

The Practitioner's Toolkit for Nature-Positive Enterprises was launched on 14 June 2023 and is available at endangeredlandscapes.org/resources.

VIVIAN HUGHES ([ORCID](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5913-9304) orcid.org/0009-0000-5913-9304, vivian.hughes@fauna-flora.org), MRUNMAYEE AMARNATH ([ORCID](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8274-5206) orcid.org/0000-0001-8274-5206), RHONA PERKINS ([ORCID](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8246-9971) orcid.org/0009-0002-8246-9971) and KIRAN MOHANAN ([ORCID](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0366-3462) orcid.org/0000-0002-0366-3462) *Fauna & Flora*, Cambridge, UK

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The Whitley Awards 2023

The UK-based charity Whitley Fund for Nature has announced the six conservation leaders receiving the Whitley Awards 2023. The Whitley Awards ceremony was held at the Royal Geographical Society and was also broadcast online.

The awards are worth GBP 40,000 each in project funding over 1 year in support of work across the Global South. The 2023 Whitley Award Winners are Leonard Akwany, Kenya (Saving native fish species of Lake Victoria, Kenya); Yuliana Bedolla, Mexico (Protecting nocturnal seabird species nesting sites in key Mexican Pacific islands); Serge Kamgang, Cameroon (Towards an integrated lion conservation approach in the Benue Ecosystem, Cameroon); Mamy Razafitsalama, Madagascar (Managing fires and monitoring fragmented forests in Ankarafantsika National Park in Madagascar); Albert Salemgareyev, Kazakhstan (Building trust in data: resolving saiga–pastoralist conflicts over water in West Kazakhstan); and Tulshi Suwal, Nepal (Conservation of the Critically Endangered Chinese pangolin and human livelihoods in central Nepal).

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 top prize was presented to 2014 Whitley Award winner Shivani Bhalla of Ewaso Lions for her work on fostering human–carnivore coexistence through locally led programmes, helping to reverse a decline in lion populations in northern Kenya. Applying the PARTNERS Principles—distilled from decades of successful community collaborations developed by last year's Whitley Gold Award winner, Charu Mishra—she and her team will collaborate with the Ewaso community and conservation practitioners from across the globe to develop an open-source framework, laying out pathways for conservation practitioners to build skills within their teams to ensure that conservation decision-making happens locally.

To date, the charity has given GBP 20 million in conservation funding to more than 200 conservation leaders

in over 80 countries. The Whitley Award was one of the first awards given in recognition of grassroots conservation leadership in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Whitley Fund for Nature supports emerging country nationals working on the ground in regions where biodiversity is rich but resources for conservation are lacking. Projects are deeply rooted in community involvement and are pragmatic, science-based and impactful.

Whitley Fund for Nature has a long-term commitment to conservation leaders, and winners can apply for continuation funding grants worth up to GBP 100,000 over 2 years to further fund and scale up their work or respond to new threats. As part of this scheme, Whitley Fund for Nature supports nature-based solutions projects that directly address climate change and biodiversity loss in consultation with communities. Winners also gain a lifelong membership in the global alumni network, giving them access to like-minded leaders and opportunities to foster collaborations. Over half of Whitley Award winners go on to receive continuation funding. Whitley Fund for Nature is celebrating its 30th year of supporting grassroots leaders across the Global South.

For more information on the Whitley Awards or how to apply, visit whitleyaward.org.

JANICE LAW ([ORCID](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5328-5634) orcid.org/0000-0001-5328-5634, janice@whitleyaward.org) *Whitley Fund for Nature*, London, UK

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Another Indonesian songbird on the brink of extinction: is it too late for the Kangean shama?

The cage-bird trade is one of the principal threats to songbird conservation in Asia. In Indonesia, where this threat is most acute, it has already driven several bird taxa to extinction in the wild and others to the brink of it. Among the most traded species, highly prized for its song, is the white-rumped shama *Copsychus malabaricus*, three million of which were estimated to be held in Javan households in 2018 (Marshall et al., 2020, *Biological Conservation*, 241, 108237). One taxon, *C. malabaricus nigricauda*, endemic to the Kangean Archipelago off north-east Java, is highly distinctive in size, plumage, behaviour and genomics, and may be a separate species, the Kangean shama (Wu et al., 2022, *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 39, msac189).

With Cameron Rutt of the American Bird Conservancy, I spent 4 days on Pulau Kangean (the main Kangean island) during 5–8 June 2023 without encountering a single Kangean shama in the archipelago's largest area of forest, mirroring the results of an unsuccessful search in 2010

(B. van Balen, in litt.). The last observation of the species on Pulau Kangean was of a single bird heard during several months of surveys in 2007–2008 (Irham 2016, *Zoo Indonesia*, 25, 122–141). Satellite data and ground-truthing during our 2023 visit revealed that suitable habitat remains extensive on the island; capture for the songbird trade (easy with shamas, as they respond to playback of songs and fly straight into nets/traps) is the only plausible explanation for the bird's disappearance. Two Kangean trappers independently told me that the Kangean shama has not been observed or caught in the main archipelago for > 10 years; one said it was common until the early 2000s. Two households in Arjasa, Pulau Kangean, had pet shamas, but neither was a native *nigricauda*, or the rare (and also distinctive) form *omissus* from neighbouring Java; both were probably imported from Kalimantan. Among hobbyist Javan songbird keepers, the phrase *Murai Kangean* (Kangean shama) is apparently unfamiliar (J. Menner, in litt.), suggesting birds from Kangean have not been in trade for some time.

A few shamas that appeared identical to *C. malabaricus nigricauda* were found in trade in 2021, apparently collected on a very remote island (anonymity preserved) that year. These birds were purchased and are the founders of a captive breeding programme on Java (numbering 25 birds in June 2023; J. Menner, in litt.). Both Kangean trappers named the island in question unprompted, and one of them had personally visited it to trap shamas in 2018, 2019 and, ominously without success, 2022. The island is only small, has a jetty and settlements and given the speed at which insular shama populations elsewhere in Indonesia have been extirpated, is likely to become extinct in the wild without immediate conservation action. If a wild population of Kangean shamas does still persist, we may have only months to save it. A visit to the island is planned for as soon as is logistically and financially possible; if shamas do remain, in situ conservation should be implemented urgently.

ALEX J. BERRYMAN (✉ orcid.org/0000-0003-1273-7184, alex.berryman@birdlife.org) BirdLife International, Cambridge, UK

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Reintroduction of adult Orinoco crocodiles: a crucial step towards the species recovery

On 2 April 2023, the Roberto Franco Tropical Biology Research Station of the National University of Colombia and the Colombian National Natural Parks Agency led the reintroduction of 14 Critically Endangered Orinoco crocodiles *Crocodylus intermedius* (12 females and two males)

into their natural habitat in the Tomo River in El Tuparro National Park, in the Colombian Orinoco region. This is the first reintroduction of a large group of adults of one of the largest Neotropical freshwater predators. The midterm goal is to restore this species by increasing its abundance in areas where it was historically present, following the objective of the Orinoco Crocodile Action Plan to establish three wild populations in protected areas in the species' historical distribution, with at least five breeding females each, within 15 years.

The 14 individuals, each > 3 m long and > 100 kg, were selected based on appropriate genetic and phenotypic profiles, preconditioned for 2 years in semi-captive conditions away from permanent human presence and fed with live prey. Satellite transmitters were installed on 12 of the crocodiles (10 females and 2 males), to gather information such as survivorship, nesting times and sites, home ranges and movement patterns. Reintroducing adult crocodiles saves time, as they are reproductively active, and helps restore populations by reducing the risk of predation, which limits recruitment rates.

Previous social research along the Tomo River has shown that local people recognize the Orinoco crocodile as important in the ecosystem and value it highly, believing that where there is a crocodile, deep water bodies remain and there is plenty of fish. The local communities do not consider the crocodile a threat, which is a significant advantage for the conservation of the species. As it is critical to understand the social implications of the crocodile's presence in areas where it has been absent for decades, we continue to work with local communities along the Tomo River where the reintroduction took place, promoting coexistence with the species.

This project had the technical and financial support of the Wildlife Conservation Society Colombia, University of Florida, CrocFest, Colombian Air Force, Colombian National Police, Colombian Civil Defense, Merecure Park, and Cormacarena Environmental Agency. This newly formed institutional alliance is also a relevant outcome of this project and facilitates restoration of the Orinoco crocodile. Conditions are now favourable for the reintroduction of additional crocodiles in the Tomo River, increasing the possibility of forming the first known natural population originating from captive individuals.

MARIO VARGAS-RAMÍREZ (✉ orcid.org/0000-0001-8974-3430, maavargasra@unal.edu.co) Estación de Biología Tropical Roberto Franco, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Villavicencio, Colombia. GERMÁN FORERO-MEDINA (✉ orcid.org/0000-0001-9952-7221) Wildlife Conservation Society, Cali, Colombia. CARLOS MORENO TORRES (✉ orcid.org/0000-0003-4771-4783) Facultad de Medicina Veterinaria, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia. SERGIO A.