

Biologist Becomes Youngest Recipient of Science Award

Utah University biology professor, National Geographic photographer, explorer and "risk taker" Çağan Şekercioğlu RC 93 became the first biologist and the youngest person to win the TÜBİTAK Special Science Award, equivalent to the US National Science Medal. Şekercioğlu, who is one of the most cited 1% of the world's scientists of the past decade, was among five researchers picked for the top 2014 awards by TUBITAK, the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey. Three researchers won the Science Award and two - including Şekercioğlu - won the Special Award, equivalent to the Science Award but for scientists who are from Turkey and working abroad.

"I am humbled to be the first biologist, ecologist, ornithologist or conservation biologist to receive Turkey's highest scientific honor," Şekercioğlu says. "In Turkey, young people interested in science often choose engineering. I hope this award will inspire more young people

to choose natural sciences in general and environmental sciences in particular. My education at Robert College and my science teachers there were critical in my deciding to pursue my passion in biology. With their help and encouragement and Robert College's stellar educational system, I was able to study biology and anthropology at Harvard University, do my PhD in biology and ecology at Stanford University, and become a biology professor at the University of Utah."

Şekercioğlu received the award from Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on December 24. While receiving the award, Şekercioğlu had a single request: "The biggest award you can give me will be to save from destruction eastern Turkey's richest wetland for birds, the Aras River Bird Sanctuary, that I discovered and where I do my science," Şekercioğlu said, and gave President Erdoğan over 55,000 signatures and 4,000 comments he collected with his petition at www.savearas.org. Şekercioğlu



Çağan Şekercioğlu RC 93

donated his 50,000 TL award money to the University of Utah Department of Biology, to be used in his ecology, ornithology and biodiversity conservation projects in eastern Turkey.

At the award ceremony, Şekercioğlu also met Prof. Ümran İnan, President of Koç University. Following their discussion, Şekercioğlu became the first biologist Distinguished Visiting Fellow of Koç University, where he will visit twice a year to teach and inspire students. You can read about Şekercioğlu's research at <http://bioweb.biology.utah.edu/sekercioглу/> and follow his National Geographic wildlife and travel photos on Instagram @natgeoexplorer