

Settlers-versus-habitat tension is not always rural

Asunción, Paraguay

Shortly before Pope Francis became the first world church leader to visit her Paraguay River neighborhood at the edge of Asunción, Elsa Fariña had been packing recyclable plastic bottles into sacks outside what was left of her home. Much of her brick house collapsed last year when the river overflowed its banks and flooded more of her neighborhood, Bañado Norte, than is usual in the seasonal water-level fluctuation.

Unable to afford to rebuild, Fariña, 68, who makes about a dollar a day collecting and selling plastic bottles for recycling, pieced together a plywood room. She worries, however, that if the city evicts her and other residents to make way for urban development, she won't qualify for a buyout. "People say they won't pay me anything

if my house is only made of wood," Fariña says. "I live alone. I can't do any more than this."

The pope gave some encouragement to Fariña and her neighbors on July 12, when he stopped by Bañado Norte and greeted its residents—fishermen, street vendors and recyclers such as those to whom he ministered in low-income neighborhoods of Buenos Aires when he was archbishop there. "I am very happy to be here with you today," he told them. "I could not come to Paraguay without spending some time with you, here on your land."

Those last words, "your land," resonated in a country where land rights are high on the agenda for the rural poor. But rural areas are

continued on page 9 ▶

Brazil prepares way for Spix macaw reintroduction

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The 2011 animated feature "Rio," in which the world's last two Spix macaws battle wildlife traffickers, become a couple and perpetuate their species, shone a global spotlight on the critically endangered bird. But in Brazil, efforts to preserve the species, among the world's most prominent wildlife-conservation initiatives, began well before they inspired a movie.

The Spix macaw (*Cyanopsitta spixii*), endemic only to the riverbank gallery forests that wind like green corridors through the otherwise sparsely forested savannahs of northeastern Bahia state, once added flashes of blue to an arid, sun-bleached landscape. But for four centuries cattle and goat ranchers harvested firewood from those forests, decimating the bird's habitat and its numbers. Then, wildlife trafficking, which started in the 1960s and peaked in the 1970s, turned a bird that was rare, even when German naturalist Johann Baptist von Spix discovered it in 1817, even rarer. And in the 1980s, as the species neared extinction in nature, European collectors were paying up to \$300,000 to possess one of the birds.

The last wild Spix macaw was spotted in 1991 and died in 2000. But because private breeding centers maintain a sizeable number of these birds, the Chico Mendes Institute for



Captive-bred Spix macaw (Photo by João Freire/ICMBio)

Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio), the conservation arm of Brazil's Environment Ministry, thought it might be possible to reintroduce the Spix macaw into its native habitat. So the agency, together with nongovernmental groups,

continued on page 10 ▶

July 2015

Vol. 17 - No. 9

Inside

Around the region 2

Though weakened, Colombia's rebels still hit oil pipelines 3

Rousseff's energy pledge on U.S. trip gets cool reception 4

Loss of vertebrate biodiversity gauged in Brazil dam study 5

CENTERPIECE:

Region moving to tap vast potential in non-traditional, renewable energy 6

Q&A:

Kennedy School's Juma sees biotech role in developing world agriculture 12