



The Africa Section of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) announces this year's winner of the Young Women Conservation Biologists' Award

Cape Town, South Africa (30 September, 2011) -- The Chair of the Awards Panel of the Society for Conservation Biology's Africa Section is pleased to announce that Dr Leela Hazzah of Egypt is the fourth winner of the coveted Young Women Conservation Biologists' Award.

This non-monetary award incentivizes young African women professionals in conservation biology, by recognizing their remarkable achievements, their dedication and their impact on African conservation on the ground.

Leela Hazzah, a young Egyptian conservation biologist working on human-wildlife conflict in East Africa for more than a decade, is a particularly remarkable winner of this year's award. Fluent in Swahili, she has worked in depth on rural community conservation issues from Tanzania and Kenya to the tropical forests of Uganda. Her most outstanding work, on the underlying motivations for lion killing and potential solutions in Maasailand Kenya (see <http://www.lionconservation.org/meet-the-team.html>), has also been awarded a Jordan Prize for African Studies. She is an expert in quantitative analyses, and has been awarded Fulbright-Hays Doctoral, UW Minority Merit, Foreign Language and Area Studies, Lawry-Leopold, and Wings WorldQuest Fellowships, and Panthera Kaplan Graduate Awards.

Lead nominator, Rodger Schlickeisen, President and CEO of Defenders of Wildlife, writes about Leela: *"Saving large, mammalian predators is one of the biggest challenges facing conservation, and few people in this field do this more impressively than Leela, who founded, expanded and leads the highly effectively Lion Guardians project. Faced with the seemingly irreversible loss of lions to a wide range of people-centered causes, she developed a participatory conservation approach that works with rural communities literally to turn lion killers into lion guardians. The approach has already been proven in several different Maasai communities as Leela has successfully trained and dispatched previously non-literate men to implement the Lion Guardian approach in an ever broader portion of southern Kenya and, more recently, into Tanzania. This kind of participatory conservation approach, based upon effecting cultural change through activities that put new value on wildlife conservation while remaining consistent with traditional values, could represent the single best hope for large predator conservation on the continent. While it has been developed in conjunction with the Maasai culture, there is a good chance that the basic lessons that Leela's approach teaches can be employed effectively in a much wider area, as it is based on empowering local communities to invest in protecting wildlife as a livelihood strategy by proactively mitigating livestock-wildlife conflict, enhancing local wildlife monitoring and conservation capacity, and preventing wildlife killing."*

The Young Women Conservation Biologist (YWCB) working group of the Africa Section of the SCB was established in 2005, based on an urgent need to fill the gap created by the limited numbers of women professionals in the field of conservation science in Africa. It was further mandated to act as a platform for young African conservation biologists (with a major emphasis on women) to share experiences, generating incentives and mentorship opportunities to strengthen conservation biologists in their careers. The first award was made in 2007 to Ugandan wetlands biologist Margaret Aanyu; the 2008 award to South African conservation planner Kristal Maze; the 2009 award to Kenyan predator ecologist Shivani Bhalla. An award could not be made in 2010.

The 2011 award will be presented at the 25th International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2011) www.conbio.org/2011 in Auckland, New Zealand to be held from 5-9 December 2011, alongside SCB's Global Distinguished Service Award, LaRoe and Early Career Conservationist Awards. SCB will support Leela Hazzah to travel from her workplace to New Zealand for the congress, receive the award in person, network professionally, and if possible present a paper on the recognized work.

Leela Hazzah can be contacted for media enquiries via the website <http://www.lionconservation.org/> . Enquiries including sponsorship of future Awards may also be made to the Awards Panel chair, Dr Phoebe Barnard of the South African National Biodiversity Institute, at p.barnard@sanbi.org.za.

The YWCB Awards Panel members are warmly thanked for their contribution to honouring deserving and inspiring young African women in conservation. The SCB Board of Governors is also thanked for its commitment to this important award.

