

Title HRH The Princess Royal (Princess Anne) recently presented one of the world's top prizes for grassroots nature conservation – a Whitley Award – to Jimmy Muheebwa, of Nature Uganda (BirdLife Partner), for his work to improve livelihoods and wetland management in the Ugandan catchments of Lake Victoria, and create better habitats for the region's wildlife, including Uganda's national bird, the Grey-crowned Crane. Mr Muheebwa, a Project Manager with Nature Uganda, received his honour during a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society, London, hosted by The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) – the UK-based charity behind the international awards scheme. The Whitley Award for Jimmy Muheebwa includes a project grant of £30,000 - donated by The Shears Foundation - an engraved trophy, membership of the influential network of past Whitley Award winners, international recognition and leadership development training. The award to Jimmy Muheebwa recognises his efforts to undo the decline caused by drainage, agricultural practices, human expansion and wildlife poaching to some of Africa's most important wetlands with the support and help of local people. Jimmy's project has already resulted in many families switching to raising chickens or goats to ease pressure on the wetlands, a successful 'adopt-a-crane' scheme for farmers, as well as a cleaner water supply and better, more sustainable use of natural wetland resources, such as for thatch, mulch, bindings and fuel. The evening's top prize - the £60,000 Whitley Gold Award – went to Dr Angela Maldonado of Colombia for her efforts around the Colombia-Peru border to end the illegal capture of night monkeys for biomedical research, including by developing alternative, sustainable, ways for rainforest communities to earn a living. In addition, Her Royal Highness also presented six other Whitley Awards worth £30,000 each to conservation leaders from Argentina, Cameroon, Colombia, Papua New Guinea, Russia and Uruguay. Commenting on Jimmy Muheebwa's success, Georgina Domberger, Director of The Whitley Fund for Nature, said: "The aim of The Whitley Awards is to identify and fund leading grassroots conservationists from around the world who are using their scientific expertise and local knowledge to inspire real and positive change for people and wildlife and the habitats they share. In the case of Jimmy Muheebwa, the judges were particularly impressed by the way he is using a national icon – the grey-crowned crane – to inspire local people to take better care of their wetlands and enjoy the many advantages that well-managed wetlands supply. The fact that his exemplary project is in Uganda was a special delight because last year Uganda supplied the Whitley Gold Award winner, Gladys Kalema Zikusoka. It is unusual for conservation leaders from the same country to do so well in our competition two years running and indicates a very strong national commitment to conservation."