

The Brazilian who saved the blue macaws from extinction and entered the UN Women's Scientists Hall of Fame



BY DEBORAH SPITZCOVSKY

It was in the 1980s that **Neiva Guedes**, a recent graduate of Biology, first spotted **a blue macaw** – *the same day she discovered that her grandchildren would undoubtedly not have the same opportunity, since the species, 100% Brazilian, was bound to disappear.*

The mix of feelings she felt that day was what defined Neiva's fate from then on: she decided to dedicate her life to **avoiding the extinction** of the blue macaws – *and, 30 years later, succeeded!*

The biologist went to the field, studied the behaviour of birds, approached the community and understood that the two main factors that contributed to the end of blue macaws in nature were illegal **hunting** – *to be sold as pet birds* – and **deforestation**, since these birds reproduced only when they found good natural cavities in the trunks of trees, that were increasingly being overthrown.

Aware of the problem, Neiva then founded the Blue Macaw Institute, did a beautiful job for community awareness and involvement, developed a technique to install **artificial nests in** perfect conditions for blue macaws to reproduce and about three decades later watched what many judged impossible when work began: the species to leave, officially from the list of endangered animals.

There is still a lot of work to be done – especially with regard to the impact of climate change on *the life of blue macaws* – but the legacy that Neiva has built so far is undeniable and has assured the biologist, among other recognitions, a very special place in the 'hall of fame' of the GIRLS and Women Scientists of the UN Women, when she became a comic book character of Monica's Gang, who is a partner of the organization.