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Cristián Samper

Director, National Museum of Natural History

Cristián Samper (sahm-PAIR), a biologist and international authority on environmental policy, is the director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. As director, Samper is responsible for the largest collection at the most-visited natural history museum in the world; last year it saw more than 7 million visitors. Since his arrival in 2003, Samper has reinvigorated the research staff by hiring new curators to replace retiring staff; built major new collection storage facilities and laboratories in Suitland, Md.; and raised more than \$100 million to support new, long-term exhibitions and programs, including the Encyclopedia of Life, the Sant Ocean Hall and the David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins.

Samper was the Acting Secretary of the Smithsonian from March 2007 through June 2008. Before coming to Washington, D.C., Samper was deputy director and staff scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama, the largest research facility for tropical biology, with emphasis on tropical forests and coral reefs, from 2001 to 2003.

From 1999 to 2001, he was chairman of the Subsidiary Body of Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. In this role, Samper helped develop a global strategy for plant conservation and launched the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, designed to determine the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being and provide the scientific basis for action to conserve and use ecosystems sustainably.

From 1995 to 2001, Samper was the founder and first director of the Alexander von Humboldt Institute, the national biodiversity research institute of Colombia. He was responsible for developing the National Biodiversity Policy for Colombia, promoting research on biological inventories, conservation biology and sustainable use of biodiversity. At the same time, he served as chief science adviser for biodiversity for the Colombian government and on the boards of many environmental

institutions. For his contributions, he was awarded the National Medal of the Environment by the president of Colombia in 2001.

Samper served as director of the environment division of the Foundation for Higher Education in Colombia from 1992 to 1995, and he also was adjunct professor of biology at the Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia. He was a moving force behind the establishment of a network of private nature reserves and major environmental education programs throughout Colombia.

Known for his work in the ecology of the Andean cloud forests, conservation biology and environmental policy, Samper currently sits on the boards of directors for the American Association of Museums, the Center for International Forest Research, and the Nature Conservancy.

Born Sept. 25, 1965, in San José, Costa Rica, Samper grew up in Colombia and holds dual citizenship from the United States and Colombia. Samper received a bachelor's degree from the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá (1987); he earned his master's degree (1989) and doctorate degree (1992) in biology from Harvard University, where he was awarded the Derek Bok prize for excellence in teaching.

About the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, located at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W. in Washington, D.C., welcomed more than 7.4 million visitors in 2009, making it the most visited museum in the United States. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission is free. More information about the museum is available at www.mnh.si.edu or by calling (202) 633-1000, TTY (202) 633-5285. In addition to the Web site, learn more about public programs and get the latest updates and access to insider videos and images via [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).

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