

# **\*\*NEWS RELEASE\*\***

## **Dr. George Schaller Wins Award for Chinese Conservation**



**NEW YORK (December 18, 2008)**—Dr. George Schaller—the world’s leading field biologist and conservationist—has been awarded the China Environment Prize for his efforts to study and protect China’s giant pandas, Tibetan antelope, and the wild places where they exist.

Schaller is a Senior Conservationist with the Wildlife Conservation Society’s Asia Programs and has worked with the Bronx Zoo-based organization for over 50 years. In 2008, he joined Panthera, a New York City based conservation organization focusing on big cats, as Vice President of the organization. He has worked in China for much of the last 28 years.

The prize was established in 2000 by the China Environmental Protection Foundation to honor and encourage individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to the cause of environmental protection in China.

“George Schaller has been and continues to be a role model and driving force for conservation,” said Dr. Steven E. Sanderson, President and CEO of the Wildlife Conservation

Society. “After more than 50 years of groundbreaking field research on some of the world’s best-known wildlife, George continues to define the field of conservation biology and works tirelessly to preserve our natural heritage.”

Schaller’s conservation work within China began in the 1980s with his seminal research on giant pandas in the bamboo forests of China’s Wolong Mountains. He was one of the first foreign experts to work with the Chinese on conservation issues. Schaller also helped the Chinese government establish the massive Chang Tang Wildlife Preserve in Tibet—one of the world’s largest protected areas—in order to protect the plateau’s unique assemblage of wildlife, including wild yak, Tibetan argali sheep, and Tibetan brown bear. Schaller’s research on Tibetan antelope—another denizen of the Chang Tang—helped reveal that the rare animal is in fact the source of “shahtoosh,” the world’s finest wool, which is smuggled by poachers into Kashmir, India. He has lobbied extensively to shut down the trade and protect critical habitat in China for this antelope species. His recent work includes efforts to establish a trans-boundary protected area along the mountainous borders of China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan that is home to Marco Polo sheep, ibex, and snow leopard.

Schaller’s reputation in the conservation field was well established before his work in China. His field work as a graduate student with legendary naturalists Olaus and Mardie Murie in northern Alaska in the 1950s led to the creation of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, often called the ‘Serengeti of the North.’ Schaller remains a zealous advocate for the permanent protection of the refuge and hopes that the incoming Administration will safeguard this pristine and ecologically rich part of America’s landscape. Schaller also initiated the first scientific study of mountain gorillas in Africa’s Virunga Volcanoes in 1959. Since 2001, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Agency for International Development have invested over \$15 million towards conservation of Great Apes in Africa and Asia, with an additional \$14 million coming from private donors and conservation organizations such as the Wildlife Conservation Society.

Schaller also pioneered behavioral examinations of the big cats, with the first ever ecological studies of tigers in India and lions in East Africa. His work on the latter resulted in an enormously successful popular work titled *The Serengeti Lion: A Study of Predator-Prey Relations*, which won the National Book Award in 1973. He has also studied jaguars and many other species.

Schaller’s work over the years on several species listed on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) has helped raise awareness on the growing rates of global illegal wildlife trade. During this past year, the United States House of Representatives held several congressional oversight hearings on illegal wildlife trade, raising public awareness and engaging in policy debates in the United States. The U.S. Department of State has also worked to maintain an international effort to curb illegal wildlife trade through the creation of the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT).

Schaller attended universities in Alaska and Wisconsin, earning his doctorate at the University of Wisconsin. His studies have been the basis for his numerous scientific and popular writings, including several books such as *The Stones of Silence*, *The Year of the Gorilla*, and *The Last Panda*. In addition to the China Environment Prize, Schaller has received numerous national and international awards for conservation, including the International Cosmos Prize (Japan) and the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement (USA). Dr. Schaller is now working primarily in Iran and Tajikistan.