

**News release**

**Brazilian conservationist honored as biodiversity 'Hotspot Hero' by Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund**

*Damião M. Santos is being recognized for achievements in protecting the country's species and ecosystems*

**Arlington, Virginia, USA (22 May 2020)** – On this International Day for Biological Diversity, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) announces that Damião M. Santos and nine other conservationists from around the world have been named "Hotspot Heroes" for their efforts to protect the world's biodiversity hotspots. The honorees were chosen from the hundreds of civil society organizations that have received grants from CEPF in the 10 global biodiversity hotspots where the fund is currently active.

CEPF is recognizing these heroes as part of the celebration of its 20th anniversary. The fund empowers nongovernmental organizations, indigenous groups, universities and private enterprises to protect the world's biodiversity hotspots—the world's most biologically diverse yet threatened terrestrial regions—and help communities thrive. CEPF does this through grants and technical support for conservation, organizational strengthening and sustainable development.

The Hotspot Heroes and the nongovernmental organizations they work for are making outstanding contributions to the conservation of the hotspots. They exemplify the kinds of dedicated, dynamic people who work to ensure that intact ecosystems can continue to sustain flora and fauna and provide clean air, fresh water, healthy soils, sustainable livelihoods, resilience to climate change and much more.

Mr. Santos is a member of the Kalunga in Brazil, descendants of runaway slaves who live in the remote mountaintop region of Goiás, part of the [Cerrado Biodiversity Hotspot](#). He is helping to lead a multitude of conservation efforts in the community. Mr. Santos headed the forest fire fighting brigade from 2013 to 2018, and he served as treasurer of the Kalunga Quilombo Guides Association from 2011 to 2014.

Under his guidance as president of the Communication Association Kalunga Engenho II from 2015 to 2017, ecotourism efforts made great strides, including the

construction of trails and bathrooms for tourists, gastronomy courses for restaurant staff, training for guides, and expansion of the tourist assistance center.

"Mr. Santos combines strength, determination, devotion and kindness. He is actively involved in his community and fully committed to the conservation of biodiversity," said Peggy Poncelet, CEPF grant director for the Cerrado Biodiversity Hotspot.

Mr. Santos was actively involved in the [CEPF-funded project](#) that used georeferencing and socioeconomic surveys to map the Kalunga territory. The information-gathering was an arduous process in which Mr. Santos and other team members traveled long distances to visit the families scattered across the region. The data has proved highly valuable to the Kalunga as well as the local and federal governments.

"The Hotspot Heroes represent the many tenacious, committed conservationists who are taking action every day to ensure the future of the biodiversity hotspots and the people who depend on these vital ecosystems," said CEPF Executive Director Olivier Langrand. "They endure a multitude of challenges—long hours, grueling travel, difficult working conditions, political hurdles and even threats to their lives—in pursuit of a healthy, sustainable world."

"Mr. Santos is a determined advocate for his community and the ecosystems they rely on," said Langrand. "His actions and leadership are helping to secure a healthy future for the Kalunga and their nature."

Read more about [Damião M. Santos](#) and the other [Hotspot Heroes](#).

CEPF is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan and the World Bank.

Since 2001, CEPF has catalyzed enduring, locally led biodiversity conservation through US\$250 million in grants to more than 2,400 organizations in 98 developing and transitional countries. Results include more than 15 million hectares of formal protected areas established, at least 890 globally threatened species supported, and more than 3,500 communities benefiting. Learn more at [www.cepf.net](http://www.cepf.net), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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Download a photo of Damião M. Santos [here](#). (\*Note: you will need to read through Conservation International's terms of use document before downloading.)