



Dr. Russell Mittermeier wins the Indianapolis Prize

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Russ Mittermeier with friend in the field

He doesn't wear a cape, but Dr. Russ Mittermeier is a superhero of sorts. Mittermeier is the winner of the 2018 Indianapolis Prize.

Created by the Indianapolis Zoological Society in 2006, the award acknowledges those who've made important advances in animal conservation. It also aims to raise public recognition of conservationists as heroes.

Mittermeier was chosen out of six finalists to receive the Lilly Medal and \$250,000, according to a June 12 Indianapolis Prize press release. The jury was made of established scientists and conservation leaders.

A 2018 survey commissioned by the Indianapolis Prize indicates that 91 percent of Americans believe the survival of endangered animals is important. 83 percent believe that animal conservationists are heroes.

Mittermeier, the chief conservation officer for Global Wildlife Conservation, created the concept of “Biodiversity Hotspots.” These areas throughout the globe are recognized not only for their biodiversity and endemic species but also for their endangered status. His focus on these hotspots helps the global conservation community develop strategic plans.

Not all countries are the same, according to Mittermeier, when it comes to biodiversity. “Megadiversity Countries” is his label for the 18 countries in the world that contain two-thirds of global diversity. And his term “High Biodiversity Wilderness Areas” signifies areas of the world like the forests of the Amazon where much undeveloped habitat remains.

Using the framework that he developed, conservation organizations can make strategic investments in the parts of the world where biodiversity is the richest--and the most endangered.

“Russ Mittermeier is a consummate scientist, a visionary leader, a deft policy advocate and an inspiring mentor to many. Perhaps most important, he is a consistent winner in the battles for species and ecosystem survival,” said Michael I. Crowther, chief executive officer of the Indianapolis Zoological Society, Inc. “Russ is considered the world’s preeminent primate conservationist and has observed more primate species in the wild than anyone else ... ever. In part because of his efforts, primates remain the only larger group of mammals to have not lost a single species or subspecies to extinction in the last 100 years!”

Mittermeier has also participated in describing 20 + species, including seven lemurs, four tarsiers and seven monkeys. No big surprise, then, that his colleagues have named eight species after him.

To his colleagues, Mittermeier is definitely a superhero.

On Sept. 29, Mittermeier and the Indianapolis Prize finalists will be honored at the Indianapolis Prize Gala presented by Cummins Inc. in Indianapolis (of course).

NUVO intern Edward Redd contributed to this story.
