



**WINGS WORLDQUEST™ ANNOUNCES PIONEERING EXPLORERS TO RECEIVE  
2018 WOMEN OF DISCOVERY AWARDS**

***Five Extraordinary Women Explorers Will Be Inducted as  
WINGS WorldQuest Fellows***

New York, NY (April 18, 2018) WINGS WorldQuest™, a nonprofit organization which supports and recognizes extraordinary women in science and exploration, today announced the names of the five recipients of the 2018 Women of Discovery Awards. The five women scientists and explorers, who hail from all corners of the globe, will present elements of their respective expeditions at WINGS' Annual Fellows Forum, and will be inducted as WINGS Fellows in New York City on April 25<sup>th</sup>.

The WINGS WorldQuest ***Women of Discovery Awards*** were established in 2003 to recognize extraordinary women making significant contributions to world knowledge and science through exploration. Unique to this honor and organization is the \$10,000 unrestricted grant that is bestowed on each Fellow, to use as she sees fit to advance her research, career, and expeditions.

Founded in 2003, this year marks the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WINGS WorldQuest. During that short tenure, the organization has made significant strides in advancing women in science and exploration. Seventy-nine pioneering women have been bestowed as Fellows, and WINGS Worldquest has granted over \$550,000 to date.

“We continue to be awed and inspired by those we honor as WINGS WorldQuest Fellows,” said Beth Nixon, Board of Directors Chair, WINGS WorldQuest, “We are proud to advance women’s role in exploration, and are so pleased to be supporting women in 2018 that are at all levels of their careers. We are confident that these women will not only continue to be pioneers in their fields, but will inspire generations of women explorers for years to come.”

The 2018 Fellows and Women of Discovery Award Recipients are:

#### **NERGIS MAVALVALA, PH.D., *AIR AND SPACE AWARD***

Nergis Mavalvala is the associate head of the Department of Physics and the Curtis and Kathleen Marble Professor of Astrophysics at MIT. She is a physicist whose research focuses on the detection of gravitational waves from violent events in the cosmos that warp and ripple the fabric of spacetime. She is part of the scientific team that in early 2016 announced the first direct detection of gravitational waves from colliding black holes using the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory (LIGO) detectors. This breakthrough ushers in a new era of astrophysics, allowing observations of the violent and warped universe not visible with light. In addition to her work on developing technologies for gravitational wave detectors since her graduate student years in the 1990s, Mavalvala has also conducted pioneering experiments in the optical trapping and cooling of mirrors to enable observation of quantum phenomena in macroscopic objects.

#### **THANDIWE MWEETWA, *CONSERVATION AWARD***

Thandiwe Mweetwa is a senior ecologist and community educator with the Zambian Carnivore Programme. Her work focuses on studying population dynamics and threats to survival of lions and other carnivores in eastern Zambia in order to protect the species and their habitat. As a supporter of community-based conservation, Mweetwa is dedicated to exploring effective ways of integrating local communities in wildlife conservation through environmental awareness programs, capacity building and citizen science initiatives. She is the manager of ZCP's conservation education program, which is designed to gain community support for wildlife conservation, and to promote interest in conservation-based careers among local youths. In 2016, she started the Women in Wildlife Conservation Training Program aimed at providing opportunities for Zambian young women wishing to pursue careers in the wildlife sector.

#### **NALINI NADKARNI, PH.D., *LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD***

Nalini Nadkarni is known as the "Queen of the Forest Canopy." For three decades, she has used mountain-climbing techniques, construction cranes, and hot air balloons to explore life in the treetops of Costa Rica and the Pacific Northwest, documenting biota that are rarely or never seen on the forest floor.

She also studies the effects of forest fragmentation on biodiversity, and has published over 110 scientific articles and three scholarly books. She is a Professor of Biology at the University of Utah. Nadkarni is also a passionate communicator about nature to people in all walks of life,

innovating science engagement programs that bring together radically different cultures of academic science and groups such as faith-based organizations, urban youth, modern dancers, and rap singers. She initiated programs to bring science education, ecological restoration projects, and nature imagery to incarcerated men and women around the country.

#### **ELEANOR STERLING, PH.D., *HUMANITY AWARD***

Eleanor Sterling is the Jaffe Chief Conservation Scientist, Center for Biodiversity and Conservation (CBC), American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). Dr. Sterling is passionate about the intersection between biodiversity, culture, and languages. She works to strengthen connections, between people and place, across communities, and through time. She has interdisciplinary training in biological and social sciences and has over 30 years of field research and community outreach experience with direct application to biodiversity conservation in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania. She believes in addressing problems from a systems perspective, understanding root causes and motivations, and identifying key leverage points. She has a lifelong fascination with languages and has studied over 10 languages, from Vietnamese to Swahili. She is also a world authority on the aye-aye, an unusual nocturnal lemur endemic to Madagascar. She lived in a tent for two years on an uninhabited island in Madagascar to study this fascinating animal. She has a long history of engagement on equity and inclusion issues, and co-founded the Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity Committee of the Society for Conservation Biology as well as the Women in Natural Sciences New York chapter of the Association for Women in Science.

#### **ASHA DE VOS, PH.D., *SEA AWARD***

Asha de Vos is a Sri Lankan marine biologist, ocean educator and pioneer of blue whale research within the Northern Indian Ocean. She calls the population of blue whales in Sri Lankan waters "the Unorthodox Whales" because through many years of research, her work has shown that they are simply different. Dr. de Vos founded Oceanswell, Sri Lanka's first marine conservation research and education non-profit. "The Sri Lankan Blue Whale Project," which commenced in 2008, is the first long-term study on blue whales in this region and is Oceanswell's flagship project. The research de Vos conducted through this project has led to many key research publications and is used to inform policy at the local and global level. She spent many years in academia with degrees from the University of St. Andrews, University of Oxford and the University of Western Australia. She is the first and only Sri Lankan to have a Ph.D. in Marine Mammal research and the first Pew Fellow in Marine Conservation from Sri Lanka. Her life's work is to change the current marine conservation model, protect this unique

population of blue whales and inspire the next generation of ocean heroes from all corners of the globe.

#### About WINGS WorldQuest™

WINGS WorldQuest™ is a registered nonprofit organization founded in 2003 to recognize and support extraordinary women in science and exploration. It is the only organization of its kind, awarding unrestricted funding to women in scientific field endeavors. WINGS' support knows no boundaries—women of all races, nationalities, ages, and cultures who show initiative, passion, and promise toward future scientific advancement have been granted funds that are often critical to seeing their ambitious ideas through. In return, they have become part of the WINGS community, and strengthen the organization's mission to inspire the next generation of intrepid explorers and global problem-solvers through various outreach programs. For more information, visit [www.wingsworldquest.org](http://www.wingsworldquest.org).

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