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Bats in the News - Honors for a Mexican Bat Expert

Rodrigo Medellín of Mexico, a leading bat scientist and member of Bat Conservation International's Science Advisory Committee, is the first winner of the Whitley Fund for Nature's new Gold Award for "outstanding individual contribution to conservation," reports the *Telegraph* of the United Kingdom.



Rodrigo Medellín and Princess Anne. Photo by James Finlay.

The award was presented by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal (Princess Anne) during a ceremony May 9 at the Royal Geographical Society in London, the newspaper said. The honor includes grant of £30,000 (about \$46,750) for conservation work. The Fund also announced seven winners of Whitley Awards who will share £210,000 (\$327,400) in project support. Medellín won a Whitley Award in 2004 and said it helped him found the nonprofit conservation organization BIOCONCIENCIA.

Among the Whitley Award recipients was BCI friend and colleague Bernal Rodríguez Herrera of Costa Rica, who was honored for "reaching across national borders to coordinate conservation action for Central America's rich array of bats."

In a film shown at the ceremony, the *Telegraph* reported, wildlife broadcaster Sir David Attenborough said, "There is arguably no one who has done more for the conservation of bats in Latin America than Rodrigo Medellín. His pioneering work to highlight the vital role that bats play in the ecosystem, and their importance to people's lives, has had a tremendous impact on the way bats are perceived in his native Mexico and beyond."

The Whitley Fund cited Medellín's most recent achievement: "Thanks to conservation measures he put in place, the lesser long-nosed bat will soon become the first species ever to be removed from Mexico's Federal List of Endangered Species," the *Telegraph* wrote.

"Most people won't have heard of this species," Whitley Fund Acting Director David Wallis said, "but they will know of a product which might also be in danger if this bat was lost: tequila. The drink is made from the agave plant and lesser long-nosed bats are its main natural pollinator. Mexico's commercial [agave] crops are currently being hit by a new infection, which has already damaged a third of the plants in a [critical] area. As a result, farmers are turning back to the bats to add more variety to the crop. ... In this way, what is good for wildlife is proving helpful to people as well."

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