

Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund (DWCF) 2009 Conservation Heroes

Grevy's Zebra Trust Rikapo Lentiyo



Rikapo Lentiyo was recruited in 2003 by the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy as one of the first part-time Grevy's Zebra Scouts for endangered Grevy's zebra in a community area. His passion and dedication quickly led to a full-time position, where duties included radio-tracking the collared Grevy's zebra and facilitating regular wildlife awareness meetings with communities. In 2006 when Kenya wildlife suffered a severe anthrax outbreak that killed nearly 40 Grevy's Zebra, Rikapo logged hundreds of kilometers by motorbike to locate the carcasses, collect samples for analysis, coordinate mortality reports, dispose of the carcasses to avoid

spread of the disease and help ensure that the Kenya Wildlife Service vets who were administering the anthrax vaccine were able to target the entire population in the vicinity. Because of Rikapo's heroic work in the field and the unprecedented financial support from partners, the outbreak was brought under control helping to save the remaining population of about 900 Grevy's zebra. Those who work with Rikapo say he is one of Kenya's most powerful ambassadors for the species and that he continues to inspire those around him with his infectious enthusiasm. Rikapo played a critical role in founding the nonprofit Grevy's Zebra Trust in 2006, and is a key member of the four-member management team which has built the trust into a respected and successful conservation organization that has been supported by the DWCF since 2007.

Bird Life International Houssein Rayaleh



A Djiboutian by birth, Houssein Rayaleh has been working tirelessly with local African communities and government bodies for several years to help protect Djibouti's extraordinary wildlife and precious habitats. He is a self-taught conservationist, with previous experience as a teacher and is committed to raising environmental awareness among younger generations. In 2006 Houssein was appointed the national technical coordinator for the conservation management planning for the Djibouti Francolin, a critically endangered pheasant whose ecosystem suffers from grazing and deforestation due to the collection of firewood by local

people. The species is considered one of the most threatened bird populations in the world due to its rapid decline of more than 90 percent in population in the last 20 years. In 2008, because of Houssein's knowledge and expertise, he was made project leader of Bird Life International's "Safe haven for the Djibouti Francolin" program, a project funded by the DWCF. In this position Houssein has conducted stakeholder workshops among local communities to raise awareness about the plight of the Djibouti Francolin and protect the juniper forests, secured agreements for the establishment of exclusion zones that protect more than seven acres, and is currently

working to establish a demonstration tree nursery beside a local school to provide community members with firewood and to provide juniper seedlings for further regeneration of the forests. The nursery will produce 1,000 plants per year, of which 50 percent of the seedlings will make-up the species of trees lost in the forests, including juniper, wild olive and ficus. Efforts like Houssein's are truly imperative as the forest that once covered more than 18,000 acres now makes up a mere 2,223 acres. Houssein's work has been credited with ensuring the critical issue of the Djibouti Francolin's survival is on the government of Djibouti's agenda.

Save Our Leatherbacks Operations Artati "Tati" Nengah



Artati "Tati" Nengah is the nucleus of all Save Our Leatherbacks Operations (SOLO) in Indonesia, serving as the main translator between SOLO staff and Indonesian communities. Through self-taught methods, Tati is able to fluently understand and translate all of the many different languages spoken in the area and serves as the primary link to all of SOLO's planning and execution of all leatherback sea turtle initiatives. A single mother, Tati attends every meeting held throughout Indonesia with SOLO staff to translate the organization's plans to save Leatherbacks surrounding the Papua

beaches and also serves as a local liaison for SOLO staff when they are working back in the United States. By functioning as a local contact, Tati saves the nonprofit volunteer-based organization thousands of dollars on airfare and other travel costs. In her spare time, Tati makes the community she is part of more passionate about leatherbacks by openly teaching the village school children about sea turtle conservation by not tossing trash on the streets and in the waters, to teaching what she has learned about the species on a macro scale to the other Indonesians she interacts with. Tati's efforts are not only considered heroic, but her work is also imperative as the leatherbacks are listed as an endangered species. The pacific population particularly, of which she aims to protect, is declining at an alarming rate due to egg harvest, fishery by-catch, coastal development and highly variable food availability.

Northern Jaguar Project Diego Ezrré Romero



Diego Ezrré Romero is a local rancher and a force for positive change in the Sahuaripa community in Mexico. In addition to his role as the town's dentist, he sets out to improve the standards for better education and to build a deeper respect for jaguar and nature conservation among his neighbors and fellow ranchers. Directly adjacent to the 45,000-acre Northern Jaguar Reserve, Diego lives on the Rancho El Calabozo and shows unlimited hospitality by offering his home as a meeting place for local conservation organizations. He has raised his voice against nearby mining operations and those who hunt or poison carnivores. With Diego's help, the Feline Photo Project, a local fundraising and conservation initiative, has become NJP's best

opportunity to establish a higher level of local tolerance for jaguars. Such tolerance is imperative to the jaguar population as its endangered status is largely due to the ranchers who kill them for preying on their livestock. Aside from working to protect jaguars, Diego works to create innovative concepts to provide new sources of income for ranch owners. He supports ecotourism as an alternative income and intends to develop an eco-tour site on his family ranch, which will also provide local community members with jobs. The Northern Jaguar Project says “Diego is an individual who deeply understands the value that jaguars have as a keystone, umbrella species. He knows that a healthy jaguar population means that he, as a cattle rancher, is acting as a good steward to the land around him.”

Pan African Sanctuaries Alliance Willie Tucker



A graduate from the College of Wildlife Management in Tanzania, Willie Tucker began his career in chimpanzee conservation when he was appointed by the Sierra Leone government in 1995 to lead the Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary into existence. He helped establish veterinary healthcare protocols, worked to engage local villages and towns, and served as a liaison between the sanctuary and the law enforcement officials to help crack down on the chimpanzee smuggling that was widespread in the region. During the nine-year civil war that ravaged the

area in the 1990s, Willie remained committed to the sanctuary and visited each day to ensure the chimpanzees were properly fed and cared for. In 2006, 11 years after Willie was chosen to lead and launch the sanctuary, 31 chimpanzees escaped the facility. Within hours of the escape Willie was able to seize control of the situation by calming the staff and local citizens, pacifying the media, reigning in the police and military forces that descended upon the site, and figured out a way to get back to work with a large number of terrified and angry chimpanzees loose in the nearby forests. “Tacugama’s ability to galvanize public support for chimpanzee conservation and rehabilitation – and then maintain that support unwaveringly through one of the worst mass escapes in PASA history – is testament to the dedication, compassion and skill of keepers such as Willie Tucker,” says the Pan African Sanctuaries Alliance (PASA).

Fauna and Flora International Salim Khamis Haji



Salim Khamis Haji began working with the Department of Commercial Crops Fruits and Forestry on Pemba Island, lying off the east coast of Africa, in 1993, and has specifically been working to conserve the Pemba Flying Fox, a critically endangered fruit bat, since 2002. He has tirelessly worked with local communities to educate and establish groups to care for the conservation and monitoring of the flying fox populations in their respective areas. This model has proved to be successful, leading to an increase in the flying fox population from approximately 5,000 in the early 90’s to more than tripling the population to about 22,000 according to research conducted in 2008. Thanks to conservation heroes like Salim, the status of the Pemba Flying Fox has also moved from critically

endangered to vulnerable- a clear indicator of conservation success.

Fauna and Flora International Sam Han



Sam Han joined Fauna and Flora International's (FFI) Cambodian Crocodile Conservation Program (CCCP) in 2002 to study and conduct research with Siamese crocodiles. In 2004, his hard work and commitment to the species led to his promotion to national field coordinator, and he has since worked with other members of FFI and the Cambodian Forestry Administration to save an estimated 250 remaining critically endangered Siamese crocodiles. He regularly travels throughout the country conducting biological surveys, investigating reports of crocodile sightings, and educating the general public about crocodiles and their habitats. He is responsible for leading field expeditions to some of the most remote places in the country. Such expeditions involve long and dangerous treks through the Cardamom Mountains, down twisted overgrown forest trails and up meandering rivers with lush vegetation. Sam's efforts have helped secure two crocodile sanctuaries, which employ 20 local community members to protect Siamese crocodiles as well as hosts of

other species. Sam is hopeful that his efforts will be successful in bringing Siamese crocodiles back from the brink of extinction and that one day he will be able to bring his children to the jungle to see these amazing creatures.

International Rhino Foundation Jackson Kamwi



Jackson Kamwi has worked to protect black rhinos, sometimes putting in 24 hours or more in often difficult and strenuous field operations, for two decades. His commitment to the species and heroic efforts has helped capture and relocate nearly 1,000 rhinos. With years of experience, those who work with Jackson say he is often able to "think like a rhino," and based on his understanding of rhino behavior and habitats, Jackson is able to confidently contribute to the execution of sometimes stressful operations to translocate rhinos. With no formal training

in wildlife management and limited school education, Jackson shows a special ability to work in the field, with specialized skills driving transport vehicles, flying helicopters, radio tracking and a talent in digital photography. Despite suffering from rhino-inflicted injuries, Jackson continues to participate in dangerous situations such as rescuing an escaped or injured rhino that needs immediate assistance. His natural abilities coupled with his experience moving rhinos out of harms way has been imperative to the approximate 4,000 black rhinos that remain in the world. During the last century, the black rhino has suffered the most drastic decline in total numbers of all rhino species. Those who work with Jackson say utterly reliable and cool-headed in

situations of stress and high personal danger that sometimes arise in the monitoring and management of wild rhinos and that he is long overdue for international recognition of his steady, professional contribution to rhino conservation.