

The 2006 Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund Conservation Heroes

The Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund (DWCF) has selected eight DWCF Conservation Heroes from applications submitted by environmental organizations working in partnership with communities around the world. The award was created to bring attention to the fact that conservation programs are successful because of the people involved with the initiative. The DWCF Conservation Heroes program rewards the dedication of individuals who, often at the risk of personal safety, work tirelessly to save animals, protect habitat and educate the people in surrounding communities. To honor each hero's work, the DWCF presented the nominating organizations a cash award of \$1,000 to be shared with the recipients to be used at their discretion. The following 2006 heroes represent an international effort to conserve wildlife and wild places, and have worked to protect such animals as gorillas, sea turtles, and bats.

Don Jorge Olivo- University of California



Don Jorge Olivo has made many contributions to conservation in Latin America as a field researcher, an educator, and a community leader. Since 2003, Mr. Olivo has been working full time as a field biologist and environmental ambassador as part of a conservation project on Long-wattled Umbrellabird run by the University of California (UCA). His salary, equipment, and per diem have been funded through grants from the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund (DWCF). With a deep and extensive knowledge of local flora, fauna, and ecology, Mr. Olivo has made outstanding contributions to the success of the research on endangered species such as the Long-wattled Umbrellabird. He

has been a dedicated learner becoming adept at techniques including radio tracking, mist netting, field-based observations of ecology and behavior, and data entry. He is committed to the research he does and often stays at the field site working extra days, intent on finding an individual's nest or gathering more telemetry data. At the community level, Mr. Olivo's understanding of conservation principles, his dedication to conservation, his charisma and prestige within local communities, make him a skillful educator. Mr. Olivo organizes visits to the study site by local school groups and adults to give local residents a chance to learn more about conservation and ecology of local forests and watersheds. He also arranges numerous visits by the UCA research group to schools to instruct students on these same topics. Additionally, he has contributed directly to the design and implementation of a local education program, which reaches over 350 area school children. With support from the DWCF, Mr. Olivo has leveraged his role as a community leader to encourage and develop a local conservation ethic. He has arranged and made formal PowerPoint presentations at more than a dozen local communities carrying a generator, fuel, a laptop, and digital video projector through dozens of kilometers of rainforest to give the presentations in remote areas. Mr. Olivo is a conservation hero who uses his respect in the community to get conservation messages out to local residents in a way that an outsider could not replicate.

Ebelio Romay – Wildlife Conservation Society



Ebelio Romay has worked for nine years in the most biologically diverse area of Bolivia, the National Park and the Natural Area of Integrated Management Madidi. He began in 1997 as an environmental education technician and in the first 8 months he visited over 30 communities, using hand-painted drawings on cloth as his only educational resource. He was invited to become the head of the park guard corps, and led the group of 12 to assist in peacefully evicting over 40 illegal logging camps within the Tuichi Valley. Mr. Romay has risked his life for the role he plays, being a victim of not only health problems such as malaria and pneumonia but also violence from illegal loggers including being kidnapped for four days.

Despite the challenges and constant stream of death threats, he helped to remove the loggers and as a result the rainforest habitat improved, with a notable increase in wildlife including four jaguars which had previously been absent from the area. He now heads a team of 24 park guards who protect the area with a ratio of one park guard to every 80,000 hectares (197,000+ acres), over very difficult terrain and with a very limited budget. He has dedicated himself to pioneering alliances with neighboring indigenous territories to effectively manage such a large area. He is a conservation hero who works daily to maintain this incredible protected area for the good of Bolivian society and the world, today and for future generations.

Kahindi Changawa Galo – Fauna & Flora International



Kahindi Changawa Galo was born into a family of seven, 27 years ago. His village, Dongo Kundu in Kenya, is near the Watamu National Marine Park, one of the oldest marine parks in the world and part of a UN Biosphere Area. In 2001 Mr. Galo took over his father's job when he retired, as housekeeper at the Local Ocean Trust/ Watamu Turtle Watch house and office. The Local Ocean Trust's flagship programme, Watamu Turtle Watch (which has been funded by Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund), is primarily concerned with sea turtle protection, including nest protection, and sea

turtle rescue and rehabilitation supported by community education and awareness programs.

He soon became fascinated with the concept of turtle protection and marine conservation. His previous turtle experience was confined to a knowledge of fishermen slaughtering sea turtles for food, or selling their shells to tourists. Mr. Galo started to volunteer his time to the project, after work. He quickly learned turtle conservation protocols, devoured information and became a part of the team. His work in the beginning was practical, simply patrolling the beaches, identifying turtle nesting sites and ensuring they were protected from poachers throughout incubation to hatching, and rescuing and tagging turtles caught as incidental by-catch. He learned how to drive, and then moved on to mastering the computer, learning the keys while the computer was off so that he could help input data. In 2002 Mr. Galo was made a field manager. Using his position of trust in the community, helped persuade the fishing communities to integrate marine conservation practices and turtle protection into their lives, a seemingly impossible task in this day and age. Within a year of his appointment he had assisted the Project Manager in establishing 11 fishermen's conservation groups in the Watamu area and had helped develop alternative income generating ideas including training fishermen to become eco tour guides and to set up tree nurseries. He has also assisted in the education of hundreds children and has helped establish a number of Wildlife Clubs and Sea Turtle Conservation Clubs in the local area. He even inspired over 4,000 local children to spend six weeks cleaning up the beaches after a shipwreck. Mr. Galo also works with local

hotels and tourists in raising public awareness; organizing beach clean ups and school day events involving local drama, poetry recitals and competitions. In addition to his daytime work, he still voluntarily patrols the beaches at night, which means that he often works an 18-hour day and a 6-day week, particularly in the height of the turtle-nesting season. Mr. Galo's selfless dedication to Watamu Turtle Watch project's work and his passion to promote the much-needed conservation of the marine world for future generations makes him a conservation hero.

Kamada Fisher's Alliance- Project Seahorse



The Kamada Fisher's Alliance was established in 2002 as a part of a Project Seahorse initiative to promote sustainable fishing practices within the community of Danajon Bank in Central Philippines. Danajon Bank is one of only six double barrier coral reefs in the world and runs for about 145 km (90 miles) with many of the nearby coastal villages among the poorest in the country. Previously this region of the Philippines faced multiple challenges; overexploitation of fish populations, ecosystem destruction due to harmful fishing practices, and a lack of

effective coastal management. The Kamada Fisher's Alliance of over 800 subsistence fishers is now a major partner for Project Seahorse, and the group is focused on improving the management of marine reserves to promote conservation. They are active in 21 communities and eight municipalities, leading their own communities to regenerate the fishing grounds of the Danajon Bank. They have worked together to do away with fishing methods that included throwing dynamite and even dumping a dangerous poison, cyanide into the ocean. The Alliance is also taking an active role in establishing no-take marine reserves and with Project Seahorse has fostered the creation of 19 locally-managed reserves. They have taken these objectives further as catalysts to improve community organization, invite political support, and engage a wide array of advocates for marine conservation. Their strategy has been so effective that a coastal resources management project throughout the Philippines intends to replicate what they have done for country wide advancements in marine conservation. The Kamada Fisher's Alliance is made up of many conservation heroes, proving that the combination of individual responsibility and community driven action can make a successful and lasting impact for ecosystems worldwide.

Laura Navarro – Wildlife Trust



Laura Navarro grew up in Mexico City, and her childhood dream of being a teacher has transformed into becoming a successful conservation educator. During high school, she taught an environmental education summer class for children, fusing her passion for teaching with her reverence for the natural world, particularly Mexico's biodiversity. As part of the team at the Programa para la Conservación de Murciélagos de México (PCMM), Ms. Navarro has fulfilled her childhood dream, and has devoted the past 13 years of her career to children's environmental education in Mexico, with a specific focus on bat conservation. Ms.

Navarro's goal is to educate Mexico's youth about the essential role bats play in ecosystem function. Her team visits schools, presents lectures, distributes written materials, and plays interactive games--all meant to educate children about environmental issues. She shares many messages with her audiences, including the fact bats are beneficial to ecosystems,

balancing insect populations, dispersing seeds, and pollinating many plant species including some critical cash crops. Sadly, they are also maligned, and local communities often destroy vital habitat for threatened and endangered bats within rural areas of Mexico. Even though bats comprise one quarter of mammal species, they are the least studied and most frequently ignored species in conservation plans. Over the past decade, her environmental education program has been wildly successful in the 12 communities near priority caves, educating women, ranchers, farmers, and community leaders, along with her major audience, children. She is the author of the series of bilingual stories: *Marcelo the Bat*; *Valentin a Special Bat*; *Don Sabino, the City Bat*; *Flowers for Lucía the Bat*, and *Seeds for Barbarita the Bat*. Ms. Navarro also coordinates a series of short radio pieces, "Adventures in Flight," and was first place winner of the Second Latin American Radio Biennium of Radio in Mexico. In 2001, she received the Educator of the Year award from Bat Conservation International. She is currently furthering her education to learn more about the cultural significance of Bats in order to improve her education strategies in the community. Ms. Navarro's lifelong work educating local communities in Mexico makes her a conservation hero.

Matti Nghikembua – Cheetah Conservation Fund



Matti Nghikembua, a Namibian naturalist, works with the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) as Senior Research Assistant and Education Officer. He joined CCF in 1997 as a student intern from the Polytechnic of Namibia working towards the National Diploma Nature Conservation course. As a student, Mr. Nghikembua assumed responsibilities consisting of conducting game counts, cheetah care, and general maintenance. He completed two case studies involving research and environmental education. In 1998 he joined CCF full time, and

started intensive outreach programs throughout the country's schools, reaching over 20,000 students and creating awareness about cheetah conservation. He went on to develop a predator education curricular, integrated into the formal education system in Namibia, and was actively involved in the launch of the CCF GeoCheetah project aimed to link Namibian and international classrooms in creating awareness about the cheetah during 1998-1999. He has served as a supervisor of more than 20 interns, helping with various aspects of their training. Mr. Nghikembua has also traveled to extensive education conferences sharing educational strategies with the conservation community and even been a steering committee member of the Namibian Environmental Education Network (NEEN). He has completed an advanced degree doing research on the effects of bush encroachment and fire on CCF farms, and as a result has been actively involved in a larger project to gather extensive ecosystem data. Mr. Nghikembua presented a paper on assessing ecological impacts of bush encroachment on local Namibian biodiversity at the 16th annual conference for the Society of Conservation Biology (SCB), co-hosted by the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology of the University of Kent at Canterbury, Britain. He was also a recipient of the International Scholarship from the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) and the Society of Conservation Geographic Information System (SCGIS), which allowed him to travel to California to advance his skills in GIS software applications. With these skills, he returned to CCF and has completed 1,070 cheetah home-range maps and is working to produce more. He currently holds the Senior Research Assistant and Education Officer position with CCF and is working towards an advanced degree. Matti Nghikembua is a conservation hero to many, specifically the cheetahs he has helped to become better understood through his outstanding dedication and commitment.

Mbake Sivha- Fauna & Flora International



Mbake Sivha has risked her life to promote conservation and human development in Africa. For seven years she worked as a Program Officer in the Kahuzi-Biega National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). She was working with the local communities living around the park, trying to ensure that their basic needs were met, with schools, dispensaries, small enterprise activities and micro-credit loans. This work was tied to the conservation of the park and the need to protect the forest, its wildlife and specifically the eastern lowland gorillas. Her position and salary drew jealousy from rebels in the local communities and one night she was singled out, attacked, robbed, and left for dead. She is also famed for her bravery during the volcanic eruption in Goma in 2002, when she used her own vehicle to rescue many of the children and less able residents away from the oncoming lava. She moved on to join the International Gorilla Conservation Program (IGCP) as Program Officer at the DRC Virungas National Park. Her role was to assist in the trans-boundary initiative to link DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda, providing increased habitat for the mountain gorilla through national cooperation and support from organizations including Fauna & Flora International (FFI). She worked against terrible odds inflicted by war and civil unrest which had claimed the lives of 3.8 million people in the years since 1998. She remained one of the few people to ensure that conservation efforts for these parks continued regardless of obstacles. In 2004 Ms. Sivha alerted the international community to the invasion of Rwandan military into the park, and a diplomatic response was initiated which led to the successful withdrawal of rebels. As a result, her name was placed on a list of people to be “eliminated.” The imminent danger led to her evacuation to Nairobi and there FFI helped to find her local work empowering communities to take conservation action. Ms. Sivha can not return home for fear of her own safety, and now works in the northern DRC at the Garamba National Park. She is committed to one day returning to eastern DRC, and to use her enforced exile as proactively as possible. She has enrolled in an MSc course in Conservation and Tourism at the University of Kent in the UK. Mbake Sivha’s undeniable commitment to both the wildlife and the people of the DRC at the risk of her own life proves she is a true conservation hero.

Onesmas Kahindi – Save the Elephants



Onesmas Kahindi is a dedicated conservationist who has successfully engaged communities in the Samburu-Laikipia area of Kenya to gain valuable insight to elephant poaching in the region. Since 2002 Mr. Kahindi has driven over 235,000 kilometers for fieldwork alone and his (Disney funded) vehicle is now a popular visitor to these remote communities. The Save the Elephants (STE) organization started a program called MIKE (Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants) to gather data on elephant mortality as an early warning system for changes in poaching intensities as well as a method to record changes in elephant population dynamics. The Samburu-Laikipia site is unique in that it is comprised of a complex network of national reserves, trust lands occupied by nomadic pastoralists, private ranches, group ranches, community conservancies, small-holder agricultural farms and settlement schemes. As the Samburu-Laikipia Program Officer for MIKE and an Honorary Game Warden for the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Mr. Kahindi is personally responsible for visiting each of these stakeholders to collect data on every dead elephant that is found. He has worked incredibly to build a co-operative information network, building trust and respect from local people initially

hesitant to cooperate. It took considerable perseverance and communication to emphasize to the communities that no retribution was involved in divulging the location of the carcasses. With dedication like his, Mr. Kahindi has helped the MIKE program to compile over 700 carcass reports between January 2002 and December 2005, with 60 percent of the reports coming from local people. This conservation hero now working to train additional MIKE scouts to expand the information network he has worked so tirelessly to create, in hopes that increased communication will prove a benefit to elephant conservation.