

## Pune ornithologist bags Green Oscar

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Pramod Patil, winner of the Whitley Fund for Nature award, with schoolchildren at an awareness programme on protection of the Great Indian Bustard. Photo: Special Arrangement

*In recognition of his work on conservation of Great Indian Bustard.*

Pune-based ornithologist Pramod Patil has won with the prestigious Whitley Award, popularly known as the 'Green Oscar' for his work on the conservation of the Great Indian Bustard .

The awards were presented on April 29 at a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society in London.

The winners each received cash prizes of £35,000 and a memento from the U.K.-based Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN).

### **Nine winners**

Nine winners from eight countries (a joint winner from Kenya) were presented the awards by WFN's royal patron Princess Anne in the presence of 450 guests that included eminent English naturalist Sir David Attenborough.

Dr. Patil bagged the prize along with Dr Ananda Kumar, a wildlife scientist with the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), who has worked extensively in Valparai in Coimbatore to facilitate human-animal coexistence.

Dr. Patil was the winner of the Whitley Award donated by The William Brake Charitable Trust for his project titled 'Community conservation of the great Indian bustard in the Thar desert, India: a landscape-level approach.'

In 2003 Dr .Patil decided to leave medicine as a profession and devote his life to conservation of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) .

### **Poor planning blamed**

Lamenting the fact that the bird, once abundantly found in grasslands across the Indian sub-continent, had been driven out of its habitat, Dr. Patil ascribed poor planning and failure to involve the local community as factors that led to the Great Indian Bustard disappearing from several protected areas.

### **Capacity building**

With most of his work centered around the Thar desert in Rajasthan (which hosts the largest surviving population of the bustard), Dr. Patil plans to use the project funding for capacity building.

Dr. Kumar's Whitley prize was donated by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)-UK, for his project on 'Elephant messengers: using innovative communication systems to enable human-elephant coexistence in Southern India.'

Noted for his passionate work on elephant conservation, Dr. Kumar and his team have come up with innovative communication systems that give early warnings to people about the presence of wild elephants and their movements in Valparai.