

Nominating Dr. Débora Leite Silvano for The IUCN SSC Harry Messel Award for Conservation Leadership

Débora Leite Silvano is a Brazilian researcher, teacher and one of the most prominent amphibian conservationists in Brazil. She has a degree in Biology (1994), a Master's degree in Wildlife Conservation and Management (1999), an MBA in Strategic Business Management (2003), and a PhD in Ecology (2011). Between 2008 and 2016, she was an Assistant Professor at the Catholic University of Brasília, and she has been a Professor at the Brasília Federal Institute since 2016.

With her calm and welcoming demeanour, Débora is a strong voice for conservation in Brazil. Her passion for amphibians, combined with hard and dedicated work, has allowed her to contribute to incredible achievements in the country and globally. Her involvement with the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) started in 2002 as a consultant working on the first Global Amphibian Assessment, published in 2004. Débora coordinated the creation and implementation of a database with information on amphibian species of the Atlantic Forest, Cerrado, and Caatinga biomes in Brazil. As a result of this work, she was the lead author of the first two scientific papers dealing specifically with amphibian conservation in Brazil, both published in 2005: "Conservation of Brazilian Amphibians" and "Amphibian Declines in Brazil: An Overview".

Between 2004 and 2007, Débora worked in the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment, where she contributed to the project "Priority Areas for the Conservation of Brazilian Biodiversity". In 2005, she participated in the global "Amphibian Conservation Summit" in Washington, DC. Débora wrote the original white paper and subsequent chapter "Designing a network of conservation sites for amphibians: Key Biodiversity Areas" in the Amphibian Conservation Action Plan published in 2007. She was also the first author of the chapter "Brazil: the world leader in amphibian diversity" in the book "Threatened Amphibians of the World", published in 2008.

Débora has been a member of the Brazilian regional branch of the IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group (ASG Brazil) since its formation in 2007, and has been serving as its Co-chair since 2013. Over the course of these years she has helped develop the Brazilian Amphibian Conservation Action Plan (BACAP), actively contributing to the national conservation status assessment of all Brazilian amphibian species, and organizing the symposia "Regional experiences of amphibian conservation in Brazil" and "The role of ASG Brazil (IUCN) in the conservation of amphibians: actions in progress and new directions". In 2016, with the encouragement and support of Dr. Ariadne Angulo, global Co-chair of ASG, Débora coordinated the ASG Brazil restructuring process, bringing new members to the team and helping to develop innovative and original activities within the group. Under her leadership, ASG Brazil has launched its official website, e-mail and fan page.

In 2016, the group undertook a massive review of amphibian conservation actions in Brazil, identifying almost 400 people involved in amphibian conservation in the country. Based on this analysis, ASG Brazil was able to identify gaps in knowledge and action and established five priority themes: (i) Public Policies; (ii) Education and Environmental Awareness; (iii) New Approaches and Technology; (iv) Applied Research; and (v) Conservation Strategies. In 2018, ASG Brazil organized the “1st Amphibians in Focus (ANFoCO): Brazilian Symposium on Amphibian Conservation”, an innovative and inclusive meeting attended by over 150 people. In 2019, the group organized the “2nd Amphibians in Focus”, this time as a workshop during the Brazilian Congress of Herpetology.

Among other things, Débora has also actively worked in the elaboration and implementation of the Brazilian Amphibian Action Plan, has co-authored the “Brazil Red Book of Threatened Species of Fauna” and the Science article “The Impact of Conservation on the Status of the World’s Vertebrates”, as well as coordinated or contributed in the assessment of 181 Brazilian amphibian species on The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Besides being a dedicated and hard-working advocate for amphibian conservation in Brazil, Débora is also a natural leader: she has her own kind and warm-hearted way of leading. She leads by collaborating, instead of competing. She leads by example. She leads by hearing. She leads by teaching. She leads by opening doors and giving space to her colleagues and students.

Over these years, as her work testifies, Débora has been an important and valuable link between regional and global conservation teams. Because of everything she has done so far for amphibian conservation, besides inspiring and opening doors for newer generations, Débora is more than eligible to receive the IUCN SSC Harry Messel Award for Conservation Leadership. Awarding this prize to a deserving Latin American woman working with amphibian conservation would also be a courageous political, social and moral gesture, celebrating the efforts of a true leader in her field.

Arguably one of the most prominent wildlife conservationists alive is a woman (Dame Jane Goodall). Yet, throughout the years, out of 72 IUCN SSC awardees only 16 were women. Latin America is home to the greatest biodiversity on Earth. Yet, out of 72 IUCN SSC awardees, only 4 worked in Latin America. Amphibians are the most threatened group of vertebrates. Yet, out of 72 IUCN SSC awardees, none was awarded in specific recognition for their work with amphibians.

In a traditionally gender-imbalanced environment, such as the science and conservation worlds, mainly dominated by white English-speaking-men, role models like Débora are much needed. In this current climate of developing equality and celebrating diversity, acknowledging Débora through this award, as well as her Peruvian-

Brazilian colleague Dr. Ariadne Angulo, would not only do justice to rewarding true amphibian conservation leadership, but would also serve as inspiration to young women in Latin America, and society in general.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Please find Débora's complete CV here: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7433263372878803>

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