

**Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
37th Meeting of the CEPF Donor Council
Virtual Meeting
19 November 2020
8:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST)**

Hotspot Highlights

TROPICAL ANDES BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

The fourth quarter of fiscal year 2020 was the most challenging period of CEPF’s near 20-year engagement in the Tropical Andes Hotspot, as all four CEPF focal countries—Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru—went on strict nationwide quarantines to stem the spread of COVID-19. Like much of the world, all CEPF grantees retreated to their homes to work. Partner communities, often located in remote areas and lacking access to basic public services, found themselves cut off from the rest of the world as they went into strict isolation.



The pandemic required the CEPF Secretariat, the RIT and grantees to work together to address the unprecedented emergency by undertaking a series of grant amendments to reconfigure programs and deadlines. A major focus during the quarter became helping local communities, particularly indigenous communities, meet their immediate needs.

For example, along the Ecuador–Colombia border region, CEPF partnered with three Awá indigenous organizations—the Unidad Indígena del Pueblo Awá, the Resguardo Pialapí Pueblo Viejo and Centro Awá Pambilar—to help Awá indigenous communities cope with threats emerging from the pandemic. With CEPF support, the communities obtained COVID-19 personal protective equipment, secured communications devices to strengthen coordination on protecting their territory, and received information in the Awapit language on how to prevent the spread of the virus.

A highpoint was the installation of a radio antenna at La Planada Nature Reserve that allowed the transmission of internet and cell phone signals to Awá communities, which is indispensable for supporting the protection of the territory and communications in case of emergencies.

In Peru, CEPF grantee Practical Action had been working to protect threatened bird species in San José de Lourdes but shifted to providing seeds and food packages to the isolated community.

A small grant to Awajún indigenous authorities managing the Chayu Nain Communal Reserve in northern Peru allowed communities to obtain COVID-19 protection as well as fishing equipment. Other grantees used CEPF funds to purchase supplies and equipment for their offices to prevent the spread of the virus.



In the midst of the crisis, the conservation community received remarkable news from Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja during the quarter. Field surveys in Abra de Zamora Key Biodiversity Area—a 6.6-hectare site located in southern Ecuador—found 27 amphibian species, 14 of which were endemic and 12 of which were new to science. A single place with such high amphibian diversity is rare in the hotspot, and discussion with local stakeholders shifted to how best to protect the unique site.

EAST MELANESIAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Tropical Cyclone Harold made landfall as a Category 5 storm on Vanuatu’s Espirtu Santo Island on 6 April 2020. A third of the country’s 270,000 people were affected, and on many islands, more than half of the dwellings were damaged. CEPF amended two active grants—one to Live & Learn Vanuatu and one to the Edenhope Foundation—to enable the grantees to deliver support for the rebuilding of water supply systems and emergency shelters.



In other news, the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS) is implementing separate grants on conservation of dugongs in Vanuatu and of flying foxes in both Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. As part of the dugong project, VESS is working to protect the seagrass beds that serve as feeding grounds for the animals. VESS has four permanent seagrass meadow monitoring sites that they visit twice per year with local stakeholders and staff of the fisheries department. Separately, VESS is raising awareness among 15 communities about the importance of flying foxes. On remote

islands, before undertaking what might be considered formal conservation activities, it is especially critical for groups like VESS to engage local people to understand what is important to them, and to place the conservation target (the flying fox) within that context.

VESS reported on the challenges of its work environment. For example, the flying foxes are located in the Banks Islands group, an outlying set of islands reached by air from Vanuatu’s capital of Port Vila, and then by boat from island to island (Vanua Lava, Ureparapara, Gaua). The challenge is that air flights are infrequent, and boats can be more so, particularly in rough seas. These trips are complicated by requirements for government research permits prior to travel. Thus, in what is considered a “minor” delay in that region, work that was scheduled for December took place in February. Of course, then, the global

pandemic arrived, forcing the closure of offices. Cyclone Harold then added internet connectivity issues. CEPF compliments its partners for their dedication amidst these challenges.

MOUNTAINS OF CENTRAL ASIA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

The Mountains of Central Asia Regional Implementation Team is fully mobilized with its headquarters in Kazakhstan and staff in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. While staff travel is limited due to the pandemic, this did not prevent the release of calls for letters of inquiry for small grants in each of those five countries as well as a large-grant open call for those countries plus Afghanistan. As of the close of the quarter, the RIT was in negotiations to award 13 small grants and was in the process of reviewing 45 large-grant applications. The RIT maintains a multilingual website at www.mca.earth.



MEDITERRANEAN BASIN BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Environmental NGOs in Beirut, Lebanon, were impacted by the explosion that occurred on 4 August. Some of our partners were injured, lost relatives or suffered material losses.

To support the conservation community during this difficult time, CEPF launched a rapid-response emergency call for proposals. With hard work from BirdLife International—the regional implementation team for the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot—and the CEPF Secretariat, the call was posted with simplified procedures on 24 August.

Lebanese organizations applied for grants between US\$1,000 and US\$7,000 to help rebuild their offices and replace damaged equipment.

In Cabo Verde, the number of loggerhead turtles that came to shore and the number of nests was up to four times more than any previous year on record. In Sal and Santa Luzia, where CEPF supports partners Projeto Biodiversidad and Biosfera, more than 10,000 loggerheads and more than 2,500 nests have been recorded. In addition, more than 88,000



nests were recorded on Boa Vista, where CEPF supported efforts during its first investment phase. The exact reasons for this important increase have yet to be determined. One hypothesis is that the years of work by NGOs to protect the turtles and their nesting sites has led the turtles to feel safer in returning. Another hypothesis suggests that an increase in sea temperature and, therefore, an augmentation in nutrients, has boosted the nesting. Unfortunately, because of a lack of tourists and international volunteers due to COVID-19, poaching has increased on Cabo Verde. To address this, CEPF

recently amended a grant in Sal to allow Projeto Biodiversidad to purchase a drone for the patrolling and monitoring of sea turtle nests.

WALLACEA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

CEPF's formal work in Wallacea came to a conclusion on 30 June 2020, with the end of the regional implementation team (RIT) grant to Burung Indonesia. Burung's work began formally in December 2014 and in the subsequent five years, the RIT and Secretariat awarded 108 large and small grants to 67 organizations. Work took place in 43 Key Biodiversity Areas across 169 communities. CEPF will be releasing a final report shortly, but it will show that threats were reduced to 18 priority species, that 258,000 terrestrial hectares and 1 million marine hectares were placed under formal protection, and that more than 521,000 hectares of forest and 36,000 hectares of fisheries are under improved management.

The stories from this region are many, but one that stands out is from the connections that Burung undertook from its position as RIT. Burung engaged national government agencies, particularly for protected areas and for fisheries, and provincial governments with the message that CEPF grantees, working in relatively small areas, were doing work that would help the government achieve its own goals and that these investments could be built upon and the results multiplied ten-fold. Thus, small achievements, like the several thousand hectares of marine protected areas created by grantees in Central Sulawesi, became seeds for the provincial government's creation of the 876,000-hectare Banggai Dalaka Marine Protected Area.

Other donors have recognized the success of CEPF's investment. The first phase of investment was supported, in part, by the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP). CEPF made a formal presentation to MACP, which then led to further presentations to the Walton Family Foundation and the Bloomberg Philanthropies Vibrant Oceans Initiative. The latter two invited CEPF to submit formal proposals in June to continue support for coastal and marine Key Biodiversity Areas in the Indonesian portion of the hotspot. [Watch a short video about CEPF's investment in Wallacea](#)

INDO-BURMA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

On 30 March 2020, the Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation issued the official notification establishing Imawbum National Park. This new protected area, located in Myanmar's Kachin State, has a total area of 156,280 hectares. It protects the only known population of a Critically Endangered primate, the Myanmar snub-nosed monkey (*Rhinopithecus strykeri*), which was unknown to science before its discovery in 2010.

The notification of this new national park is the culmination of years of effort by Fauna & Flora International (FFI), in partnership with the Myanmar Forest Department and local communities in Kachin State. CEPF supported the community consultations and agricultural land mapping necessary to verify that the proposed boundary for the national park did not contain any farmland. This was essential to ensuring that the national park designation did not have inadvertent adverse impacts on local livelihoods, which could have undermined support for it. Without CEPF's support for this essential step, the overall process to establish the national park would have been delayed. CEPF will now support FFI and its partners to

develop a management plan for the new national park, taking care to ensure that COVID-19 regulations are complied with.

MADAGASCAR AND THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

CEPF Hotspot Hero Dr. Vikash Tatayah, conservation director of Mauritius Wildlife Foundation, has been heavily involved in efforts to help mitigate the damage caused by the recent oil spill off the coast of Mauritius. We spoke with him about the consequences of the oil spill to local biodiversity as well as recovery efforts currently underway. [Read the Q-and-A](#)

In June, Dr. Brian Fisher, curator of entomology at the California Academy of Sciences, shared via a videoconference the findings of a CEPF-funded project with an insect-focused approach to conservation. Based on the research conducted in Madagascar, Dr. Fisher made a convincing case that at the intersection of climate change, biodiversity loss and food scarcity lie an unexpected and abundant resource: edible insects. He shared success stories and provided leads for exploring this resource; the “Edible Insects” recording is available [here](#).



In other news, despite the disruption from COVID-19 during the reporting period, grantees were, overall, highly resourceful and able to implement their projects safely, albeit with some adaptations. Grantees were better able to continue conservation at sites where staff was based at the community level. Mauritius, Comoros and Seychelles were able to keep COVID-19 at bay for the most part. However, these islands suffered from the lack of ecotourism and were hampered by extended delays in procurement (e.g., traps).

As for Madagascar, especially in the capital and in the port city of Toamasina, COVID-19 actively circulated and its impact on biodiversity conservation was immediate: increased illegal logging from 4,931 trees (2019) to 8,219 trees (first semester of 2020), increased forest fires from 165 (2019) to 533 (first semester of 2020); and loss of ecotourism revenue to name a few. This situation underscores the need for the conservation community to become less dependent on ecotourism, as it can be an unreliable source of income.

EASTERN AFROMONTANE BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

In March, CEPF completed its investment in the Eastern Afromontane after seven years and nearly US\$12 million awarded in grants. All the details of this work are available in the [final assessment document](#).

Ultimately, CEPF funds reached 115 unique groups, either as grantees or sub-grantees, of which 85 are based in the region. Grants took place in 13 countries. Results included:

- Improved management of 58 Key Biodiversity Areas covering 4,851,995 hectares.



- Within that total, created or expanded 11 protected areas covering 1,428,329 hectares.
- Reduced threats to 27 globally threatened species and discovered six new ones.
- Provided non-cash benefits to more than 200,000 people.
- Increased the income of more than 26,000 people from livelihood activities.

Photos (top to bottom): Kits being prepared for the Awá community. © Paola Zavala/FFLA; Salamander species new to science, scientific name *Bolitoglossa* sp. *nov*, discovered by UTPL researchers in Ecuador's Abra de Zamora Key Biodiversity Area. © EcoSsLab – UTPL; Watershed monitoring. © VESS; Ala Archa National Park, Kyrgyzstan. © O. Langrand; Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). © Joana Hancock; Insect collection. © Brian L. Fisher; Endangered grey crowned cranes (*Balearica regulorum*), Kenya. © George NM