be announced at cambridgeconservation.org/about/tony-whitten-conservation-award during summer 2021.

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Earthshot prize targets game-changing initiatives

In November 2020 HRH Prince William launched the Earthshot Prize, with the ambition of inspiring and championing the solutions that will address the ever-growing environmental crisis facing the planet. Referencing John F. Kennedy's Moonshot programme, which challenged the USA to land a man on the moon before the end of the 1960s, the Earthshot Prize aims to catalyse and identify novel and scalable environmental solutions, from any sector anywhere



Top row, left to right: Areeruk Nilsai, Guoyi Zhang and Joseph B. Rasalan. Bottom row, left to right: Munkhnast Dalannast, Rena Tri Hernawati and Tony Whitten.

in the world. Solutions are sought that will drive real, tangible change towards five Earthshots—simple but ambitious goals: Protect and restore nature, Clean our air, Revive our oceans, Build a waste-free world, and Fix our climate.

Five GBP 1 million prizes will be awarded each year for the next 10 years (2021–2030) supporting 50 solutions to the world's most significant environmental problems. The prize money is designed to enable the wider scaling and global uptake of the Earthshot solutions identified.

Ideas for potential solutions are actively being sought from around the world by a wide ranging group of nominating organizations, including Fauna & Flora International, of which Prince William recently became patron. Fauna & Flora International and other nominating organizations are inviting concepts describing potential Earthshot solutions from any interested parties. They are seeking game-changing initiatives that could be scaled to help tackle one or more of these environmental crises, and could—in time—be applied across the globe. Potential Earthshots are formally submitted by nominating organizations, with prizes being awarded by a panel of 13 distinguished international figures. Ideas can be submitted to nominating organizations at any time, but the closing date for prizes in any year will be the end of January.

Fauna & Flora International is particularly keen to identify potential nominations for the Protect and restore nature and Revive our oceans Earthshots. We are seeking to identify ideas that provide a step change in addressing these key matters—ideas with evidence of their potential but a need for an injection of support to deliver real and measurable benefits for people and planet. These ideas can come from individuals, organizations, academia, governments, the private sector or consortia.

For more information or to submit an idea or concept for an Earthshot contact earthshot@fauna-flora.org. For more information about the Earthshot Prize visit earthshot.org.

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African forest and savannah elephants treated as separate species

The African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG) of IUCN will now treat African elephants as two species: the forest elephant *Loxodonta cyclotis* and the savannah elephant *Loxodonta africana*. This will be reflected in IUCN's Red List assessment update for African elephants, and in the next iteration of the African Elephant Status Report, both to be published in 2021. This concurs with Wilson & Reader (*Mammal Species of the World*, 2005),

the primary IUCN reference on mammalian taxonomy, Wittemyer (in *Handbook of the Mammals of the World*, 2011), and Tassy & Shoshani (in *Mammals of Africa*, 2013).

The 2019 AfESG members' meeting considered morphological, genetic, reproductive, ecological and behavioural evidence, and a commissioned study by Kim & Wasser (iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/2019-03-15-final-taxonomy_report-african-elephant-sg.pdf) that specifically assessed extent and distribution of genetic hybridization. Hybrid individuals occur infrequently, at a few locations. The only exception is the hybrid hotspot along the border between The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, thought to be a consequence of human pressure having pushed individual elephants into the range of the other species.

Species-specific national and regional assessments of population status and trends are needed. In separating the two species, the AfESG highlights three consequences. Firstly, *L. cyclotis* is listed in CITES Appendices under *L. africana* (cites.org/sites/default/files/document/E-Res-12-11-R18.pdf). This could (1) be maintained; (2) changed to *Loxodonta* spp., as is the case for monk seals (*Monachus* spp.), under Appendix I or II (depending on range state), which would allow inclusion of hybrid elephants and unclassified populations; or (3) a Party could request an updated reference in CITES nomenclature to recognize both species. Under CITES rules, if *L. africana* were split into *L. africana* and *L. cyclotis*, all *L. cyclotis* would remain on Appendix I (as only some populations of *L. africana* are currently on Appendix II, with specific annotations). An appropriate approach should be identified for the regional and continental treatment of other African elephant issues, such as cross-border movements.

Secondly, the Red List assessments provide species-specific lists of range states, based on the best current information. However, legislative nomenclature varies by country. The two-species listing will support harmonization of nomenclature in national legislation, and focus attention on the differing management and conservation issues faced by the two species. Thirdly, there may be uncertainty as to whether one or both species occur in a country. The two-species listing will encourage the genetic investigation of hitherto taxonomically undefined populations, to examine the importance and dynamics of hybridization. The AfESG has established a taxonomy task force to develop supporting documentation for the economic, political, and conservation implications of the two-species listing of the African elephant. It will further recommend support for range states in addressing the implications identified.

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