

**News release**

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

*Indigenous Awá leader Olivio Bisbicús 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 Olivio Bisbicús 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.

Twenty years ago, Olivio Bisbicús founded the Reserva Natural inkal Awá La Nutria to protect his community's ancestral territory in Colombia's Andean forest. The indigenous group straddles the boundary line between Ecuador and Colombia, with members living on either side. The reserve is important for biodiversity: Within 330 hectares live at least 322 bird species, 300 orchid species and 36 frog species.

Unfortunately, the corridor from Colombia into Ecuador is an important passageway for drug traffickers, too.

In fighting to preserve their natural resources, the Awá have come under severe threat—six Awá environmental defenders were murdered in 2018 and 2019. Undeterred, Mr. Bisbicús continues in his role as an environmental leader in his community.

"Mr. Bisbicús is a long-standing advocate for conserving and protecting the territory of the Awá people, which is located in an area of exceptionally high biodiversity in the [Tropical Andes Biodiversity Hotspot](#)," said Michele Zador, CEPF grant director for the Tropical Andes Biodiversity Hotspot. "He is representative of the brave fight of indigenous people to defend their land and their biodiversity against incredibly dangerous pressures."

CEPF has helped the Awá strengthen their territorial governance, better identify the geographic areas of the reserve, and document the region's birds, reptiles, amphibians and trees.

"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. Bisbicús and the Awá people are true leaders in conservation, and they are courageously standing up for nature and their own way of life," said Langrand. "The world owes a great debt to Mr. Bisbicús, the Awá and indigenous people around the world who are doing so much to save ecosystems that provide vital services such as fresh water, food and climate change mitigation and resilience."

Read more about [Olivio Bisbicús](#) 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 Olivio Bisbicús [here](#). (\*Note: you will need to read through Conservation International's terms of use document before downloading.)