

Presentation ceremony in the 19th edition of the BBVA Foundation awards

The Biodiversity Conservation Awards pay tribute to the leaders giving voice to and defending the interests of all life forms with which we share the planet

- **In Biodiversity Conservation in Spain**, the award went to Fundación para la Conservación y Recuperación de Animales Marinos (CRAM) for its contribution to sea turtle conservation on the Tarragona coast, with the involvement of most of the local fishing fleet
- **The award for Biodiversity Conservation in Latin America** was 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 went to the Gorongosa Restoration Project for successfully rebuilding the Mozambican National Park after the ravages of a 15-year-long civil war, with outstanding results in large mammal conservation
- **In Knowledge Dissemination and Communication (audiovisual formats)**, the award was shared by Silvia García and Jacob Petrus, who have worked tirelessly to keep environmental issues at the forefront of TV news, drawing in large audiences through a combination of quality and scientific solvency
- **The award for Knowledge Dissemination and Communication (other formats)** went to José Luis Gallego, head of the Environment area at newspaper *El Confidencial*, for a reporting career that combines scientific rigor with a commitment to conservationist values
- **The Director of the BBVA Foundation, Rafael Pardo, announced at the event that the next award edition will include a new category distinguishing conservation actions in the African continent**, “in recognition of the fact that Africa and Latin America are two all-important regions for conservation”

The BBVA Foundation Biodiversity Conservation Awards ceremony celebrated “the value of life in all its expressions and all those who engage in its defence, from conservationist organizations to rescue centers, public agencies and the media.” The Director of the BBVA Foundation, Rafael Pardo, spoke these words during the presentation of the awards, which in their 19th edition recognized the protection of turtles and other marine species in the Mediterranean Sea; the rescue and care of illegally trafficked wild animals in Bolivia’s Amazon rainforest; the reconstruction of Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique, with outstanding results in the conservation of elephants, lions and other large mammals; the influential TV environmental journalism of Silvia García (environmental reporter with *Antena 3 Noticias*) 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.

“At each ceremony of these awards, now entering their 20th edition, we recognize efforts to safeguard and give voice to the interests of those forms of life that stand at a structural disadvantage with respect to humans, unable to challenge us or claim their rights through collective actions like strikes, demonstrations or the casting of votes, or to make their voices heard in the mass media,” said Rafael Pardo during the event held in the Palacio del Marqués de Salamanca, Madrid headquarters of the BBVA Foundation. “All tonight’s awardees are leaders guiding us in the universe of conservation, in opinions and in action. Their message to us is that the primary asset supporting conservation is the existence of a citizenry and local communities capable of understanding, admiring and being moved by the diversity of life.”

“Scientific knowledge, truthful and consistent reporting by media outlets and their specialist professionals, the leadership of conservationist organizations, the vision and forethought of governments that understand that to preserve biodiversity is to preserve an irreplaceable store of wealth, the commitment of public servants working in the realm of the environment, and, last but not least, the shift that has already taken place in the popular mindset will, I am sure, allow us to prevail over the difficulties of the present,” said the BBVA Foundation Director.

Furthermore, coinciding with the 20th anniversary of these awards, Rafael Pardo announced that the next edition would further expand the BBVA Foundation's engagement with the defence of nature through the addition of a new category, “rounding off an award scheme that annually distinguishes and supports actions in Spain, Latin America, the World, and now specifically in Africa, in recognition of the fact that Latin America and Africa are two all-important regions for

conservation.”

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

An alliance with fishers to save the turtles of the Mediterranean

“There are actions that support biodiversity from above, like those pursuing its better regulation, through laws and other legal provisions. But for me, real, deep and lasting change can only come from citizens themselves, drawing on a growing environmental awareness.” With these words, Elsa Jiménez, Director of Fundación para la Conservación y Recuperación de Animales Marinos (CRAM), accepted the award bestowed on her organization in the Biodiversity in Spain category for securing the involvement of practically the whole of the Ebro Delta fishing community in the protection of turtles and other endangered marine species.

Bycatch or accidental capture is among the most significant threats facing the loggerhead turtle in Mediterranean waters. Over 70% of those caught by the Spanish fishing fleet come from the continental shelf between the Ebro Delta and the town of Castellón, the Delta being the site with by far the greatest interaction. It was to combat this threat that Fundación CRAM, founded in 1996, launched its 2017 campaign “Fishers for the Sea: Actions for the Recovery and Conservation of Sea Turtles” seeking both to minimize the impact of bycatch on these protected animals and to treat and reintroduce affected individuals.

“The fishers taking part do so because they have become mindful of the impact of their activity, and gained a broader understanding of biodiversity conservation. Their involvement is an example of voluntary conservation work, done out of conviction, not compulsion,” said Jiménez. “Any campaign aimed at boosting awareness among stakeholder sectors is an investment with a guaranteed return.”

In the seven years since CRAM launched the project, 355 sea turtles have been treated in Tarragona province. Of this number, 329 have been successfully rehabilitated, representing a 93% recovery rate.

“These actions are the chance for us to relay the threats while conveying a positive image of the fisheries industry, depicting it as part of the solution, not the problem,” Jiménez explained. “They also allow us to bring citizens on board, so they get involved in conservation, in caring for and respecting other forms of life, using emotion to bring about a shift in awareness that can make us better human beings.”

More information on Fundación CRAM [here](#).

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

Protecting Bolivia's Amazon rainforest to "defend life" on our planet

"Each of us has the duty to safeguard our planet, minimize our impact and speak for those that have no voice. To defend the forest is to defend life, and this can only happen if we protect it together," declared Nena Baltazar, President and Founder of Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi (CIWY), distinguished in the Latin America category for its efforts over three decades to protect the ecosystem and wildlife of Bolivian Amazonia.

Each year, millions of wild animals fall victim to illegal trafficking in South America, with the Amazon a particular blackspot. Countless specimens of big cats like jaguars, as well as snakes, birds, caimans and monkeys are stolen from their forest habitat and end up in open-air markets, fairs, zoos, circuses, restaurants or private residences, where they are either kept alive, as pets, or sacrificed, as trophies or to manufacture cosmetics, food products or fake medicines. CIWY, founded in 1992, has worked tirelessly to allay this threat to biodiversity by creating three sanctuaries where it rehabilitates and cares for wild animals rescued from illegal trafficking. With these reserves, the Bolivian NGO also protects 1,300 hectares of virgin rainforest from poaching, logging, mining and forest fires.

"Bolivia faces an environmental crisis that is without precedent. Devastating fires consume our forests, wildlife trafficking continues to claim lives and ecosystem destruction is advancing unchecked. And what we lose today we cannot get back tomorrow," warned Baltazar after collecting the award on behalf of CIWY. The black market in animals is currently the third largest crime business in all of South America, behind only drugs and human trafficking. But CIWY, she explained, is fighting back not just through the rescue and recovery of threatened species, but through an educational campaign called "Guardians of the Forest" to get younger generations involved in conservation efforts: "We have set up ranger brigades with young people and children in order to sow the seed of love and respect for biodiversity and nature."

"We want to truly inspire humanity, to inspire people, to work with the authorities to put a stop to this trafficking once and for all, so there is no need to set up more centers," said the CIWY President. "We want everyone, all humans, to understand that we need the forests, we need the forest animals if we are to have a worthwhile future."

More information on CIWY [here](#).

Worldwide Award for Biodiversity Conservation: The Gorongosa Restoration Project

Paradise regained, by integrating conservation and human development

The devastating civil war that engulfed Mozambique for fifteen years (1977-1992) had its collateral victims in the wildlife of Gorongosa National Park. So much so that the first post-conflict aerial census conducted in 1994 confirmed the loss of between 90% and 99% of its large mammal populations, including elephants, buffalo, hippopotamuses and zebras. Today, thanks to the work done by the Gorongosa Restoration Project, the Mozambican park has recovered much of its ecological integrity. It is for the extraordinary results of its actions in defense of nature that the project has been distinguished with the Worldwide Award for Biodiversity Conservation.

“Increased protection, with some limited wildlife introductions, has led to a spectacular recovery. In the 1990s there were likely less than 10,000 animals left in Gorongosa. The latest aerial wildlife count, undertaken in October last year, yielded more than 110,000 large herbivores and crocodiles. More than 800 elephants, nearly 2,000 buffalo and 1,000 hippo were counted,” remarked Susana Carvalho, Associate Director at the Mozambican national park, collecting the award on behalf of the project.

This success traces back to the alliance forged in 2008 between the Government of Mozambique and a private foundation, created by American philanthropist Greg Carr with the aim of restoring Gorongosa National Park. The project has also promoted research on Gorongosa’s extraordinary biodiversity through the Edward O. Wilson Laboratory, named after the renowned Harvard Professor of Entomology and 2011 BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Laureate in Ecology and Conservation Biology.

A mainstay of the team’s strategy has been to secure the active involvement of the local community. One way to achieve this was by recruiting young people to its wildlife ranger network. Another was the launch of an ambitious development program ensuring access to basic amenities like drinking water and decent housing, and the introduction of sustainable crops like coffee, which to date has benefited over 200,000 people.

“Our work is guided by a simple yet powerful belief: that people and nature can thrive together,” said Carvalho in her speech. “This award is a true celebration of our collective efforts. It reminds us of the importance of working together on the conservation of natural wonders such as Gorongosa, and shows that nature can rebound if given a chance.”

More information on the Gorongosa Restoration Project [here](#).

Knowledge Dissemination and Communication (audiovisual formats): Silvia García and Jacob Petrus

Training the TV cameras on the environmental crisis and its possible solutions

Antena 3 Noticias reporter Silvia García (Murcia, 1966) recalled in her speech that during her time at university there was no such specialty as environmental journalism, and society was largely blind to the importance of conserving nature. Yet from the start of her career she felt called to “narrate and give voice to” the environment through the all-powerful medium of television.

In her 35-years as a journalist, first at TVE – where with Lorenzo Milá and Fran Llorente she was part of the founding team of *La 2 Noticias*, with the mission to bring environmental coverage to a daily news program – then, from August 1998, at *Antena 3 Noticias*, García has worked to keep nature-related content at the forefront of the news agenda.

“Environmental journalism is nature’s minstrel, its narrator and its notary public,” she commented in her speech. “And I am firmly convinced that television has done the most of any medium to raise awareness. Because biodiversity is something we breath, smell and touch. But seeing and hearing it overwhelms us, thrills us, surprises us and moves us. And that power has always been a responsibility. Together with scientists, it falls to us journalists to attest to what is happening in our natural environment; to make humanity see that, if only out of self-preservation, it must protect the Mother who continues to feed us. The Earth.”

The director and presenter of TVE program *Aquí la Tierra*, Jacob Petrus (Manresa, Barcelona, 1976), winner *ex aequo* in the audiovisual category, spoke of the importance of quality environmental communication in the times we live in: “We have a lot of work to do. We have to warn about the progress of the global environmental crisis and point out future alternatives to reduce our ecological footprint. And increasingly, alas, we have to refute the hoaxes, fake news and disinformation spread via social networks, pseudo-media and discredited spokespeople, opining at times from positions of leadership.”

Petrus’s professional career, which spans more than 25 years reporting on the world’s environmental challenges, began as Head of Weather at Telemadrid, a position he held until 2013. Then began his journey in public broadcasting, both as a contributor to radio station RNE, where he continues to feature environment-related content, and, for the last ten years, on the TV program *Aquí la Tierra*.

At a time when “climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are part of our daily diet,” he said

on collecting the award, we must realize that “nothing will change unless we change ourselves; unless we understand that the health of people and animals is bound in with the health of ecosystems, and that the survival of the planet, as we know it, will depend on how we live, how we consume and even how and what we cook.” For all these reasons, he advocated for environmental communication that focuses on “teaching society about the possible paths that can lead us to a better future, a future where the human species is more respectful of the environment, reduces its ecological footprint and is less aggressive.”

Knowledge Dissemination and Communication (other formats): José Luis Gallego

Rigorous environmental reporting that instills “love of nature and of life”

Finally, José Luis Gallego (Barcelona, 1964) talked in his speech about the “disdain for nature” that afflicts our society as the root of the many of today’s problems: “We are victims of this alienation from nature, a lack of affective ties with the world around us: our first and only home, the place we come from, our shared habitat.” Faced with this challenge, the head of the Environment section at newspaper *El Confidencial* defended the value of solvent environmental reporting, based on the best scientific sources, but at the same time informed “by the desire to connect” with the public, to “engage and seduce them” through “love of nature, the planet, life.”

Gallego receives the award for an outstanding career in environmental communication stretching back more than three decades and spanning a wealth of outlets and formats, from his articles in magazines like *National Geographic* or *GEO* and newspapers like *El Periódico de Catalunya* or *La Vanguardia*, to his longstanding role as a contributor to Julia Otero’s program on radio station Onda Cero, which he continues to combine with his position as head of *Planeta A*, the Environment section of *El Confidencial*. In his years in the profession, he has published over 30 books dealing with diverse aspects of the environmental crisis and proposing strategies to address them, with titles that include *Vivir en un planeta mejor* (2013), *Circulando hacia una nueva economía* (2020) and *Naturalistas en zapatillas* (2022).

Like his colleagues distinguished in the audiovisual formats category, Gallego called for a style of environmental reporting that illuminates the pathways society can choose to confront the dual threat of climate change and the biodiversity crisis, rather than indulging in apocalyptic narratives that cause only weariness and despair. “We in the media have to elicit certain magic words from the reader, listener or TV viewer. We have to tell a story that is encouraging and energizing, so the reader wakes up and says: ‘OK, what can I do?’ That’s the important thing.”

About the BBVA Foundation Awards for Biodiversity Conservation

The conservation of species and ecosystems 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 were 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 was likewise 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-paying worldwide.

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.

Together, the BBVA Foundation's biodiversity laureates 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 meaningful headway in the fight to conserve our natural environment.

The jury deciding the awards is made up of scientists working in the environment field, communicators, and representatives of conservationist organizations who bring to the table complementary viewpoints on nature conservation.

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/>