

For Cheetahs, Gorillas, and the Wilds of Nature: 2008 Conservation Medalists

The first gold-filled conservation medals bearing the image of the Zoological Society of San Diego's official symbol, the elephant seal, were awarded in 1966. Since that time, medals have been awarded



to an impressive international array of conservationists, from H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, who was president of the World Wildlife Fund, to Dr. Jane Goodall and Sir David Attenborough.

BY ASHLEY BRADLEY, STAFF WRITER

Important strides in conservation are being made locally and around the world, as climate change and other potential threats affect plants and animals. In order to highlight and honor more of these achievements, the Zoological Society is pleased to announce additional categories of our annual Conservation Medal award.

Our Lifetime Achievement award is presented to conservationists who have made a lasting contribution to conservation during their careers. The Conservation-In-Action award is presented to individuals who are actively engaged in significant conservation initiatives. The Conservation Advocate award is presented to individuals who have supported conservation through communications or philanthropy. For the first time, the Zoological Society of San Diego is presenting a monetary award: both Conservation-In-Action and Lifetime Achievement medalists will receive \$10,000 from the Society to continue their efforts.

The Young Conservationist award is presented to young people involved in efforts to preserve wildlife and habitats. These recipients, selected in junior and senior high school categories, are chosen annually during the Greater San Diego Science and Engineering Fair (held in April) and will receive \$500 scholarships. While the Conservation Medal has historically been presented to adults, for the first time we are extending this recognition to outstanding achievement by students.



2008 LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD:

Dr. Laurie Marker

Dr. Laurie Marker has worked with cheetahs for more than 30 years. In

1990, she founded the Cheetah Conservation Fund in Namibia, which is focused on conservation research and education. Dr. Marker has been integral to the development of the international captive breeding program for cheetahs. In 1988, she developed the studbook for the species and still serves as the international studbook keeper. Her intensive work for cheetah conservation, both in the field and in zoological institutions, has earned accolades worldwide.

Dr. Marker worked with captive cheetahs to better understand if hand-raised cheetahs that were to be reintroduced in the wild still had

a hunting instinct. In the field, she's worked with local communities to ease conflict between cheetahs and livestock. In the lab, she's helped to identify the lack of genetic diversity in some populations.

Wild Animal Park Mammal Curator Randy Rieches says: "Laurie has been able to accomplish so much for cheetah conservation because she is such a dynamic individual. She is a dedicated behaviorist, and she is an incredible speaker. She can impart the plight of this species in a way that anyone who hears her speak cannot help but send a donation to help save the cheetah in its native habitat."



2008 CONSERVATION-IN-ACTION AWARD:

Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka

Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka founded Conservation through Public Health (CTPH), a Ugandan non-profit organization that works “to promote conservation and public health by improving primary health care to people and animals in and around protected areas in Africa.” Of particular concern

are the mountain gorilla populations in Uganda, Rwanda, and Congo. Their populations are critically endangered, and human encroachment, poaching, political unrest, and diseases spread from other species—like humans and livestock—continue to diminish the population.

The CTPH maintains three programs to address these issues. It monitors wildlife health through collecting and analyzing fecal samples and trains wildlife authorities and Human Gorilla Conflict team members. Workshops are held to educate local communities on good hygiene and the risk of transmitting disease between people, wildlife, and livestock. CTPH also provides resources for communication to the outside world, so that students can use computers and further explore “conservation, public health, e-business, and sustainable livelihoods.”

“Human infections pose a big threat

to the endangered mountain gorilla population mainly because of their close genetic relationships and almost-shared habitat,” says Dr. Anthony Nsubuga, of the Zoo’s Genetics Division, who is studying mountain gorillas in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. “CTPH and Gladys’ efforts towards conservation through public health are having a huge impact on prevention of cross-species disease transmission, especially in rural communities that are often largely ignored by public health and policy officials.”



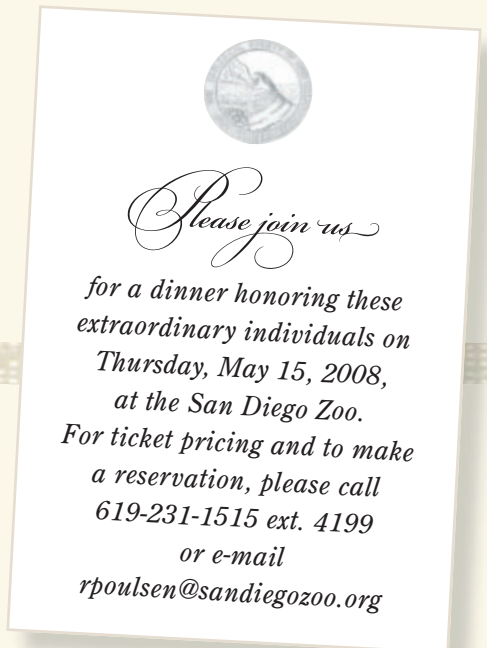
2008 CONSERVATION ADVOCATE AWARD:

Richard Louv

Richard Louv’s books and articles on people, nature, and the interconnectedness of it all remind us what it feels like to be awed by wildlife and the world outside. Louv’s most recent book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* examines the changes in children as their connection with nature is replaced by

indoor play that’s often focused on the digital age. This shift in perspective is negatively affecting them physically, mentally, and spiritually. “I’m concerned about the growing gap between human experience and the natural world, especially among the young. A number of studies show the trend toward disconnection from nature,” says Louv.

Well researched and supported by years of conversations with families around the country, his book draws the conclusion that children are missing an important part of their development by not getting outside and getting dirty. The book has spawned the Children & Nature Network, a grassroots community where researchers, teachers, and organizations can share news, programs, and tips to help reconnect children and nature. Our education programs at the Zoo and the Park, while not affiliated with C&NN, also seek to make a connection between wildlife and visitors of all ages.



“The San Diego Zoo does vital conservation work around the world, of course, and offers its visitors a sense of awe and wonder about the natural world,” says Louv. “But all zoos can do more in their own regions and surrounding communities to introduce the young to the wildness in their own backyards and parks and backcountry. As the great nature writer and lepidopterist Robert Michael Pyle has said, ‘What is the extinction of a condor to a child who has never seen a wren?’” It is this need for environmental awareness and stimulation that drives Louv’s conservation advocacy. 