Colombia designates two new Wetlands of International Importance

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Colombia has designated two new Wetlands of International Importance: Complejo de Humedales Urbanos del Distrito Capital de Bogotá (Urban Wetland Complex of the Capital District of Bogotá), the first urban High Andean wetland complex in Latin America to be designated; and Complejo de Humedales del Alto Río Cauca Asociado a la Laguna de Sonso (Upper Cauca River and Sonso Lagoon Wetland Complex), a complex with a high level of endemism. The two together cover an area of 6,192.33 hectares.

The Bogotá wetland complex (no. 2404 on the List of Wetlands of International Importance) consists of 11 urban wetlands designated as District Ecological Parks. These permanent freshwater marshes provide shelter and habitat to endemic species from the High Andean region of Colombia, such as the Bogotá rail (*Rallus semiplumbeus*) and the Apolinar’s wren (*Cistothorus apolinari*). There are also records of 196 bird species, 42 of them aquatic and 65 migrant.

This wetland complex regulates the supply of water from the rivers of the Bogotá savannah, providing flood control in the rainy season and in summer allowing for conservation of groundwater levels. It is a crucial ecological connector between the rural and urban territories of the Bogotá River basin, crossing the city of Bogotá from east to west. In addition, it is the first urban complex of High Andean wetlands in Latin America to be added to the List. The site has also been designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA). Among the main threats to the site are rainfall and climate variability associated with El Niño and La Niña events.

The Laguna de Sonso complex (no. 2403 on the List) is located in the upper Cauca River basin and consists of 24 wetlands. It is of great national and international importance because of its biological diversity. Thirty-nine plant species are identified, 25 of them on the IUCN Red List, and 162 bird species including the horned screamer (*Anhima cornuta*) whose populations are found only in Sonso and in the Cienaga del Conchal, also in Colombia. The Site presents a high level of endemism with five
Laguna de Sonso (Rostrhamus sociabilis) endemic fish species; the boquiancha (Genycharax tarpon); the roño (Callichthys fabricioi); the micudo (Pimelodella macrocephala); and two sardines (Hyphessobrycon poecilioides and Gephyrocharax caucanus).

The complex has outstanding ecological values due to its landscape, its biodiversity, and its considerable tourism and recreational potential. It is a source of food and water for the locals, while also providing educational opportunities through an environmental education and research centre. Threats include the growth of the population and the increase in the extent of land used for agriculture, especially sugar cane cultivation.