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Indianapolis Zoo Honors Hero of Animal Conservation with the World's Largest Animal Conservation Award

Dr. George Archibald receives the inaugural
$100,000 Indianapolis Prize for his work with cranes

WASHINGTON D.C. – In honor of more than 30 years dedicated to saving endangered crane species, a man who once danced with a female crane named Tex and brought a national television audience to tears describing her fate, has been awarded the inaugural Indianapolis Prize. George Archibald, Ph.D., is the recipient of the $100,000 Indianapolis Prize, an initiative of the Indianapolis Zoo and the largest international monetary award given to an individual for conservation of an animal species. He will receive the check and the accompanying Lilly Medal in Indianapolis on September 30 at a gala ceremony presented by the AES Corporation and hosted by actress Jane Alexander.

The announcement was made at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. In making the announcement, Indianapolis Zoo President and CEO Michael I. Crowther said, "George is an icon in animal conservation. With his revolutionary work and dedication to the preservation of cranes, there is absolutely no question that the population is stronger because he is their champion. He is a true hero and we are honored that he is the first recipient of the Indianapolis Prize."

Archibald co-founded the International Crane Foundation, located in Baraboo, Wisconsin, in 1973 when cranes were in a perilous situation and many of the 15 remaining species were on the brink of extinction. Today, several species have made remarkable turnarounds, most notably the North American Whooping Crane. Down to their last 10 to 15 birds in the 1940s, now the population numbers in the hundreds.

"I am humbled by this honor and proud to be recognized among the world's leading conservationists," said Archibald. "This award is a privilege not only for me and the team I'm a part of, but the cranes we work to save. They depend on us and look to us to be their voice. It's a great honor to have that voice heard."

Archibald has pioneered several techniques to rear cranes in human care, including having human handlers wear crane costumes to avoid human imprinting and using ultra-light aircraft to lead cranes on migration. Archibald spent three years with a highly endangered whooping crane named Tex, dressed as and acting as a male crane – walking, calling, dancing – to shift her into reproductive condition. Through his dedication and the use of artificial insemination, Tex eventually laid a fertile egg. As Archibald later recounted her tale on "The Tonight Show," he stunned the audience and host Johnny Carson with the sad end of the story – the accidental death of Tex shortly after the hatching of her one and only chick.

Archibald is also known for having entered some of the world's most hostile territories, including Afghanistan, Cuba, Russia and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea, to protect the watersheds and grasslands where cranes live and to help increase migratory flight paths.

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“Zoos throughout this country play a significant role in the worldwide effort for animal conservation," said Jim Maddy, president and CEO of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), the national member organization that accredits U.S. zoos. "The Indianapolis Prize is an outstanding addition to the cause of preserving the world’s endangered animals, and it is a prime example of a single zoo's ability to increase awareness of and spur action toward conservation of the natural world."

An international nominating committee and jury of distinguished members of the conservation community selected the six finalists from more than 50 of the world’s pre-eminent animal conservationist nominees to compete for the Indianapolis Prize. The other finalists included Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton (one of the world’s foremost authorities on elephant conservation), Dr. Holly Dublin (chair of the IUCN’s largest and most important network of scientists and researchers working to preserve endangered species), Dr. David Mech (the world’s leading authority on wolf conservation), Dr. Roger Payne (a pioneer in the study of whale songs and father of the Save the Whales movement) and Dr. Simon Stuart (champion in the preservation of threatened species and senior advisor for the Biodiversity Assessment Initiative).

In addition to the unrestricted award of $100,000, the recipient will be presented with the Lilly Medal. The Lilly Medal design by Rik Tommosone resulted from a competition among teachers and students at the Herron School of Art in Indianapolis. The Medal itself is cast in bronze and will be presented in a handcrafted limestone display box carved by well known sculptor Dale Enochs.

Information about the Indianapolis Prize and the AES Corporation presents the Indianapolis Prize Gala is available at indianapolisprize.org. Tickets to the Gala are also available for purchase online.

The Indianapolis Prize was initiated by the Indianapolis Zoo as a significant component of its mission to inspire local and global communities to celebrate, protect, and preserve our natural world through conservation, education and research. This biennial award will bring the world’s attention to the cause of animal conservation and the brave, talented and dedicated men and women who spend their lives saving the Earth’s endangered animal species.

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