

WINNERS

LACA Professional Development Scholarship 2016

LACA offered four competitive scholarships of \$2,000 US each in support of expenses associated with emerging conservation professionals conducting their thesis work in disciplines and subjects directly related to applied conservation biology, and for which some tangible conservation benefit or outcome are anticipated.

Some of the most pressing issues with respect to conservation are found in Latin America and the Caribbean. Universities and colleges across most of the LACA membership region do not currently have adequate support for the professional development of their emerging conservation professionals. In particular, more support is needed for the projects of LACA graduate students who have the potential to be greatly impactful in conservation. This scholarship opportunity intends to increase support for Latin America's most creative, innovative, and dedicated conservation graduate students, so they may pursue and conduct outstanding research in the field of applied conservation biology.

Congratulations!



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Juan David Carvajal

PhD student, Institute of Ecology (INECOL, México)

Juan is from Medellin, **Colombia**. He obtained his undergraduate degree in Biology from the Universidad de Antioquia, where he began to study and explore freshwater fish eight years ago. Today, as a PhD student, he integrates ecology, evolution and conservation to better understand freshwater ecosystems and produce better tools for their long-term management and preservation. His PhD project has three primary objectives: 1) to determine the natural and human-induced factors that explain species' range sizes at different spatial scales (global, regional and basins); 2) to assess the current and future vulnerability of freshwater fish species to major human-induced disturbances, such as climate and land use changes; and 3) to determine how changes in species range sizes, caused by different human disturbances, could influence spatial conservation priorities.

Juan enjoys to ride bike and underwater sports.



Congratulations Juan David!



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Antonio Ruiz Sakamoto

Masters student, Universidad Autónoma De Baja California Sur (UABCS, México)

Antonio is a **Mexican** Marine Biologist . He graduated with a thesis about the economic value of the Giant Manta rays in the Revillagigedo Archipelago between 2013 and 2015. When he received the opportunity to develop it, he traveled to this islands in the middle of the Pacific, where he had his first encounter as a diver with mega fauna (sharks, whales, dolphins and Giant Manta rays). This experience changed his point of view about what the ocean is supposed to look like. He understood that we have huge impact in the world and that if we want to keep our natural treasures, we need to act now. This initiated a very exciting career where ecology, conservation and a deep love for marine life began. Currently, he is involved in a conservation, educational and research program, about Giant Manta rays in the Mexican Pacific. This gave him the opportunity to continue his studies in a Master program in the same university. With the help of advisors with years of experience in sciences and conservation, we developed a very interesting project where aspects of the ecology of Giant manta rays are being studied. This generates information that then is used to educate the local communities so they learn to live in balance with nature, helping to prevent accidents, and showing them that the best way to conserve their world is by understanding nature and taking care.

Congratulations Antonio!



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Nicola Smith

PhD student, Earth to Ocean Research Group, Simon Fraser University, BC (Canada)

Nicola Smith is a **Bahamian** citizen and her research interests include biological invasions, coral reef ecology and data-poor, tropical fisheries. In 2016, Nicola was a part of the official delegation from The Bahamas at the 32nd Committee on Fisheries (COFI32) at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, Italy. Nicola was a speaker and panelist at a COFI32 side event on Reliable Fishery Statistics and Importance for Food Security Assessments, where she presented her research findings on unreported recreational fishery catches in The Bahamas over the last 60 years. Recently, Nicola was selected by the Royal Society, London, as an "Outstanding PhD Student in Biology from the Caribbean" to attend the 2017 Commonwealth Science Conference in Singapore. Her research has been published in the journals PLoS ONE, Frontiers in Marine Science and Fishery Bulletin.



Congratulations Nicola!

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Diana Carolina Villanueva Ceballos

Masters student, Conservation and Wildlife Management (National University of Costa Rica)

Diana was born in the municipality of Murillo in the central cordillera of the **Colombian** Andes, coming from a peasant family that has cultivated the land applying agroecological technics, which has allowed her to have a direct contact with nature and an environmental conscience. This is how she motivated herself in 2003 to study biology at the University of Caldas in Manizales, focusing on the field of mastozoology and an interest in working with rural communities. This led her to participate since 2005 in projects for the conservation of threatened species in the Serranía de los Yariguíes, in the east of the country, where her passion for protecting biodiversity was taking more force and action, through the application of strategies for conservation hand in hand with rural communities and with decision makers. The interest in research and conservation prompted a group of friends and her, 12 years ago, to create Biodiversa Foundation, an environmental NGO, which has led her to analyze and understand more of the interaction between social, economic and environmental. In 2013 and 2014 she was part of the team of two Protected Areas in National Natural Parks of Colombia, addressing issues such as management plans and ecological restoration, further strengthening her interest in finding solutions to the environmental problems we face in the present. All of the above motivated her to focus in conservation biology and since 2015 she studies a Master's Degree in Wildlife Conservation and Management at the National University of Costa Rica, where she is currently developing a research focused on the Paso de Las Lapas Biological Corridor in the Central Pacific of this country.

Congratulations Diana!

