



GOSCARs

GRASSROOTS OWEN-SMITH COMMUNITY RANGER AWARDS

open for nominations

The GOSCARs – the Grassroots Owen-Smith Community Ranger Awards – to be presented annually to up to three top-performing Namibian conservancy game guards, conservancy lion or rhino rangers, fish guards or community resource monitors – are now open for nominations.

The awards recognise the men and women who work – and walk – in the field. They are the people the late Garth Owen-Smith would want honoured in his name; they represent the original concept with which Namibia's internationally recognised community-based natural resource management program started.

The annual GOSCARs will serve to remind us all that this is the front line of community-based conservation. Without community fieldworkers there would be no community-based conservation in Namibia – no communal conservancies, no communal forests and no communal fish reserves – and a lot less wildlife. The winner's conservancy and, if appropriate, their traditional authority, will also get a small award, recognising that it is the people who live with wildlife and other valuable natural resources who hold the future of conservation in their hands.

Namibian community-based conservation started with the appointment of community game guards by a few traditional leaders in Kunene and later in what was then Caprivi, now Zambezi. This early work, pioneered by Garth Owen-Smith, was enabled by a small NGO-funded grant covering community game guard rations and small salaries. These men were the foot soldiers who stopped rampant illegal hunting in the early 1980s and who, with their far-sighted leaders and supportive community members, laid the foundation for what is today a vigorous national program supported by government and NGOs.

The near-forgotten early days were difficult on two fronts – community-based conservation went against the apartheid politics of the day and against conventional conservation thinking. Communities were seen as conservation's problem, not its solution. Those promoting community-empowerment were seen as subversive and a threat to the apartheid government. With community support, pioneers such as Garth Owen-Smith, Chris Eyre, Lukas Mbomboro and others prevailed. After independence the new government's early idealism resonated with the community-based approach that recognised valuable wildlife and other natural resources as community-owned, and that linked rights to responsibilities.

The awards thus aim to promote community-based natural resource management by going back to its roots – recognising the men and women at the front line as well as acknowledging responsible conservancies and related community-based organisations which are accountable to their members and fulfil their purpose. Specific criteria to be listed on the nomination form include effective monitoring of wildlife and other valuable natural resources, excellent communication with community members and conservancy committees, human-wildlife conflict mitigation and conservation outreach within communities.

Conservancies, community forests, fish reserves, NGOs or other organisations working in CBNRM, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, and the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources are all invited to nominate a community conservancy, community forest or fish reserve ranger by 1 December each year. The completed nomination form, including a brief motivation, should be sent or hand-delivered to the Namibian Chamber of Environment. Nomination forms can be downloaded from the NCE website at www.n-c-e.org. Hardcopy nomination forms will be available through NACSO partner's offices including IRDNC offices in Opuwo, Werledsend, Katima Mulilo and Windhoek.

A small GOSCARs committee chaired by Dr Margaret Jacobsohn will select finalists from the nominations. Beaven Munali, former assistant director of IRDNC and former chair of the Zambezi Regional Council, is also a judge, with two others to be appointed. The information provided about the finalists will be checked in the field. The winning men and women will then be chosen by the GOSCARs panel. A cash prize and framed certificate will go to each of the winners at a ceremony in April each year. The inaugural ceremony will be held in April 2022, commemorating Garth's life.

These awards have been made possible by the generosity of hundreds of people, in Namibia and internationally, who contributed to the Garth Owen-Smith Memorial Fund. The GOSCARs and the fund are lodged with the Namibian Chamber of Environment, who are doing the administration at no cost and will assist the judging panel with raising funds for the annual ceremony and other costs.

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