

Securing tenure and livelihoods in Paraguay's Atlantic Forest

Title

BirdLife Partner Guyra Paraguay is working with local communities at Important Bird Areas to demonstrate how conserving biodiversity can improve the quality of life and livelihoods, and alleviate poverty. Important sites for biodiversity conservation in Paraguay are being lost at an unprecedented speed. Almost 90% of Paraguay's share of South America's Atlantic forest has been lost, with only two of the remnants larger than 20,000 hectares. In the Gran Chaco, 1,500-2,000 hectares of forest are bulldozed every day. The impacts on the welfare and livelihoods of the people who depend on these ecosystems have been overlooked in the race to compete in international markets for commodity crops.

Indigenous people have been chased from their ancestral lands. At San Rafael, the largest remaining area of Atlantic forest, where Guyra Paraguay has already secured the future of 7000 hectares of forest and grasslands, a further 270 hectares of pristine forest have been brought under a new model of land ownership. The native indigenous group, the Mbyá Guaraní, formerly marginalised by lack of land tenure, now have access to hunt and gather products, and benefit from services provided by the native forests. Also at San Rafael, a small farmers' community is benefiting from a project which encourages them to retain and extend the forest cover on their land. The project ensures that the farmers are better rewarded for conserving the forest than for clearing it for cotton and soy, and payments are geared to benefit the most deprived. Retaining rather than clearing the forest reduces the amount of land available for cultivation, so the community has been trained to improve productivity and profitability on smaller areas of land. Community representative Senor Cacique Eusebio Chaparro was awarded this year's "El Grito de la Selva" (The Cry of the Forest) prize by Guyra Paraguay for his leadership in demonstrating that conservation of biodiversity and poverty alleviation can go hand in hand. *Alberto Yanosky & Marcelo Arévalos/Guyra Paraguay*