

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.

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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