
Presentation ceremony for the awards' 12th edition in the BBVA Foundation

The Biodiversity Conservation Awards call for protection of the planet's health with policies based on the scientific consensus

- "Preserving nature is a need, not a luxury," said Francisco González, addressing the public at the ceremony. "Biodiversity conservation cannot be confined to emergency interventions. It has to be an ongoing policy commitment."
- "To confront a challenge on this scale, we need to plan ahead and pursue an abiding strategy," continued the BBVA Foundation President, "letting ourselves be guided by a scientific community that can tell us where and how to act."
- Accolades in this 12th edition of the awards go to the Asociación de Naturalistas del Sureste (ANSE), in the Biodiversity Conservation Projects in Spain category; the Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Laboratory of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), in Biodiversity Conservation Projects in Latin America; and Caty Arévalo, environment correspondent with Agencia EFE, in the Knowledge Dissemination and Communication category.
- The BBVA Foundation Awards for Biodiversity Conservation recognize environmental conservation projects anchored on sound scientific knowledge that have achieved tangible results of broad and lasting impact

Madrid, November 29, 2017.- The dramatic biodiversity losses documented by scientists, and a raft of other evidence like today's high temperatures or prolonged drought, only confirm the sensation that time is running out for our planet, warned the Foundation's President, Francisco González, during the presentation ceremony of the 12th BBVA Foundation Awards for Biodiversity Conservation. One by one, speakers at the event held in the Madrid headquarters of the BBVA Foundation stressed the need for policies anchored on the scientific consensus and a firm, long-term commitment to the protection of nature.

"Preserving nature is a need not a luxury," was the message conveyed by Francisco González. Conservation actions, he insisted, "are not just an expression of our moral, ethical or aesthetic duty, given that we rely on nature for our very survival. But we should also beware of acting only at times of alarm. Conserving biodiversity cannot be confined to emergency interventions. It must be an ongoing policy commitment and a constant in the acts of private organizations and individual citizens."

"We are all responsible and we must all be part of the solution," added the BBVA Foundation President. "To confront a challenge on this scale, we need to plan ahead and pursue an abiding strategy, while accepting the guidance of a scientific community that tells us where and how to act."

The ceremony of the BBVA Foundation Awards for Biodiversity Conservation has become a kind of annual assembly for the Spanish environmentalist community, attended by numerous representatives of non-governmental organizations devoted to conserving nature, as well as scientists and experts involved with environmental management.

The protection of nature is a longstanding priority for the BBVA Foundation, which not only promotes knowledge generation in ecology and conservation biology but also conservationist projects based on scientific evidence, and communicative labors that bring society to a greater awareness of the threats. Established in 2004, the BBVA Foundation Awards for Biodiversity Conservation recognize projects carried out in two geographical areas of high biodiversity, Spain and Latin America, with a third category reserved for knowledge dissemination and communication in this domain so crucial for the planet's future. The jury deciding the awards, funded with a total of 580,000 euros, is formed by scientific experts, media professionals and representatives of NGOs who contribute their complementary backgrounds and perspectives in nature conservation.

"A crucial time in history"

The jury in this 12th award edition affirms that we are living through "a crucial time in history," when science has shown protecting nature to be more urgent than ever. Yet society, it adds, "is being subjected to messages about complex environmental issues that are inexact and at odds with the scientific evidence." Hence its insistence that the two winning projects owe much of their success to being based on sound science.

The **Asociación de Naturalistas del Sureste (ANSE)** received the award for its work in conserving and promoting an ecologically unique part of Europe that is nonetheless subject to severe human pressure: the semi-arid littoral and pre-littoral zones of the Iberian Southeast, particularly the Mar Menor.

The **Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Laboratory at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)** has been a key actor in the creation of 20

nature reserves in Mexico covering millions of hectares, and in the launch of protection plans for some thirty endangered species, among them the jaguar.

The winner in Knowledge Dissemination and Communication, Agencia EFE's environment correspondent **Caty Arévalo**, earned praise from the jury for the "quality and rigor" of her reporting, and her passion to secure the best professional training. Her stories reach millions of readers worldwide, giving a global platform to the most rigorous voices in environmental science.

ANSE: "Exchanging a story of conquest for one of cooperation"

On receiving the award, Pedro García Moreno, director of ANSE, spoke about the region his association is fighting to defend: "The Iberian Southeast is a singular geographical area within Europe, characterized by scant rainfall and the predominance of semi-arid landscapes, but boasting a vast wealth of natural habitats, with many species – including its human inhabitants – midway between Europe and Africa."

"Despite our continued mistreatment of our land, and the deficient enforcement of much protective legislation, we have achieved real advances of late in conservation matters and the levels of awareness of citizens and their representatives. This progress encourages us to redouble our efforts to replace a story of conquest with one of cooperation and restoration. Nature on our planet faces grave threats, some of them global, but all demanding the attention and work of local communities. This is especially so in biogeographical regions like ours with scarcer, more overexploited natural resources."

The Asociación de Naturalistas del Sureste (ANSE) is Spain's fourth oldest ecologist organization. It was founded in 1973 on the initiative of a small group of bird lovers, but quickly found itself with an expanding membership. It currently has some 550 members and works alongside volunteers and other organizations. Among its activities are campaigns to protect natural areas and threatened species, control of pollutants harmful to wildlife, reporting of environmental offences and the study of local ecosystems, including littoral zones, irrigated cropland and rivers. One of its restoration projects with autochthonous flora has helped preserve the last sand stretches along the Mar Menor, where it also halted the urbanization of what are nowadays protected areas. Other multi-year campaigns led to the designation of the marine reserves of Cabo de Palos, over two decades back, and Cabo Tiñoso, in 2016.

Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Laboratory, Mexico: "Humanity's greatest challenge is to stop the environmental rot"

For Gerardo Ceballos, director of the Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Laboratory at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), "there are a wealth of ethical, moral and economic reasons to combat the extinction of species, but the single most important is that humanity's survival depends on us conserving nature. Wildlife species perform vital environmental services, like

the combination of gases in the atmosphere or the quality of drinking water (...). With the loss of species we are ultimately eroding our capacity to sustain life."

"Our future will depend on the strategies we use to confront the challenges of biodiversity conservation and economic and social development. Halting then reversing the environmental rot will be humanity's greatest test," remarked Ceballos in his speech during the ceremony.

Since it was established in 1995, the UNAM Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Laboratory has worked for public conservation policies based on the best available science. In these two decades and more, the results of its activities include the creation of 20 reserves occupying millions of hectares, protection and management plans for 30 endangered species, among them the jaguar, bison, prairie dog and black-footed ferret, and partnership initiatives with rural communities. Its work has also laid the ground for policy decisions like the passage of the Mexican Endangered Species Act or the setup of the Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP).

Arévalo: "I want to explain how urgent it is that we transform our development model to restore the planet's lost balance"

"My ambition has always been to match the standards of the best in the world in my branch of journalism," said Caty Arévalo on receiving her award. "In the last few years, I have tried to be present wherever the great environmental stories were unfolding, so the 500 million potential readers of Agencia EFE could hear about issues like fracking or climate-induced migration at the same time as their English-speaking fellows."

"I continue to believe that climate change and the loss of biodiversity are the biggest problems facing humanity," continued Agencia EFE's environment correspondent. "And I will not stop striving to explain how urgent it is that we change our economic and development model in order to restore the planet's lost balance."

Arévalo began her career in the late 1990s covering environmental news for radio broadcasters Onda Cero and Cope and newspaper *El Mundo*, until in 2002 she was recruited by EFE as the agency's first ever journalist specializing in biodiversity and climate change. Since then, she has covered all major international encounters on environmental matters, including the UN climate change and biodiversity conservation summits. She has written on-the-ground reports analyzing grave environmental problems, like the first Alaskan communities forced from their homes by the impacts of climate change, marine pollution due to plastic waste, or the indigenous peoples affected by oil spills in the Amazon. Throughout her career, moreover, she has maintained direct contacts with leading experts from the global scientific community at universities like Oxford, Harvard or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

(MIT), giving her first-hand access to some of the most cutting-edge research in the environment field.

Jury members

The jury in this 12th edition was chaired by Rafael Pardo, director of the BBVA Foundation, with members Alberto Aguirre de Cárcer, director of daily newspaper *La Verdad*, Murcia; Araceli Acosta, Chief Coordinator for Environmental Reporting with *ABC Natural*; Begoña Peco, Professor of Ecology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid; Carlos Montes, Professor of Ecology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid; Eulalia Moreno, Research Professor at the Arid Zones Experimental Station, CSIC; Juan Carlos del Olmo, General Secretary of WWF España; Daniel Oro, Research Professor at the Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies, CSIC-University of the Balearic Islands; Xavier Querol, Research Professor at the Institute of Environmental Assessment and Water Research, CSIC; and Rafael Zardoya, Research Professor at the Spanish Museum of Natural Sciences, CSIC.

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