

## THE PRIZE WINNERS OF THE FRANKFURT CONSERVATION AWARD 2023 (BRUNO H. SCHUBERT PRIZE)



Photo: Orlando A Cáceres

### **PRIZE WINNER IN CATEGORY 1 (Teaching)**

#### **Prof. Dr. Meike Piepenbring**

**Prof. Dr. Meike Piepenbring, Professor of Mycology at the Institute of Ecology, Evolution and Diversity at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, is awarded the prize for outstanding personal achievement in academic teaching on nature and environmental protection.**

Worldwide, only around five percent of existing fungi species have been scientifically described. Meike Piepenbring researches the diversity and ecology of fungi, particularly in the tropics, and works with international scientific partners in South America and West Africa. With the University of Parakou in Benin, for example, she has launched a project to scientifically record West African fungi and is developing methods for cultivating edible mushrooms that can serve as a high-quality meat substitute. "Mushrooms contain a lot of protein, as well as D vitamins, minerals and trace elements," explains Piepenbring. "By developing sustainable cultivation methods and passing them on to local farmers, we can promote the economic independence of women in particular and conserve natural resources."

Meike Piepenbring is a passionate university lecturer in the Department of Biosciences at the Goethe University and is involved in the "Frankfurt Spring School on Conservation Project Management". The "Spring School" is a course for young or future conservation professionals from all over the world, which provides knowledge on project and team management, financing and communication in conservation projects and nature parks as a complement to university education. Through her research, teaching and public relations work, Meike Piepenbring enhances knowledge, enthusiasm and appreciation of biodiversity - indispensable foundations of any nature conservation initiative.



Photo: Private

## **PRIZE WINNER IN CATEGORY 2 (Research)**

### **Prof. Dr. Beth Kaplin**

**Prof. Dr. Beth Kaplin, Acting Director at the Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resources Management (CoEB) and Professor at the College of Science and Technology at the University of Rwanda, and Affiliated Research Professor of Biodiversity at the School for the Environment, University Massachusetts-Boston, USA, is honoured for her outstanding personal achievements in research on nature conservation and environmental protection.**

Beth Kaplin is the Director of the Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resources Management, a UNESCO Category 2 Center, which she has established over the past five years together with a dedicated team at the University of Rwanda. Under her leadership, the center is developing into a leading institution in biodiversity research and nature conservation in Central Africa and serves as a model for similar initiatives in the Global South.

Beth Kaplin's research focuses on tropical ecology - including the ecology of individual tropical species and communities, particularly the interactions between plants and animals and between different ecosystems. Throughout her career, the zoologist has focused on the role of higher education in building capacity for biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation research in Africa.

As Professor of Conservation Science at the University of Rwanda, she supervises BSc, MSc and PhD students at her own university and other academic institutions. She is also an Associate Research Professor at the School for the Environment and a Senior Fellow at the Center of Global Governance and Sustainability, both at the University of Massachusetts-Boston. From 2006 to 2015, she raised over \$1 million to develop BSc and MSc programs in biodiversity conservation at the University of Rwanda.

Together with Senckenberg, she has been organizing the Volkswagen Foundation-funded event "Mind the Darwinian shortfalls - A graduate summer school on Biodiversity and Collection Management in East Africa" for young scientists from central, eastern and southern Africa at the UNESCO World Heritage Site Nyungwe for the past three years.

"This award is a great honour for me," says Beth Kaplin. "It is an acknowledgement of my work over the past 18 years to create sustainable conservation programs for Rwanda, a biodiversity hotspot and my second home. These programs include bachelor's and master's degree programs in biodiversity conservation at the University of Rwanda to educate young people in the country, as well as a new research facility to help the Rwandan government in its pursuit of sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, landscape restoration, climate adaptation and green growth."



Photo: SERNANP

## **PRIZE WINNER IN CATEGORY 3 (Applied nature conservation)**

### **José Carlos Nieto Navarrete**

**José Carlos Nieto Navarrete, Director of the Servicio Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado - SERNANP, Peru, is honoured for his outstanding personal achievement in practical work in nature conservation and environmental protection.**

José Carlos Nieto Navarrete heads the Peruvian authority for protected areas 'Servicio Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado - SERNANP'. He receives the prize

in recognition of his professional life for the management of Peruvian national parks and protected areas and his commitment to nature conservation. He has over 17 years of experience in practical nature conservation, including as head of the Manu National Park - one of the most biodiverse areas in the world and a World Heritage Site.

As Director of SERNANP, José Carlos Nieto Navarrete has made important progress towards more efficient management of protected areas. He positioned protected areas as models of participative management and promoted processes to reclassify and establish protected areas, including in the context of international commitments.

José Carlos Nieto Navarrete played a leading role in the implementation of a sustainable tourism strategy that establishes protected areas as destinations for nature lovers. This contributes to local economic development and at the same time makes biodiversity visible. This, in turn, serves its conservation to a large extent.

He knows the wilderness areas, understands the requirements of the very complex biodiversity conservation and the involvement of people. He knows the staff and has worked with them on site. And he has traveled himself to many of the areas which are often difficult to access.

He also works with local communities and organizations that promote an intercultural approach in mixed World Heritage sites (cultural and natural heritage) and biosphere reserves. With all this experience and his long professional career in the service of biodiversity conservation, he has gained the trust from the government, which is needed for leadership in the national service.

"Peru is the second largest country in the Amazon biome," says José Carlos Nieto Navarrete. "It is a jewel that we have not adequately protected and that is under serious threat as we are confronted with the spread of illegal coca plantations, illegal gold mining and illegal logging. Therefore, it is our job to tackle the problem from all sides. We cannot leave our park rangers and the indigenous peoples who risk their lives to prevent the advance of these criminal organizations alone. We need help from all sides and from all countries."