

# *Cuban Wins Whitley Award for Plant Conservation Project*

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London, May 12 (RHC) – Cuban Botanist Luis Torres has won a Whitley Award for building a national movement to protect Cuba’s amazing plant life.

Torres, head of Conservation of the Cuban Botanical Society, launched the Planta! Campaign in 2012 as a nationwide effort to inspire the preservation of this diverse mosaic of plant life.

Cuba hosts one of the four richest island floras of the world and supports 7,500 species of flowering plant, more than half of that of the entire Caribbean. Some 53% of all Cuban plant species are endemic to the country. Plants have cultural, economic and medicinal value and perform crucial ecosystem services.

According to Torres, poor awareness of the importance, value and perilous situation of Cuba’s flora means that allocation of resources for conservation is insufficient and exacerbated by poor enforcement of legislation and inadequate commitment of citizens and decision-makers. A lack of skilled conservation practitioners at local level also reduces the effectiveness of conservation actions, limiting the development of local initiatives.

The Planta! Project aims to educate Cubans about the importance of their native flora and inspire them to conserve it, as well as to build capacity for developing and implementing community-based conservation projects nationwide.

The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) is a UK registered charity offering awards and grants to outstanding nature conservationists around the world. For their significance, the Whitley Awards are known in the as the “Green Oscars” in the environmentalist world.

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