

PRESS RELEASE:

22 March 2019

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Bishop's Stortford student to study Red Sea coral reefs thanks to Scottish mountain men's legacy

Wahaj Mahmood-Brown, of Bishop's Stortford, East Hertfordshire, a 33-year-old student of Marine Biology, Biodiversity and Conservation at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, is to lead his first independent study into coral reefs with support from the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant.

Wahaj will travel to the Marsa Shagra coral reefs in the Red Sea to complete 12 days of diving, mapping and analysing data from the reef. The data gathered will inform knowledge on the relationships that maintain the diversity and abundance of parrotfishes and surgeonfishes. These fish are keystone species of the coral ecosystem and indicators of the reef's overall health.

On receiving the news of the grant offer Wahaj said: "I am very grateful to the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant for helping to make my dream research project a reality! The amount awarded has paid for all the equipment I need to carry out the project so I am very thankful for the help."

Rosie Simpson of the John Muir Trust, who administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant said: "We've been delighted with the number and quality of applications this year and we wish Wahaj all the best with this important research project. Although coral reefs cover just a tiny fraction of the earth's surface, they play a vital role in marine ecology and are often referred to as the 'rainforests of the sea'. We know that they are under threat from destructive fishing practices, marine pollution, global warming and invasive species.

"Des and Bill lived active, adventurous, outdoor lives and would be delighted to know that their inspirational lives are now helping scientific research that deepens our knowledge of the threats facing our planet."

Wahaj is one of six successful applicants to the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant. This grant was established to give people the opportunity to seek out life-changing experiences in wild places of the world in ways which will benefit both the person, and the wild places themselves.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

ABOUT THE DES RUBENS AND BILL WALLACE GRANT

The John Muir Trust administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant for free. The grant was set up in honour of Bill Wallace, who died of heart failure in February 2007 while skiing in the Alps at the age of 73 with two artificial hips, and Des Rubens, a popular teacher at Craigroyston High School in Edinburgh who was killed in June 2016 in an Alpine climbing accident at the age of 63.

Since the grant was established in 2007, initially in honour of Bill Wallace, it has supported almost 50 people from all walks of life, from students to scientists, from grandmothers to gardeners, take part in life-changing adventures of educational or scientific value in some of the wildest places in the world.

The John Muir Trust looks to support projects, adventures or expeditions that reflect the ethos of both men and give others an opportunity to follow in their footsteps.

ABOUT THE JOHN MUIR TRUST

The John Muir Trust is a membership based conservation charity dedicated to the experience, protection and repair of wild places. The Trust was founded in 1983 and was inspired by the life and works of John Muir (1838-1914), the Scots-born founding father of modern conservation and the inspiration behind national parks. We operate in Scotland, England and Wales and are the guardians of some of the finest wild places in the UK including Ben Nevis, Helvellyn and Schiehallion.

For more info about the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant, contact:

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<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/grants-and-awards/the-bill-wallace-grant>