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Aspira Fund beneficiaries announced by Andy Rouse Wildlife Photography & Páramo

The Aspira Fund, launched last August by international wildlife photographer, Andy Rouse, and Páramo Directional Clothing Systems, has named the two projects in very different spheres that will benefit from the first year's donations:

- Capercaillie conservation in Scotland via RSPB Scotland – to directly fund field research on and protection of the bird most threatened with extinction in Scotland;
- rYico – a humanitarian organisation supporting young people in Rwanda, an environmentally and ecologically sensitive area visited by Andy when photographing mountain gorillas earlier this year.

The Aspira Fund is the outcome of a partnership between Andy Rouse, the renowned wildlife photographer and Páramo Directional Clothing Systems. Impressed with the Páramo range of garments that he uses when photographing in extreme environments, Andy has worked with the brand to create a limited edition 'Andy Rouse Wildlife Photography' range. Proceeds from sales of ARWP garments go into the Aspira Fund, enhanced by a contribution from sales of other Andy Rouse merchandise – books, prints and the new 2008 calendar.

Two very diverse projects were chosen by the Aspira Fund to benefit from the total accrued from sales this year:

1. Capercaillie protection

The capercaillie, the world's largest grouse, is Scotland's most threatened bird faced with extinction within a decade until recently. Due to conservationists' efforts, population numbers in Scotland – its only UK habitat - have now stabilised. The Aspira Fund contribution will go directly to a local fund within RSPB Scotland to be used by the capercaillie field office for a variety of tasks on the ground:

- capercaillie survey work;
- habitat survey work, resulting in habitat management recommendation;
- habitat improvement work such as fence removal
- specific research e.g. examining the capercaillie diet
- purchase of vital equipment such as GPS or a dog for brood counts.

continued



Speaking on the Páramo stand at the Rutland BirdFair, Andy Rouse documented energetically his encounter with a characterful and feisty capercaillie in May this year and displays a photograph of *'a wonderful capercaillie in full swing, moments before it took a piece out of my finger. An awesome bird and my first experience of being forced to run away from its scathing wings.'*

2. The **Rwandan Youth Information Community Organisation (rYico)** is a charitable organisation founded in 2003 in response to the needs of young people in Rwanda. rYico works to support and empower vulnerable young people in Rwanda through Centre Marembo, a youth resource centre based in Kigali. The young people that attend the centre include those orphaned, neglected or left in difficult conditions, particularly as a result of the 1994 genocide.

While tracking some of the 700 remaining mountain gorillas through the forested slopes of Rwanda in the Parc National des Volcans earlier this year, Andy was impressed not only by the immense gorillas but by the incredibly friendly people. *'Despite everything that's happened in Rwanda, I was awestruck by the resilience of the people who **always** wear a smile and came away with a wish not only to try to protect the dwindling numbers of gorillas and their endangered habitat but to contribute to local community projects in this vulnerable area in order to help the people too.'*

The Aspira Fund will give money to specific projects through rYico which will not only benefit the orphaned children but will help support the rural communities that they come from, and so focus assistance where it is needed on the ground in Rwanda.

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Notes to editors

1. For more information on any of the above and for images please contact Páramo marketing department by telephone (00 44 (0)1892 786447) or email catherine.whitehead@paramo.co.uk.
2. For information on the Aspira Fund, visit www.aspirafund.co.uk – this gives details of the Fund and the limited edition Andy Rouse Wildlife Photography range of Páramo garments.
3. The range is manufactured ethically in Bogotá, Colombia by the Miquelina Foundation. Through this partnership, all sales benefit not only the Aspira Fund but 'at risk' women and children in South America.
4. Páramo are hosting an evening event in Wadhurst, East Sussex where Andy Rouse and Joe Cornish will appear on stage together critiquing each other's photographic work.
5. The full range of Andy Rouse limited edition garments can be seen at www.aspirafund.co.uk.