

19th edition of the Biodiversity Conservation Awards

The BBVA Foundation recognizes the protection of loggerhead turtles in Tarragona, the *saviors* of Bolivian wildlife, the reconstruction of the Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique, and the environmental reporting of Silvia García, Jacob Petrus and José Luis Gallego

- **In Biodiversity Conservation in Spain**, the award goes to Fundación para la Conservación y Recuperación de Animales Marinos (CRAM) for its contribution to the conservation of the loggerhead sea turtle along the Tarragona coast, with the involvement of most of the local trawler fleet
- **The award for Biodiversity Conservation in Latin America** has been bestowed on Bolivian NGO Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi (CIWY) for its work in the rescue and care of illegally trafficked wild animals and the protection of 1,300 hectares of Amazonian forest
- **In Biodiversity Conservation Worldwide**, the award goes to the Gorongosa Restoration Project in Mozambique for successfully rebuilding the National Park after the ravages of a 15-year-long civil war, with outstanding results in large mammal conservation
- **In Knowledge Dissemination and Communication in audiovisual formats**, the award is shared by Silvia García and Jacob Petrus, for placing environmental issues at the forefront of TV news, reaching large audiences with quality, scientific solvency and an upbeat approach
- **The award for Knowledge Dissemination and Communication in remaining formats** goes to José Luis Gallego, head of the Environment area at *El Confidencial*, for a reporting career that combines scientific rigor with a commitment to conservationist values

The protection of the loggerhead sea turtle and other marine species by raising awareness and engaging the support of the trawling sector in the province of Tarragona; the rescue, protection and care of illegally trafficked wild animals in Bolivia's Amazon rainforest; the reconstruction of the Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique, with outstanding results in the conservation of large mammals such as elephants, lions, buffalo and antelopes; the TV environmental journalism of Silvia García (editor of Antena 3 News) and Jacob Petrus (director of TVE program *Aquí La Tierra*); and the environmental reporting career of José Luis Gallego (head of the Environment section at *El Confidencial*), combining scientific rigor with conservationist values, take the honors in this 19th edition of the BBVA Foundation Awards for Biodiversity Conservation.

Fundación para la Conservación y Recuperación de Animales Marinos wins the award in the Biodiversity Conservation in Spain category for its success in involving practically the whole of the Ebro Delta fishing community in the fight against the bycatch of species such as loggerhead turtles, achieving, in the words of the jury, "a model example of conservation based on the awareness and cooperation of fishers, key players in the conservation of sea turtles in the Mediterranean."

The award for Biodiversity Conservation in Latin America goes to the NGO Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi for more than three decades' work devoted to the rescue, care and conservation of wild animals that have fallen prey to illegal trafficking networks. In all this time, the citation states, "it has managed to protect the Bolivian ecosystem and wildlife from threats like forest fires, poaching, logging and illegal mining ... in collaboration with the scientific community" and by deploying "effective social outreach in the form of education programs for local communities."

The BBVA Foundation Worldwide Award for Biodiversity Conservation has been bestowed on the Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique, for successfully rebuilding the park with "outstanding results in the conservation of large mammal species such as elephants, lions, buffalo and antelopes." The jury also singled out "the difficulties of undertaking this conservation work in a country that is still recovering from the ravages of 15 years of civil war and a long post-war period," adding that "the successes achieved in Gorongosa represent a source of inspiration for other African nations."

Silvia García (editor of Antena 3 Noticias) and Jacob Petrus (director of the program *Aquí la Tierra*

on Spanish public television TVE) share the award for raising the TV profile of environmental reporting, winning large audiences by means of quality, scientific solvency and an upbeat approach. García, said the jury, “has a successful, decades-long track record as a committed environmental journalist working on news programs for TV channels,” while Petrus has consistently displayed “a flair for innovation in the TV treatment of a wide spectrum of environmental issues.”

José Luis Gallego, head of the Environment section of *El Confidencial*, has been distinguished with the award for Dissemination and Communication in other formats. The journalist, also a contributor to radio station Onda Cero was lauded by the jury for “his decades-long career in environmental reporting “combining scientific rigor with a commitment to the values of nature conservation across multiple channels and formats including radio, print, television and book publications.”

Biodiversity in Spain: Fundación para la Conservación y Recuperación de Animales Marinos (CRAM)

From the rescue to the clinical care of turtles trapped in fishing nets

Bycatch, or the unintentional fishing of marine species, is one of the main threats facing sea turtles, with particular impact on the loggerhead turtles that inhabit and transit the Mediterranean. Over 70% of the number of these turtles caught by the Spanish fishing fleet come from the continental shelf between the Ebro Delta and the town of Castellón, the Ebro Delta being the area with by far the greatest interaction.

The Fundación para la Conservación y Recuperación de Animales Marinos (CRAM), established in 1996, launched its “Fishers for the Sea” project in 2017 to further sea turtle recovery and conservation and minimize the impact of bycatch on these protected animals by rescuing and reintroducing affected individuals.

The program arose from the confluence of three factors. The first was the geographical location of the turtles’ feeding grounds in the Ebro Delta, coincidentally exacerbated by a second factor: that the law allows trawling there at shallower depths, resulting in more turtles being caught.” The third factor was a 2014 scientific paper that offered the first description of decompressive syndrome in sea turtles, a pathology that can be lethal or leave major sequelae. “That paper convinced us to review the procedure we had followed till then, which was that if the trapped turtle was able to move, it was immediately released back into the sea. And what we found was that more

than half of turtles had the syndrome and were unable to return to their habitat," explains Elsa Jiménez, Director of the CRAM Foundation.

The syndrome causes symptoms in turtles that range from disorientation, lack of coordination and ataxia to coma. If returned to the sea, their chances of survival are slim. To get round this, the CRAM Foundation has worked with fishers' associations and given them a leading role. "We talk about fishers as the first line of rescue, because it is they who activate the protocol on detecting bycatch and carry the turtles to port, where we pick them up. Their ownership of the scheme has been built up with small gestures, like allowing them to name individual specimens, keeping them informed of the recovery process and inviting them and their families, their children, to share in the moment of the animal's reintroduction."

"Currently, 79% of the trawlers in La Ràpita and 100% in Les Cases d'Alcanar – the two "hot" spots of the deltaic platform – are actively collaborating in the project. "There was some reluctance at first, but now collaboration is the norm and more and more fishers are coming on board, especially now we have ensured them legal security through an agreement with the regional government whereby each boat has a permit to rescue, transport and land sea turtles."

Among the project's key resources is the veterinary care provided at the Foundation's Recovery Center in Prat de Llobregat. "The clinical side is important to us, so the award money will go to improve the center's facilities and help us be faster and more efficient in our interventions." Each turtle recovered and diagnosed with decompression sickness spends a month and a half to two months at the center, where the foundation has a hyperbaric chamber of its own manufacture. "For as long as they are at the center, they are our patients so in some cases visits are restricted. But whenever possible we try to let people see this work first hand, in order to raise awareness."

After seven years, of the 355 specimens attended to in Tarragona province, 329 have been rehabilitated, representing a 93% recovery rate.

The Foundation has received support from the Catalan Government's Department of Climate Action, Food and Rural Affairs, and its Corps of Rural Agents. The regional government indeed has delegated powers to the CRAM Foundation for the rescue and recovery not just of turtles but other endangered marine species, like cetaceans and seabirds, that appear along the Catalan coast. The Foundation's team, made up of 24 people, reinforced by some 250 volunteers each year, provides 24-hour care, 365 days a year, allowing it to maintain an immediate and permanent response system.

Biodiversity Conservation in Latin America: Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi (CIWY)

Saviors of the wildlife of the Bolivian Amazon

Every year, millions of wild animals are victims of illegal trafficking in South America, especially in the Amazon. Countless big cats, such as jaguars, along with snakes, birds, caimans and monkeys are stolen from the jungle and end up in open-air markets, fairs, zoos, circuses, restaurants or private residences; either alive, as pets, or slaughtered, as trophies or to make fake medicines, food or cosmetics.

It was to combat this illegal wildlife trade and ensuing environmental destruction that Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi (CIWY) came into being in 1992. This private-sector Bolivian NGO works to end the black market in animals through educational programs, research projects, and public campaigns. In the three wildlife sanctuaries it runs in the Bolivian Amazon, CIWY rehabilitates and cares for wild animals rescued from illegal trafficking, forest fires and other situations of danger. Not only that, within their bounds it protects 1,300 hectares of virgin rainforest from poaching, logging, mining and forest fires.

In recognition of these efforts over the space of three decades, the jury has granted the Inti Wara Yassi Community the Award for Biodiversity Conservation in Latin America, hailing both its “partnership with the scientific community” and its success in “protecting the Bolivian ecosystem and wildlife from threats such as forest fires, poaching, logging, and illegal mining.”

The Community’s president, Tania Baltazar, has not abandoned the front line of environmental defense since she founded the Community in 1992. News of the award reached her in one of its sanctuaries, Ambue Ari, in the midst of the fight against forest fires in the northern part of Ignacio Warnes province. The flames have torn through the sanctuary, ravaging about 50% of its surface area: “What we are witnessing is heartbreaking,” she reports, “with many animals, thousands, dead from burns or smoke inhalation. That is why this award comes as a blessing. It gives us the energy to go on fighting and the resources to be able to move forward in our mission to care for wildlife. With the funds, we can buy more acres of forest to expand what we have and give more land to the animals.”

CIWY set up Bolivia's first wildlife sanctuary in 1996 and was one of the first organizations in the country to fight for animal rights and environmental protection. “I was a second year-biology student when I took home a spider monkey that was being mistreated,” Tania recalls. “Within an

hour it had destroyed everything and my mother threw me out. After months not knowing what to do with her, I started the shelter so she could have her own space. For the love of that monkey.” From these beginnings, the CIWY expanded into running three sanctuaries, caring for more than 500 rescued animals of 39 different species.

“It is not only the threat of fire,” continues CIWY's founder and president. “In Bolivia we have laws that protect wildlife, but unfortunately these laws are not enforced and wildlife trafficking has increased year after year. It is usually the authorities that rescue the animals (although they only confiscate, not sanction) or sometimes members of the community. When a new animal comes in,” she explains, “it is evaluated by the team of veterinarians and biologists. It is important to consider the precise species and its original habitat. Most arrive with physical or psychological problems, at times irreversible. Depending on their origin and condition, they are treated, rehabilitated and released. That is if they have not been imprinted; become accustomed to humans. But not all of them are lucky enough to return to the wild. Most stay with us, and are taken to our sanctuaries where they stay, sometimes for life.”

Tania points out that the black market in animals is the third largest crime business in all of South America, behind drug and human trafficking. And what's needed to fight it is a three-way strategy of control, sanctions and education. It is in this third strand that CIWY can intervene directly, through environmental education programs. One such program now under way is “Guardians of the Jungle” getting children to engage with conservation work. By this means, says Tania, they can erode demand, since these children are less likely to become recipients of trafficked wildlife, to keep wild animals as pets, to covet parts of them (fangs, skins...) as trophies or to take part in their illegal hunting.

Over the past 30 years, the Community has released thousands of rehabilitated animals into the wild and provided lifelong sanctuary to the rest. And CIWY has gained extensive experience in the specialized care of rescued wildlife, especially primates and felines. So much so, they say, that other organizations and government agencies seek their advice on how to provide these animals with proper care.

Biodiversity Conservation Worldwide: The Gorongosa Restoration Project

The restoration of a biodiversity paradise ravaged by the Mozambican civil war

The great naturalist Edward O. Wilson described Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique as “a window on eternity,” a tribute to the astounding biodiversity he discovered in his visits there on

some three occasions between 2011 and 2014. But this wilderness paradise was on the verge of being lost. As a result of the civil war that ravaged the country for 15 years (1977-1992) following its independence from Portugal, Gorongosa's wildlife suffered a catastrophic decline. In fact, the first post-conflict aerial census conducted in 1994 confirmed losses of 90-99% in its large mammal populations, including elephants, buffalo, hippopotamuses and zebras. Today, thanks to the work of the Gorongosa Restoration Project, recipient of the Worldwide Award in Biodiversity Conservation, the Mozambican park – ranging over 1,300 hectares – has recovered much of its ecological integrity.

“When we started out, there were fewer than 10,000 large animals in the park. Now there are more than 100,000, so we have grown their numbers by a factor of ten,” said the project's Scientific Director Marc Stalmans.

This success traces to the partnership struck in 2008 between a private foundation, created by American philanthropist Greg Carr with the aim of restoring the Gorongosa park, and the Mozambican government. The project has been based primarily on the effective protection of wildlife through surveillance by an extensive ranger network, as well as a reintroduction program for species that had been almost wiped out, like buffalo, leopards, hyenas, wild dogs and wildebeest.

“In the most serious cases, we have achieved excellent results with species reintroduction, but others have managed to recover on their own. If you give nature a chance, with good protection, it can rebound spectacularly,” Stalman remarks. “In the case of lions, for example, when the project began there were fewer than 30 individuals. Today the population is up to 210 heads.”

In parallel, the project has promoted scientific research on Gorongosa's extraordinary biodiversity, led by the Edward O. Wilson Laboratory, named after the renowned Harvard Professor of Entomology and 2011 Frontiers of Knowledge Laureate in Ecology and Conservation Biology. “After his visits, Wilson was keen to encourage the study of wildlife in the park,” says Stalman, “and he has been a huge inspiration for the science we conduct.” This research program has uncovered up to 200 species new to science, mostly insects, but also bats, reptiles and plants.

Another success of the Gorongosa Restoration Project highlighted by the jury has been the active involvement of the local community, achieved by recruiting young people to its ranger network and through an ambitious development program that ensures their access to basic needs such as drinking water, along with housing rehabilitation and the introduction of sustainable crops like

coffee. In fact, more than 50% of the project's budget goes on health, agriculture and education projects benefiting more than 200,000 people. Many of these actions focus on girls' education, particularly getting them into secondary studies, with a direct impact on the age they give birth, the number of children they have and, ultimately, the control they have over their own lives. In addition, the creation of a Master's program in Conservation Biology for Mozambican students is creating new, high-level technical jobs for citizens throughout the country.

"An essential part of our work is to improve the lives of people living around the park," explains Stalmans, "because many of the problems of overexploitation of natural resources that threaten biodiversity are due to poverty and lack of knowledge. Our focus on the economic development and education of the local community is a key factor in the success we have achieved. Hopefully our model can serve as an inspiration for other African countries, as the jury remarked."

Dissemination and Communication (Audiovisual Media): Silvia García and Jacob Petrus

Two ways to expand the televisual treatment of environmental issues

Silvia García: pioneering the environmental coverage of TV news

Silvia García's career in television spans 35 years, starting with public broadcaster TVE, where in 1994 she founded "La 2 Noticias" together with Lorenzo Milá and Fran Llorente, charged with bringing environmental coverage to a daily news program, then without precedent in the Spanish TV landscape. In August 1998, she was hired as an environmental reporter at Antena 3 Noticias, and has worked to keep nature at the forefront of this news program, most recently in a bulletin that last weekend had an audience of 1.6 million viewers.

"I realized from the start that young people were interested in the environment, but there was no space for it in television news. I thought it should have its own section, alongside national, international, economic or sports news. The environment is an essential part of our lives, yet it would often be the first content dropped from the schedule. But I am stubborn and have had the support of my network, so now the viewer of Antena 3's weekend bulletin knows that they will always find environmental stories. It is what we do."

In the course of her career, she has covered world climate summits – Kyoto, Copenhagen and Madrid – in the conviction that "climate change is a determining factor for biodiversity," as well as what she describes as "human and environmental disasters": Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua and Honduras, the earthquake in Haiti, and the tsunami that affected the Fukushima nuclear

power plant. In Spain, she reported on the Prestige disaster and 2006 fires, both in Galicia, and the Aznalcóllar mine spill in Andalusia.

But García is no fan of confining environmental news to its most tragic side: “That would be yellow journalism. As journalists we have to convey what is happening, but if you say whales are dying, you also have to say what we can do to prevent it and who is doing that. We can't hide the problems, but we must also discuss solutions and what we can collectively and individually contribute to those solutions.”

In his letter in support for her candidature, journalist Matías Prats highlights her “passion for journalism, unstinting effort and, above all, brilliant talent to communicate with and reach citizens. A talent and a readiness that are always at the service of the conservation of Spanish and global biodiversity. After decades giving the lead-in to her stories on the news set of Antena 3 Noticias, her live reports from all kinds of places and terrains, in disaster zones, talking to all kinds of people and communities, I feel proud to have done so.”

The awardee journalist points to the Kyoto Summit of 1997 as the turning point in environmental awareness. “It has been a long road, but that was the moment when we began to talk more generally about climate change, biodiversity. And we saw how the trickle of news reports we had been putting out for years, began to soak through into consciousness at the century's turn.”

In addition to these headline stories, she has reported on biodiversity and initiatives for its conservation, including a series on the Galapagos Islands and another on the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. At home, she has fronted stories on topics like the captive breeding of the lynx or the recovery of the bearded and cinereous vultures. And she has also specialized in energy items, with reports on underground nuclear waste cemeteries in Finland and Sweden, a solar farm in Mexico or an offshore wind farm in the Baltic.

“I'm not trying to influence people so they think the way I do,” she insists. What I want is to give them information so that they can form their own opinions. But I also believe in what I do and say and that there are stories that need to be told. I like to think that something of what I have done will make the world a little better, and this award redoubles the enthusiasm I put into my work every day.”

Jacob Petrus: an innovator in TV environmental reporting

A geographer and climatologist by training and science communicator by vocation, Jacob Petrus (Manresa, Barcelona, 1976) has been accompanying viewers for more than a decade in the program *Aquí la Tierra*, an environmental program screened by public broadcaster RTVE that informs, educates and raises awareness about the three key environmental crises of our time: pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss.

His professional career, which spans over 25 years reporting on the planet's environmental challenges, began as head of weather reporting at Telemadrid, a position he held until 2013. He next worked with public radio broadcaster RNE, contributing to the programs *Las Mañanas de RNE*, *Gente Despierta*, *De Pe a Pa* or *Las tardes de RNE*, where he continues to highlight content related to conservation, the environment, meteorology and climatology.

As of 2014, he has added the posts of director, coordinator and presenter of *Aquí la Tierra*, combining them since 2022 with regular contributions to *Héroes por el Clima* section of publisher Vocento's *Antropía* supplement, where he publishes interviews and profiles of agents and institutions fighting to protect the environment. He has also written outreach articles on meteorology and climatology for outlets like *Muy Interesante*, *Geo* or the newspaper *Público*.

"I have always had this desire to communicate and inform, and although I am a geographer specializing in climatology, another part of me has always been a journalist," he says of his dual vocation. "I first became a weatherman because it brought together the two strands of communication and science. And that's why I have made outreach reporting part and parcel of my career."

His engaging approach, accessible to all audiences, combining more lighthearted stories with coverage of major environmental issues, is what sets him apart on the television grid. "*Aquí la Tierra* uses a familiar, colloquial language to address topics we deal with every day, that can be grasped by adults and children alike. Our aim is to raise awareness about environmental problems in a positive way, even though we have to rebuke people at times for how badly we are handling them. We believe that in conveying the message entertainingly, with joy, because we live in an increasingly urban society estranged from nature. And it is necessary to get back our affective relationship with the environment."

One of the main goals of *Aquí la Tierra* is precisely to serve as a bridge between the countryside and the city, since "we need an active rural world in order to protect our environment. That is the

kind of country we believe in, so the fact of doing our bit to revitalize the rural world is a huge motivating factor for our team.”

Throughout his career as a popularizer, Petrus has witnessed how the demand for scientific content has gained ground in newsrooms, largely due to a social context in which eco-anxiety is taking grip: “We are bringing science to society, and I believe that society is responding. When we started with the program, we had the feeling that we had to sell the issues. Now it is the other way around, it is society that is calling for us to discuss issues that are on their list of concerns. Society wants to know on which days pollution levels in a city are higher. They want us to talk about microplastics, climate change, future scenarios. On top of this, we are forced into daily purchasing decisions that are often uninformed. One of our main goals is to advise on the best decisions we can make to reduce our ecological footprint, and ensure that the advice given is effective.”

Public television, he believes, must offer programming by the people for the people. A view that reflects his more personal side: “I am a father and find it difficult to find content that I can watch with my children, so every time a family tells me that they sit down together to watch *Aquí la Tierra*, that is hugely moving for me. We even hear from a lot of school teachers that they use the program so the kids can learn. It's wonderful to think that the next generation will be more aware, at least on an environmental level, so that, going forward, we can do more and make this planet a better place to live.”

Dissemination and Communication (other formats): José Luis Gallego

“Observe, enjoy and inform about nature in order to conserve it”

José Luis Gallego (Barcelona, 1964) is currently Head of the Environment section at newspaper *El Confidencial* and a contributor to the Onda Cero radio program *Julia en la Onda*. The jury has recognized him for his career of three decades in environmental reporting “combining scientific rigor with commitment to the values of nature conservation across multiple channels and formats, including radio, print, television and book publications.”

The career of this “environmental storyteller,” as he describes himself, is a mosaic of media and formats that includes articles in magazines such as *Integral*, *National Geographic* or *GEO* and newspapers like *El Periódico de Catalunya* and *La Vanguardia*, where he was co-founder with Antonio Cerrillo and Joaquim Elcacho of the environmental supplement *Natural*. It was also in *La Vanguardia* that he began his work as a columnist, which he would later continue in *El País*, *El Periódico* and *eldiario.es*. In the late 90s he began a collaboration with Julia Otero that continues

to this day, which he combines with heading the Environment section of *El Confidencial*. In the interim, he has published more than 30 books and worked in television in roles ranging from that of a regular contributor, for 11 seasons, to *Els matins de TV3*, to director, scriptwriter and presenter of three nature series: *Naturalmente* (TVE), *Terra Verda* (TVE Catalunya) and *Riu Avall* (TV3).

In all of this, his guiding light has been “the passion, instilled since childhood by the work of Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente, to observe, enjoy and inform about nature, so as to convince society of the need to protect it, and unite behind its protection. For we only conserve what we love.”

He considers that the keys to good environmental journalism “are the same as those that ensure success in any other field: namely, to know, understand, check and tell. Unfortunately, there are people who tell without knowing and people who understand but do not check, and that is a very serious mistake.” The main challenge he sees for “those of us devoted to environmental dissemination” is to reach young people: “those who have evolved from boredom and eco-fatigue to rebellion and public mobilization against, for example, climate inaction. We cannot address them with half-truths. The new generations of information consumers will not tolerate anything that smacks of lies or falsehoods, and that is why we have to apply ourselves with such rigor to honest information.”

Among the reporting milestones that he has had to cover, he highlights, “the climate summits, where the work of the environmental journalist is front page news, and where we sometimes have to deal with the tension between knowing that a summit is going end without progress and trying to separate the wheat from the chaff to tell a positive story.” He also particularly recalls “the *Prestige* accident, which I had the chance to follow minute by minute for TV3. We went from chronicling an environmental catastrophe to telling the heartwarming story of the tide of volunteers who came to the beaches to pick up the tar with their hands, with a desire to help that should give us hope. By conveying the urgency and seriousness of what was happening, I believe that the media contributed to this response.”

When José Luis Gallego is asked to say from experience which channel or format best connects with the public, he immediately cites two of his current occupations: “Digital journalism is undoubtedly the future and working in *El Confidencial*, with its almost three million daily visitors, allows me to bring the discourse of respect for nature to readers I couldn’t access before. On the other hand, the forever medium is certainly radio, both live and through podcasts. Radio is immediate but doesn't overwhelm you, it accompanies you in the car, the gym or as you get on with your work, where you can have it in the background. But when someone has the ability to break through to the listener, that person will stop what they are doing and focus on the topic.”

About the BBVA Foundation Awards for Biodiversity Conservation

Biodiversity stands alongside climate change as the core environmental issue of our time. For more than twenty years now, the BBVA Foundation Awards for Biodiversity Conservation have recognized the work of conservationist organizations, institutions and agencies in carrying forward environmental conservation policies and projects based on the best available knowledge, and the efforts of communication professionals who have contributed to the protection of our natural heritage.

In this 19th edition, the awards for projects in Spain and worldwide are joined by a third category recognizing conservation projects in Latin America, each of them carrying a cash prize of 250,000 euros. The Dissemination category has likewise been expanded to include two awards, of 80,000 euros each, distinguishing communication efforts in the Spanish language: one for audiovisual formats across multiple channels (TV, film, Internet, social media, etc.) and the other for remaining formats. Their combined monetary amount makes the Biodiversity Conservation Awards among the highest internationally.

For years now, the scientific community has been verifying and alerting to the fact that species extinction is rapidly accelerating, to the point of being a thousand times faster than the natural rate. This reality, documented by science, has found echo in the media, who have joined in the task of relaying the scientific evidence to a public increasingly aware of the scale of today's environmental challenges.

Environmental culture has put down firm roots in Spain, with the vast majority of citizens believing that species diversity is an essential part of the country's wealth and the wellbeing of its human inhabitants, and voicing their concerns at the degradation of the natural environment. Most are convinced that the situation is serious, and that a mismatch exists between the problem before us and the measures taken to address it.

Frontier scientific research on the environment is of course a vital resource, but it is not enough of itself. Scientific evidence and social awareness must also be translated into public policies, the decisions of leading private-sector agents, and concrete actions by conservationist and environmental organizations like those recognized annually over the space of two decades by these BBVA Foundation Awards for Biodiversity Conservation. And the support of public opinion – the combined knowledge and values of the population – is absolutely vital if we are to meaningfully and consistently address the countless challenges that surround the conservation of nature and life.

Over 19 editions, the awards have found their way to a diverse set of organizations that, from differing angles and with differing objects, have taken effective steps to protect nature. These range from major ecologist and naturalist organizations, like WWF and SEO/Birdlife, to local associations concerned with a single species, like the Fundación para la Conservación del Quebrantahuesos (bearded vulture), Fundación Oso Pardo (brown bear) or the Programa Ballena Franca Austral Program (southern right whale) in Argentina, as well as groups devoted to specific ecosystems, like Fundación Naturaleza y Hombre, protecting nature in the Iberian south east, or Fundación Global Nature, working to preserve wetlands, by way of public agencies undertaking vital tasks for the protection of nature, among them environmental police force SEPRONA or the Environmental Prosecutor's Office. At the same time, the Dissemination category has reflected the many and varied ways of amplifying the conservation message, with awards for media journalists and other communicators disseminating knowledge of the natural world through multiple channels and formats, from illustration and photography to audio recordings and documentary films.

Together, the BBVA Foundation's biodiversity awardees form a mosaic that reflects how the global biodiversity crisis is a complex, many-faceted problem that demands an array of approaches and strategies acting on different levels, and a firm, long-term commitment if we are to make significant headway in the protection of nature.

The jury deciding the awards (see membership list below) is made up of scientists working in the environment field, communicators, and representatives of conservationist NGOs who bring to the table complementary viewpoints on nature conservation.

Jury members

The jury in this edition was chaired by **Rafael Pardo**, Director of the BBVA Foundation. Remaining members were **Alberto Aguirre de Cárcer**, editor of newspaper *La Verdad de Murcia*, Spain; **Gerardo Báguena**, Vice-President of Fundación para la Conservación del Quebrantahuesos (recipient of the BBVA Foundation Award for Biodiversity Conservation Projects in Spain in the 15th edition); **Rosa Basteiro**, Science and Environment editor with Spanish National Radio (RNE); **Teresa Guerrero**, Head of the Science section of newspaper *El Mundo*, **Pablo Jáuregui**, Head of Scientific and Environmental Communication at the BBVA Foundation; **Ainhoa Magrath**, Ikerbasque Research Professor at the Basque Centre for Climate Change; and **Eva Rodríguez**, Head of the Environment and Society section of the Agencia SINC scientific news service. **Sara Bertrand**, Director of Projects, Grants and Awards at the BBVA Foundation, took on the duties of technical secretary.

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Full details of the Foundation's work in biodiversity conservation and climate change can be found at:

<https://www.biophilia-fbbva.es/>

For more information on the BBVA Foundation, visit:

<https://www.fbbva.es/>