

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2007)

Project Ref. No.	14-028
Project Title	<i>Conservation of Puna's Andean cats across national borders</i>
Country(ies)	<i>Argentina, Bolivia and Chile</i>
UK Organisation	<i>Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU), Oxford University</i>
Collaborator(s)	<i>Andean Cat Alliance (AGA); Mammal Behavioural Ecology Group, Universidad Nacional del Sur (GECM, Argentina); Museo de Ciencias Naturales de Salta, Universidad Nacional de Salta (Argentina); Colección Boliviana de Fauna (CBF, Bolivia); Fundación Biodiversitas (FB, Chile)</i>
Project Leader	<i>Claudio Sillero</i>
Report date	<i>31 October 2007</i>
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	<i>HYR 2</i>
Project website	www.wildcru.org/andeanecat

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up).

Field, educational and networking activities have progressed according to our timetable. The field manual of monitoring techniques has been delivered to all AGA country representatives and other partners. Collection of field data is going well in all three countries, and homogenisation of protocols by AGA partners following the AGA methodologies manual is in progress. The manual has also been adopted to train four Argentine villagers as Wildlife Monitors. In Bolivia, 96 sign count line-transects were carried out in three areas (7 sites), and 194 carnivore faecal samples collected. Ten line transects were carried out in Argentina. Some 350 carnivore faecal samples have been collected in Chile for DNA analysis. The Argentine team has completed over 1000 camera trap days. In total over 100 new carnivore pictures have been obtained by camera traps in different study sites spanning the three countries, confirming the occurrence of Andean cats in the Chilean side of the study area. Research on prey abundance was undertaken in two sites in Bolivia and in seven sites in Chile, using double counts for mountain vizcachas and live trapping for small rodents. In Argentina a study counting vizcacha faecal pellets in plots has been started, and it will compare these data with direct counts elsewhere. A diet study of High Andes carnivores started in Bolivia, with 129 faeces analyzed so far. Similar studies will be started in Argentina and Bolivia shortly.

In April a three-week training camp took place to identify detecting dogs and handlers. Out of this a dog-handler team was selected and it has been carrying out detecting transects in the Argentine side. A lot of 200 faecal samples, including those detected by the dog, have been sent to Daniel Cossios (AGA – Peru, and University of Montreal, Canada), for genetic screening. Cossios is working on a study of High Andes cats population genetics. Preliminary results suggest reduced genetic variability in Andean cat populations, supporting the need for conservation measures.

Six postgraduate students (1 PhD, 1 MSc and 3 Undergraduates) are currently working with the project, collecting field data and providing regular outputs to inform the GIS habitat suitability model we are working on based on the relationships between carnivores and their prey in the High Andes ecosystem. Camera trapping data are being analysed and the first estimates on population density of small cats in the High Andes should soon be available, based on capture

and recapture of individually identifiable individuals.

The Guide for Educators manual has reached some 20 schools of three provinces in northwestern Argentina, and nine no-governmental and governmental organizations. It has also been used for the training of local Education Officers in Argentina and Bolivia. In April we selected two 16-year-old students from Cusi Cusi secondary school as Local Education Officers, from those that had participated in one of our Educational visits some years earlier. They received a 9-day training based on our Guide for Educators. In May, Maria J. Merino held the second workshop for local educators in Argentina, attended by two representatives of the Administracion de Parques Nacionales, two local representatives of Jujuy Province's Ministry of Education, two school headteachers, five teachers, and our Education Officers. Following this workshop, awareness-raising activities have been mainly in the hands of the Education Officers and the High-Andes Educators Network. With them we have started education activities in a new village, presented our conservation project in a regional meeting of rural schools (attended by over 100 people) and reached more than 40 new school students at Cusi Cusi. Next November, we plan to carry out a new educational campaign in the region and provide training to two Education Officers from a different locality. In cooperation with Daniel Cossios (AGA - Peru) we are nearing completion of a storybook about the Andean cat for young children. In April-May a 3-day workshop provided training to 15 teachers from rural schools in Bolivia. These teachers have started working with environmental education tools (based on the Guide for Educators) and already completed 13 activities at the schools of Quetena Chico and Quetena Grande villages. Four public talks were delivered in three cities of the Second Administrative Region of Chile by project personnel.

A second tri-national workshop for protected area staff is planned for early December in Jujuy, Argentina. This small meeting aims to identify common interests and prepare the ground for a cross-border cooperation agreement to be submitted for signature by PA authorities in all three countries next year.

Magdalena Bennett from Chile visited Oxford for four weeks in June to work with WildCRU partners on a GIS-based model of potential Andean cat distribution using the transect data. This work is well advanced and has been presented in two conferences (below). Mauro Lucherini (project coordinator, Argentina) spent six weeks in Oxford analyzing data and writing in collaboration with WildCRU partners. He attended the Felid Biology and Conservation Conference at Oxford. A major output of this collaboration will be the completion of a chapter dedicated to the Andean cat in a new book on felids to be published by Oxford University Press (Biology and Conservation of Wild Felids, Macdonald D.W. and Loveridge A.J., Eds.). A scientific paper from our Chilean partners is in press in *Molecular Ecology*, and one on educational activities from the Argentine team is in press in *Tópicos en Educación Ambiental*.

Presentations of project outputs were given at the Society of Conservation Biology (Port Elizabeth, South Africa), Biology and Conservation of Wild Felids Conference (Oxford, UK), the 3rd Argentina-Chile Bi-national Meeting of Ecology (La Serena, Chile), and 6th Wildlife Conservation Network Expo (San Francisco, USA).

A nation-wide magazine for schoolteachers (*EGB3*) published a note featuring the progress of our educational component with local schools in Argentina. Three banners introducing our project were produced and displayed at the International Tourism Fair in March and at the meeting on Bolivian Protected Areas organized by SERNAP in September.

The fourth project newsletter will be published at the end of October, with a focus on the protected areas surrounding the triple frontier of Argentina, Bolivia and Chile, and the potential for greater cooperation across boundaries (www.wildcru.org/andeanecat).

