

# Russell Mittermeier wins 2018 Indianapolis Prize, \$250,000 for conservation efforts



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*PUBLISHED: JUN 12TH, 2018 - 12:05AM (EDT) UPDATED: JUN 13TH, 2018 - 9:45AM (EDT)*

INDIANAPOLIS (WTHR) — Russell Mittermeier is a smart guy. Smart enough to have graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Dartmouth in 1971 and earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. But, despite the fact that he knows more than most people about conservation and conservation issues, he has a surprising common touch. He's used his ability to reach out to just about anyone to become, arguably, the best-known conservationist in the world.

By his own count, he has been to 170 countries and done field work in at least 30 of them. You don't get to so many corners of the world without traveling a lot.



"I live in Great Falls, Virginia," he said, "and that's my home base, but in any given year, I'll be traveling let's say 80 percent of the time." He goes to places like Brazil, Surinam, and Madagascar. His days are diverse as his passport: "One day I'll be out in the forest looking at lemurs, another day I'll be out at an international convention. Sometimes I'll be interacting with ministers and heads of state."

He can move in so many circles because he understands the people with whom he is moving. Literally understands them. Mittermeier speaks seven languages fluently, and has talked his way into just about every region of the world where plant and animal species need protection. Long time friend and colleague Olivier Langrand of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund marvels at his energy. "And you can see the passion going through, and yet you can see the conservation leader, you know, in the middle of the forest in Suriname or the head of state you know sitting behind the fancy desk in the capitol city being touched by this and listening to Russ."

Mittermeier is a leader in a generation of conservationists that know that saving the world's wild places has to work for the people who live there, too. As president of Conservation International for more than 25 years, he helped identify and secure the protection of 260-million acres of natural areas around the world, both on land and sea. The most important push is the development of so-called 'bio-diversity hotspots' around the world. He supported that work by publishing more than two dozen books for the mass audience and over six hundred papers for fellow scientists.



He joined "Global Wildlife Conservation" as its chief conservation officer in 2017 where he continues a remarkable career that includes the discovery of 12 separate species. He focuses his work on primates, and they remain the only larger group of mammals that has not lost a single species to extinction in the last 100 years.

Mittermeier's love of nature has been noted in the halls of government around the world. Leaders of the Netherlands, Brazil, and Suriname have honored him with some of their country's highest civilian awards. He was one of Time Magazine's 'EcoHeroes for the Planet' in 1998. It's a long list of accomplishments, but even though he's closing in on 70-years-old, he insists he is not done yet: " I've got such a long agenda of things I still have to do", he says, "species that I haven't seen in the wild, countries that I have to get to. I don't think I'm going to get to all of them because, you know, time kind of runs out after a while, but as long as I can see straight and walk, I'll continue to try."



Mittermeier in Madagascar



That includes motivating the next generation to continue the work — a generation that includes his three children, insuring that the Mittermeier legacy will go on after Russ makes his last trip into the field.

As the winner of the 2018 Indianapolis Prize, he will receive an unrestricted gift of \$250,000 to use in his conservation work, work that has been a model of success for more than four decades.