

Land rights at last for indigenous protectors of Paraguay's Atlantic Forest

Title After ten years of negotiations, the indigenous Kue Tuvy Aché community in Paraguay have gained formal recognition of their ownership of the land known as Finca 470, part of the Bosque Mbaracayú Important Bird Area. During the course of those ten years, the Kue Tuvy Aché worked with BirdLife Partner Guyra Paraguay and others to develop a management plan which protects the 4,000 ha of native Atlantic forest which makes up Finca 470, while enabling them to pursue sustainable livelihoods. This work was begun with the support of institutions including BirdLife Partner Nature Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and Conservation International. If it were not for the Aché, this last remaining block of forest within the buffer zone of the Mbaracayú Biosphere Reserve would already have been lost, said Alberto Yanosky, CEO of Guyra Paraguay. Under the shade of the forest, the Aché have grown 20 hectares of yerba mate trees, which are certified organic with the support of the Guayaki Company. The yerba mate produced is exported into the US, where it commands a premium because of its unique designation as the only shade-grown yerba mate produced by an indigenous community within the remnants of the Atlantic Forest. However, throughout those ten years, legal title continued to be withheld, and the Aché were forced to struggle constantly to protect the land from encroachment by speculators, illegal loggers and landless people from elsewhere in Paraguay. Thanks to the efforts of several Congressman, the land was finally transferred to the Kue Tuvy Aché by Law N° 4304/11 of Paraguayan Republic on 9th August 2011. As a member of the Congress, I have a commitment to this indigenous community, to respect their rights but also to thank them and reward their work toward biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, said Senator Alfredo Stroessner, one of the Aché's strongest supporters in their battle for recognition. The Aché, and their sustainable agricultural model, were also supported by the UGP (Unión de Gremios de la Producción) trades union. This is a victory for a community which celebrates life through the wise use of natural resources, and teaches the whole country and the world that development can only be possible if we link it with biodiversity conservation, said Alberto Yanosky.