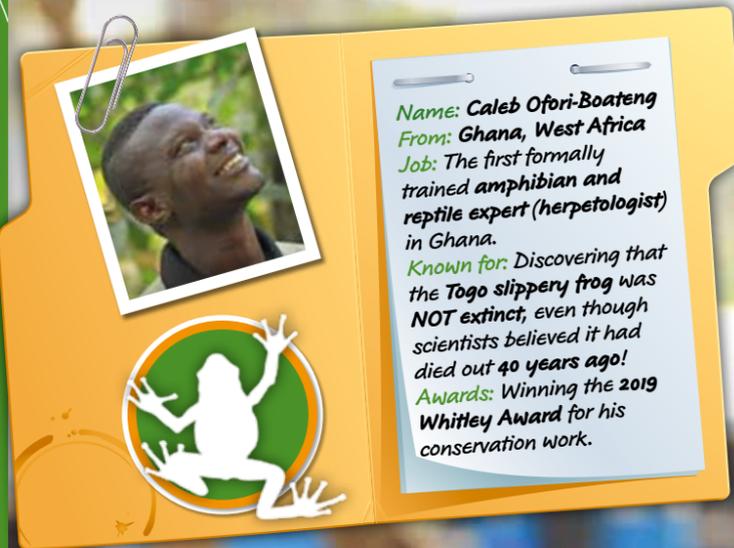


# THE BIG INTERVIEW

Ghana's first ever frog expert Caleb Ofori-Boateng, tells us about his fantastic froggy finds...



**Name:** Caleb Ofori-Boateng  
**From:** Ghana, West Africa  
**Job:** The first formally trained amphibian and reptile expert (herpetologist) in Ghana.  
**Known for:** Discovering that the Togo slippery frog was NOT extinct, even though scientists believed it had died out 40 years ago!  
**Awards:** Winning the 2019 Whitley Award for his conservation work.



"What you are passionate about can change the world. My advice would be to not lose that passion. Family, parents, school may all think they know what's best for you, but only you know your true calling. If you have the opportunity to follow it, give it all you've got. You may change the world!"

I'm doing everything I can to give the Togo slippery frog a chance to survive!

## HOW CALEB IS HELPING!

- Caleb is the founder of Herp Conservation Ghana, a charity that helps protect amphibians and reptiles.
- He has encouraged 17 local families to donate their land to become a legally protected area!
- Caleb is fundraising to make a canopy walkway over that land, so tourists can view the wildlife from the treetops. Some of the money that visitors spend will go back into supporting the local communities
- He's educating local people about the frogs so they no longer eat them and working with them to stop deforestation.
- Find out more about Caleb's work at [herpghana.org](http://herpghana.org) and [whitleyaward.org](http://whitleyaward.org)

The Togo slippery frog spends most of its time in streams, so it's very hard to track down.



**Hi Caleb! You won the 2019 Whitley Award for your work saving the Togo slippery frog. Scientists spent 40 years believing it was extinct, so how did you find it again?!**

I was on a training expedition in 2005 in the Eastern part of Ghana. One night we went down into the valleys. It felt like we were in a scary part of a *Harry Potter* movie, where there were bats flying around and owls calling! Then suddenly, we heard a whistling sound, like a human! We thought it must have been a ghost, but once we gathered the courage to track it down, we realised it was the supposedly extinct 'whistling frog', the Togo slippery frog. It was a very special moment.

**Wow! And now you've dedicated your life to saving them!**

Yes! I wanted to do conservation work with amphibians, because they're among the world's most threatened species – and yet nobody in Ghana was researching frogs, so we knew nothing about them! As the only local person on the team, it became my responsibility to ensure they survived.

**Why was this species in trouble?**

Local people considered the Togo slippery frog as food. It's been a part of their diet for 5,000 years. Historically, it's part of the reason why people settled in the area – it was an easy food source. And it was found on land that wasn't protected.

**How did you combat these problems?**

I had to find out why people were eating a critically endangered frog, today. Was it possible that they didn't know it's critically endangered? Did they realise they were destroying the forests and streams that the frogs live in? Once we identified that the issue could be a lack of knowledge and information, we started creating awareness in local communities and got them involved.

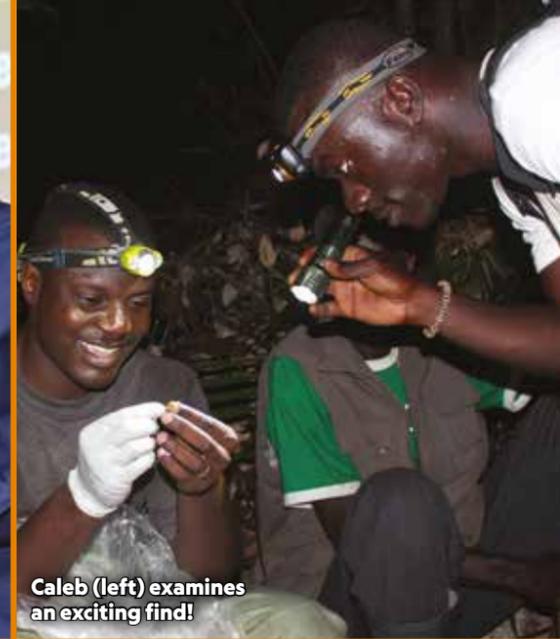
**How do you encourage local people to care about these frogs?**

In Ghana, many people are very religious

Princess Anne presented Caleb with his Whitley Award in 2019!



Caleb (left) examines an exciting find!



and they trust information that comes from religious centres. So we go to the Islamic mosques and the Christian churches and we try to integrate conservation into their religious beliefs. It's been very successful. We did a survey and found that 70% of the people we contacted have now heard of this frog, and 86.5% of them said they won't eat the frog again.

**My love for frogs deepens by the day!**

**Amazing news! Why did you want to work in conservation?**

I was inspired by my father. He was one of the park officials in

the national park when I was little – I was literally born into the reserve, so it was in my blood. He would carry me around the reserve on his back, or we would go out in his old jeep to watch buffalos and duikers [a type of antelope].

**What amazing experiences!**

We had an extremely good relationship, but then he died suddenly when I was seven. He was only 45. It was traumatising for me. I didn't understand what death really was. As a little boy I had this hope that maybe one day I could grow up and do something to bring him back. But I realised over time that that was impossible. I understood that that

"When I was growing up, the animals were all around us! I remember lions roaring in our back yard. We ate fruit from the same trees as the baboons!"

was what happens when a species goes extinct – they have so much potential (just like my father had big plans for wildlife conservation) – but none of that can happen when they're gone.

**So losing him inspired you?**

I related his death to species extinction, yes. And when I realised the rate of extinction in some species, I felt I was in a race against time.

**Have you discovered any other frogs?**

Yes! I've done lots of surveys and found a couple of new species. In fact, I discovered one this year that I named after my mother!

**Haha, brilliant! What was her reaction when you told her you'd named a frog after her?**

She was very proud! It's a puddle frog, which is a very small species, and we named it Afia Birago. My mother's name is Afia, which is a name given in Ghana if you're born on a Friday, and her surname is Birago. It's the only frog that has a Ghanaian name.

**Cool! Why did you name it after your mum?**

When my father died, life was very difficult, but my mother did incredibly well to keep us going to school and to raise us. So I thought I would immortalise her in this way. **That's lovely. What's your hope for the future?**

My dream is to recreate a world where people are living successfully with wildlife, like when I lived in the National Park as a child. The local communities in Ghana still have some forest left but it's not a perfect situation. Most of the habitat is gone, but fortunately we do still have some large mammals hiding in the valleys. We still have some frogs and butterflies and a few monkeys, though sadly most have been hunted. My hope is to protect and restore that habitat – to create a world where people can walk the trails and hear animal calls, or a monkey might drop something on your head! **We hope so, too – thanks Caleb!**



Volunteers wear T-shirts to share the message that frogs are great!



The Togo slippery frog is known as the 'whistling frog' by locals because of its call!