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## **Patricia C. Wright Named 2014 Indianapolis Prize Winner**

### **Conservation hero wins \$250,000 and the Lilly Medal for work saving Madagascar's lemurs**

**INDIANAPOLIS** — For her heroic and selfless dedication to protecting the lemurs, ecosystems and people of Madagascar, Indianapolis Zoological Society officials today announced Dr. Patricia Chappelle Wright as winner of the 2014 Indianapolis Prize, the world's leading award for animal conservation. As the Indianapolis Prize winner, Wright, a distinguished professor of anthropology at [Stony Brook University](#), will receive \$250,000 and the Lilly Medal, joining the ranks of some of the most celebrated conservationists on Earth.

“We are honored to present the 2014 Indianapolis Prize to Patricia Wright,” said Michael Crowther, president and CEO of the Indianapolis Zoological Society, which initiated the Indianapolis Prize as part of its conservation mission. “A static summary of achievements is not enough to convey Pat’s impact on protecting lemurs and their habitat in Madagascar. Her approach has been hugely successful at the intersection of conservation and community-building. We hope that her remarkable story will empower others to become advocates for our planet and the wildlife that inhabit it.”

Wright, the first female winner of the Indianapolis Prize since its inception in 2006, was selected from an elite group of finalists that includes: Joel Berger, Ph.D., senior scientist at the Wildlife Conservation Society; Gerardo Ceballos, Ph.D., professor of ecology and conservation at the National Autonomous University of Mexico; Carl Jones, Ph.D., scientific director of the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation and Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust; Russell Mittermeier, Ph.D., president of Conservation International; and Carl Safina, Ph.D., co-founder and president of the Blue Ocean Institute.

Wright and the five finalists will be honored at the Indianapolis Prize Gala, presented by Cummins Inc., on Sept. 27 in Indianapolis. Dr. Wright will receive an unrestricted \$250,000 cash award and the Lilly Medal, an original work of art that signifies her contributions to conserving Madagascar's lemurs — considered to be the world's most threatened mammal group. The remaining five finalists will each receive \$10,000.

## Patricia Wright, Conservation Hero

In the 1960s, Wright, then a social worker, purchased an owl monkey from a New York City pet store. Her fascination with that monkey led Wright to ultimately obtain her Ph.D. in her 40s and travel to Madagascar, an island often referred to as the “Eighth Continent” due to its rich diversity of plants and animals. There, she fell in love with the island’s lemurs. Just a year out of graduate school, Wright rediscovered a species of lemur thought to be extinct for more than 50 years. She even discovered a new species — the golden bamboo lemur. These discoveries catalyzed Wright’s political capital in Madagascar, which proved useful as she established Ranomafana National Park in 1991. The park is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and 18 other parks have been established in her wake.

Today, Wright partners with Malagasy villagers to develop solutions that are both environmentally and economically sustainable. Much of this effort is focused on empowering villagers with their status as stakeholders for Madagascar’s forests - and specifically, its lemurs. In a country where more than 75 percent of the population lives at or below the World Bank’s global poverty line benchmark of \$1.25 a day, ecotourism has become a means for economic empowerment and self-sufficiency. By engaging community stakeholders to save Madagascar’s vanishing habitat, Wright’s plan for preservation provides a conservation model that can be replicated all over the world.

Wright’s heroic work and remarkable personal story is featured in the IMAX and Warner Bros. 2014 documentary [“Island of Lemurs: Madagascar.”](#) Narrated by Morgan Freeman, the film seeks to inspire a mainstream audience to advance the conservation efforts for lemurs, animals which have been around since the time of the dinosaurs.

“This is a story about a courageous individual who has engaged in acts of heroism to save some magnificent creatures,” said Freeman. “I cannot think of a person more worthy of the Indianapolis Prize than Dr. Patricia Wright.”

Wright intends to use some of her winnings from the 2014 Indianapolis Prize toward providing electricity, especially for Malagasy schoolchildren, in the various small villages around Ranomafana. “I want to help light up their lives,” said Wright. She also plans to fund the protection of an unprotected forest just north of Ranomafana, home to another yet undescribed new species of rare lemur, which are critically threatened by gold mining in the area.

“In Madagascar, they call her ‘Mother,’ and she loves them just as much,” said Mireya Mayor, Ph.D., American anthropologist and National Geographic correspondent. “Dr. Wright is selflessly and fiercely dedicated to the people and ecosystems of Madagascar because she loves them. Her heart is theirs.”

## About Patricia Wright

Raised in Lyndonville, N.Y., Wright received her baccalaureate degree from Hood College and her doctorate from City University of New York. She has held professional appointments at Duke University and Stony Brook University and is the Executive Director of the Institute for the Conservation of Tropical Environments at Stony Brook University and the [Centre ValBio Research Campus](#) in Madagascar.

She was awarded a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1989, and was honored by the government of Madagascar with the National Medal of Honor in 1995, the *Medaille Officier* in 2003 and the *Commandeur* medal in 2012. Most recently, Wright has authored the book “High Moon Over the Amazon: My Quest to Understand the Monkeys of the Night,” and her work has been featured in the IMAX film “Island of Lemurs: Madagascar” directed by David Douglas.

## About the Indianapolis Prize

The Indianapolis Prize was first awarded in 2006 to George Archibald, Ph.D., the co-founder of the [International Crane Foundation](#). The 2008 winner was George Schaller, Ph.D., senior conservationist for the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) and an icon in field conservation around the world. In 2010, the Indianapolis Prize was awarded to Iain Douglas-Hamilton, Ph.D., founder of [Save the Elephants](#), who pioneered research in elephant social behavior and has led the way in fighting poaching of African elephants. Steven Amstrup, Ph.D., of [Polar Bears International](#), received the 2012 Indianapolis Prize for his field work and research that led the United States to declare polar bears as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

To learn more about each of the finalists, how you can support their work, and the Indianapolis Prize, please visit [indianapolisprize.org](#).

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### **MEDIA NOTE:**

**Images that accompany this story are available for download from the [Indianapolis Prize Press Room](#).**

*The [Indianapolis Prize](#) was initiated by the [Indianapolis Zoo](#) as a significant component of its mission to empower people and communities, both locally and globally, to advance animal conservation. This biennial award brings the world’s attention to the cause of animal conservation and the brave, talented and dedicated men and women who spend their lives saving the Earth’s endangered animal species. The Indianapolis Prize has received support from the Eli Lilly and Company Foundation since its inception in 2006.*