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*Nature Conservancy* (ISSN 1540-2428) is published four times a year, in February, May, August and November, by The Nature Conservancy, 4245 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 100, Arlington, VA 22203. Annual membership dues are \$10. Of this amount, \$4 is for a subscription to *Nature Conservancy*. Periodicals postage paid at Arlington, VA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: The Nature Conservancy, Member Service Center, 4245 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 100, Arlington, VA 22203-1606. Allow up to eight weeks to process new memberships. Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 40039356. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 503, RPO West Beaver Creek, Richmond Hill ON L4B 4R6.

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## MEET THE BOARD

# Cristián Samper



**LENGTH OF SERVICE:** Seven months

**BACKGROUND:** Graduate of Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia; master's and doctorate degrees in biology from Harvard University. An expert in international environmental policy and the ecology of Andean cloud forests. Was founder-director of a biodiversity research institute in Colombia, then chairman of a subsidiary of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. In 2001, joined the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama. Currently director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. Board member of the American Association of Museums and of the Center for International Forest Research.

**Family:** Wife Adriana Casas, an environmental lawyer at the Inter-American Development Bank. Daughter Carolina, age 3.

**Grew up in:** Bogotá, Colombia.

**Formative experience:** I was invited by a Colombian biologist to go on a field expedition to the Choco jungle when I was about 15. That was when I really got grabbed by biology. We were collecting animals and plants, all kinds of stuff. I loved it.

**From research scientist to active conservationist:** You suddenly realize that some of the places you loved and studied are under threat. Then you decide you can't focus on the science without becoming a responsible citizen and trying to help.

**And from researcher to administrator:**

I'm a scientist at heart. But one of the things I learned was that as much as I enjoy doing science, I enjoy even more making science happen. I still collaborate on projects. I still get to the field as often as I can.

**The Smithsonian as living-history**

**museum:** [We have] a collection that spans the entire historical range of the black-footed ferret. You can take DNA and look at the genetic variability over time and use that information in the captive breeding program. That's an example of how you can use a collection that's well over 100 years old to address contemporary conservation issues.