

July 2023 / June 2024
Annual Report





Our **vision** is to conserve Andean cat populations and protect their habitat throughout their range, across Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Perú, and to promote peaceful coexistence between them and native communities.

The **Andean cat** is the most endangered wild cat of the American continent. Fewer than 1,400 adult Andean cats are estimated to roam the vast, arid landscape of the high Andes and northern Patagonia. This little-known species is threatened mainly by habitat loss and degradation caused by extractive industries, such as gold mining and oil extraction. Andean cats are also hunted by herders because they are perceived as threats to their livestock. Given their low numbers, the loss of even a single individual can drive a local population to extinction, so our work is focused on reducing those losses by actively engaging local communities in the conservation of these endangered cats.



Collaborators in this report:

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Images: Cover: Bernardo Segura - Page 2: AGA - Page 4: Anthony Pino/AGA - Page 5: Colegio Alemán de San Felipe; Alonzo Salazar - Page 6 & 7: Anthony Pino/AGA - Page 8: Constanza Napolitano/AGA - Page 9: Diana Gomez/7a Escalada - Page 10 & 11: Bernardo Segura/AGA - Page 12: Anthony Pino/AGA - Page 13: Pucapaqocha/AGA/RNSAB - Page 14: Anthony Pino/AGA - Page 15: Silvina Enrietti; Cintia Tellaeche - Page 16 & 17: WCS Argentina - Page 18 & 19: Hunter Listwin - Page 20: Pucapaqocha/AGA/RNSAB - Page 22: Tommy Sheridan - Page 23: 7a Escalada/Uma Rumi - Page 24: María José Villegas - Page 25: Anthony Pino/AGA - Page 26: in collaboration with AGA: Pucapaqocha; Greenpeace Chile; Bernardo Segura; WCS Argentina.

Working in conservation can be challenging and deeply rewarding. The field demands perseverance, adaptability, and a clear vision of what we seek to protect. Over the past year, we have faced numerous obstacles, each of which has nurtured our growth, taught us valuable lessons, and brought us closer to our goal: safeguarding the Andean cat and its habitat. These challenges drive our creativity and innovation and sometimes really push us to think outside the box. We get creative and excited with new ideas that we believe will make a difference. But our schedules are not the same as those from the communities, and sometimes implementing these ideas takes a long time.

People from the communities need to get together and discuss every aspect of a new idea to decide if they will implement it, and if so, when, where, how, whom... These different speeds contrast with the sense of urgency that we all conservationists have. With time, we learned to understand the depth of commitment each community will have with the given word. They go through a profound analysis of new ideas, contrasting them to their cosmovision in a conscious or more intuitive way. This thorough analysis usually finds the exact spot where necessity and urgency are perfectly balanced, so the implementation of the new idea has the maximum chances of success. We are very lucky and honored to work with these communities, the true guardians of the fragile Andean ecosystem, because with their input we can develop conservation strategies that are good for all, sustainable, and successful.

This year, we have taken necessary steps to strengthen our collaborations with local communities, expanded our network of partner organizations and gained valuable insights into the needs of the Andean cat. However, we know the work is far from over; there is much to be done, and for this, we want to express our sincere thanks for your continued commitment to this cause. You are a critical part of our conservation programs, your support and valuable insight are mostly appreciated in our path of growth. Together, we can build a world where this unique wild cat can thrive in the wild, while still moving between planes.

Rocio Palacios - Director
Cintia Tellaeche - Programs Director



An unexpected visit

On a sunny morning of May, students and teachers rush to school just like any other day at the Escuela Alemana in San Felipe, Chile. That day, however, they were met with an unusual surprise: an Andean cat entered the school yard. While the wildlife authorities were getting there students, teachers

and the rest of the school community were amazed about the presence of the cat, and peaked through windows to see the cat napping under a tree. Eventually, the cat returned to its habitat under its own power, not too happy from being awakened from his nap.



Tribute to Mother Earth

This unexpected visit opened the door to new opportunities to raise awareness about this species. The school and AGA organized a very special talk that took place in the same school. During the talk, AGA member Bernardo Segura asked 'how many of you saw the Andean cat?' At this question, a sea of little hands went up. A unique scene, which would hardly be repeated anywhere else, not even at a meeting of members of the Alianza Gato Andino. The artist Loncho Salazar, also an AGA member, designed and painted a wonderful mural at the school that now marks an unforgettable moment for the whole school community.

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Murals are a wonderful conservation tool, and they are often more important to remind commu-

nities that the Andean cat is present, even if they do not see it. The impressive mural 'Homenaje a la Pachamama' (Tribute to Mother Earth) in Arequipa, Peru is located at the Mirador de Yanahuara, one of the most iconic and touristic places in the city. This 645 square feet mural is the first in Peru dedicated to the Andean cat and its habitat, as well as the iconic species it coexists with. It was done as a collaboration between the Municipality of Yanahuara, the cooperative of artisans Pucapaqocha, the International School of Arequipa and coordinated by Anthony Pino, from AGA and volunteers Enzor Casella and Mariela Rojas. This art piece is raising awareness among the thousands of visitors and we expect that it will initiate conversations about the importance of conserving these ecosystems and species. Let's paint the world with Andean cats!





Crafting Coexistence in the Andes

A new day begins in the arid Andes and Vilma wakes up before the sun rises. Outside it's freezing, the sun struggles to appear from behind the mountains. She walks to the kitchen, wrapped in a blanket she knitted herself, and heats water to make tea. She prepares tortillas, a type of flatbread, and gets everything ready for her children to go to school. As soon as all is ready, she goes to visit her llamas.

This story repeats itself in thousands of homes in the vast territories where the Andean cat lives. Each new day symbolizes a fresh challenge in these arid lands, not just for humans but also for wildlife. Food sources are scarce, so livestock provides a tempting option for some native carnivores, creating a conflict that has been around for as long as human activities of this kind have existed. But there is one thing that has changed over time: how humans

understand and react to these conflicts. In the past, relationships with nature were built on a deeper understanding. When a puma killed livestock, the herder believed they were giving back to Pachamama (Mother Earth) a portion of what she provides for all living beings. Sadly, the strong influence of the Spanish conquest, globalization, and urban migration, have weakened these more organic relationships. As a result, conflicts have intensified, seriously affecting not just various carnivore species, but also the livelihoods of local people.

Vilma enjoys the daily walk through the marvelous Andes to meet with her llamas, but sometimes she finds a heartbreaking scenario when some of her animals have been killed by pumas. She is one of the artisans in the CATCrafts program and she relies on the fibers provided by her llamas to help support her family. Some losses are worse than others: reproductive males, pregnant females, or the highly appreciated black llamas that provide natural black wool, are the most challenging for their household economy. When these events started becoming more frequent Vilma approached AGA's experts, asking for help to prevent attacks without harming wildlife. The same situation occurs with artisans in other sites of the program, like Narda from Ayquina in Chile, or Juan from San Juan de Tarucani in Peru. Luckily in AGA our conservation programs work interconnected, so we start implementing conflict mitigation measures that are culturally appropriate to each community, sometimes helping them



expand their own strategies that end up being adopted by more herders. These strategies reduce their losses of livestock, making their lives easier in the challenging landscape, and facilitating their permanence on the Andes. These stories support AGA's view that harmonious coexistence is within reach. Your support not only improves the lives of Vilma, Narda, and Juan, but also the quality of life for all the wildlife inhabiting the vast Andean landscape.

Unlocking the Secrets of the Andean Cat: A Genetic Journey for Conservation

The Andean Cat Global Genetics Program is conducting interesting work and has made exciting progress. The Program objectives are to: (i) Complete the gaps across the species range, (ii) Assess connectivity among populations, (iii) Identify conservation units. We have collected samples from across the species range, including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru. Samples include mostly noninvasively collected feces, but also pelts from Andean local communities and road kills. Andean cat samples are very difficult to obtain: Only 2 to 10% of fecal samples collected in the field belong to Andean cats after they are genetically identified. Our ongoing efforts have analyzed so far a total of 27 different Andean cat individuals. Preliminary results show three genetically distinct groups or conservation units across the range. Recently, the first Andean cat whole genome was sequenced (in



collaboration with Dr. Eduardo Eizirik and Dr. Jonas Lescroart, University of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil). This genomic study found that the Andean cat has the lowest genomic diversity of the *Leopardus* genus, harboring 10 times less genetic variation than the most diverse species evaluated, the ocelot. The Andean cat's extremely low genetic diversity is comparable to that of the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*). Using all gathered information, our ultimate goal is to design evidence-based conservation strategies for the long-term survival of the Andean cat.



Acknowledgements: We are very grateful for the valuable support of the Jon Ayers Foundation.



If you want to know more find the complete article by scanning the following QR code

[Link here](#)

Reference genomic study: Lescroart, J., Bonilla-Sánchez, A., Napolitano, C., Buitrago-Torres, D. L., Ramírez-Chaves, H. E., Pulido-Santacruz, P. and Eizirik, E. 2023. Extensive phylogenomic discordance and the complex evolutionary history of the Neotropical cat genus *Leopardus*. *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 40(12), msad255.

When the snow melts

It is April, and at 4 am Bernardo is adjusting his backpack. After a short drive, he sets off on a three-hour highly-technical walk. The air is cold, the slope is steep, but his steps are steady. He

knows these are the last camera traps installed until mid to late September when the snow, which makes the place inaccessible, melts. During the winter months, he just must wait.



From the balcony of his apartment, with a majestic view of the mountain, Bernardo spends time with his daughter Valentina, who he calls “Tina”. At only six years old, Tina is an Andean cat expert. She is not just able to differentiate Andean and pampas cats, she can also recognize individual cats from her dad’s study site. She dreams of going to the field with her dad to install her camera trap that she has decorated with cats and hearts, but she understands she must wait. During the winter she helps dad review videos from the previous season, and together they spend long hours imagining what the cats are doing when they look at the mountains.

Finally, September is back, and the snow has melted. The sun casts long shadows on the rocks as Bernardo holds one of the camera traps. He does a quick review of the videos and gets happily surprised to see that the female Andean cat who had two kittens in the last two years, is now accompanied by a new little one. He knows this cat and feels grateful and honored to be able to witness her life. He feels a connection with her. When he lifts his head and sees the city down below, he thinks of his amazing daughter, who is anxiously waiting for him at home to share the news about their beloved Andean cats. At that moment he decided the best way to honor them both: the cat will be named “Tina, la gata andina”.



Hananpacha, the world above

For traditional Andean cultures, the world has three planes, each with a guardian. The upper plane, *Hananpacha*, is the residence of the Gods such as '*Inti*' (Sun), and the Andean condor acts as guardian. The middle plane, *Kaipacha*, is the world of mortals always protected by the puma. The lower plane, *Ukupacha*, is where hidden beings thrive and has the serpent as its protector. In this cosmovision the mountains, or *Apus* in Quechua language, are revered as living beings. Mountains are immense and powerful, and are also the source of watercourses that provide life in their wake. But perhaps the most important aspect is that their summits touch the sky, establishing a contact between *Kaipacha* and



[Link here](#)



Scan to see what we found.



the sacred *Hananpacha*, providing a path between mortals and their divinities, a path that is traversed by the *Osqollo*, the sacred Andean cat.

This cosmovision has been evolving and adapting to recent times, but when working with local communities there are still glimpses of divinity. As an example, when we visit the artisans from Pucapaqocha Cooperative in Peru, who are part of the CATCrafts program, we are invited to be part of a small ritual of intentions that we share with the *Apus* before starting field work. These same artisans decided to invest the conservation funds obtained through the sale of their crafts in camera traps to install around their community. These tools, which never get tired and are neither hungry nor thirsty, witnessed hundreds of sunrises, nights of full moon, dense fog that was an impenetrable blanket to the infrared light, white quiet landscapes after sudden snowfalls, or Mars-looking red sunsets. A mother viscacha was seen desperately searching for her young for three days, until she found it. A puma marked its territory. Foxes stopped to smell for prey, pampas cats smelled the camera, a whole family of pumas walked by and a bunch of vicuñas, rodents and Andean parakeets were feasting on yareta flowers, the cushion-shaped plant that is characteristic in the high Andes.



And of course, there are Andean cats. Two cats live around the community, and the cameras recorded them in their daily lives. On two occasions, they were carrying their prey. Vizcachas are heavier than how they look, and you can hear the rocks creaking under both weights added together when the cats take the rodent to a safe spot for consumption. Although their feline faces cannot smile, you can sense their satisfaction at being alive for another day. The women of Pucapaqocha were thrilled when they saw the videos of the cats. They sensed their presence, but these cats are so hard to see that most of them never had seen them

in the wild. Their faces lit up when the cat appeared on the videos. They laughed and empathized when the cats were dragging their prey. Their joy was palpable, and it went beyond the images themselves, there was a sense of awe of being able to witness the intimate life of the sacred *Osqollo* and being able to empathize with the hard work required to survive. Being witness to this magical moment of connection between these women and their natural world made it easy to believe that *Hanapacha* still exists on the peak of the Andes, where the mythical Andean cat is still surviving in a world dominated by humans.



Reporter Kids

At the end of 2022, AGA's Educational Program incorporated photography as an innovative medium in education, through a partnership with the project Niños Reporteros (Kids Reporters) from LATINPHOTO.org. Under the masterful direction of Silvina Enrietti (a.k.a "Nil") the exercise for the kids was to think about their environment from the perspective of a photographer, who puts nature as the protagonist. This approach proposes a change in how kids learn, making them the directors of their own educational process through the storytelling of their experiences.

This project was implemented at the school No. 131 in Lagunillas del Farallón, in the Province of Jujuy, Argentina. Activities were co-created with teachers, developing fun, enriching, and at the same time challenging plans. By the end of the year we planned a visit to the natural lagoon near town, the same one the kids see everyday. A huge challenge to take 40 kids, from 6 to 12 years old to this open space! As soon as we arrived, something incredible happened. The children organized themselves into groups and began observing every small detail of the ecosystem. They took pictures with the cameras of the project, some you can see accompanying this note. But the most exciting part was to watch them be amazed by each minute detail, from an insect to bird nests. This project transformed their own reality, making their natural surroundings more exciting and interesting by making them the directors and storytellers.

[Link here](#)



***If you'd like to see more,
watch a video!***

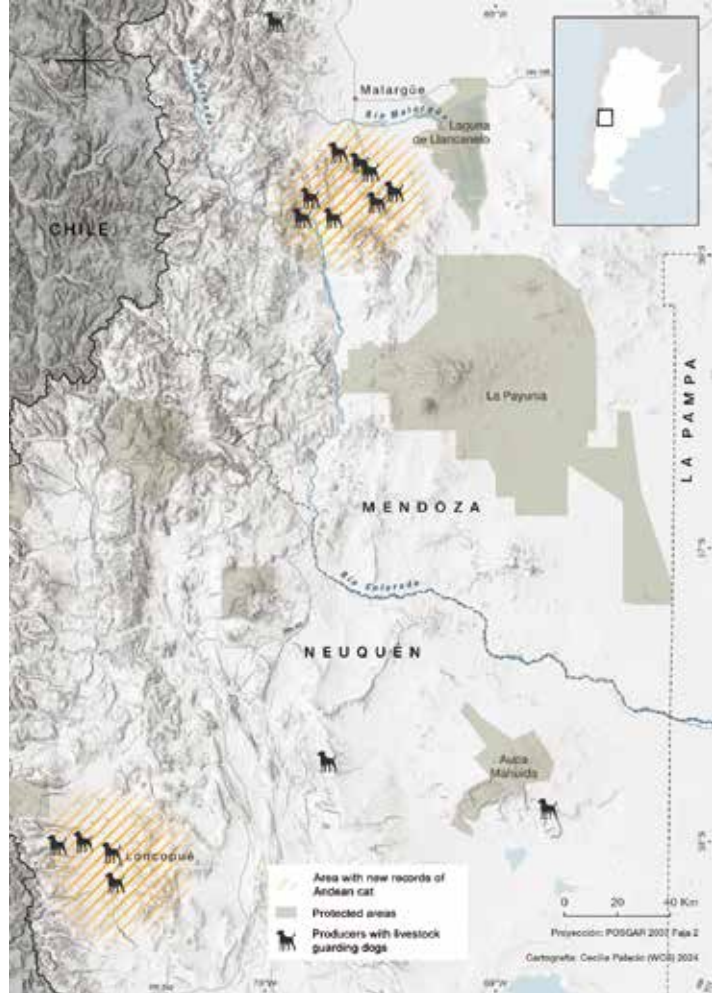
Equilibrium, the role of Patagonia's protectors



“Strong”, “bold, and “resilient” are probably the words that come to mind when you first hear about Livestock Guarding Dogs (LGD). Perhaps, they also conjure up images of imminent and bloody confrontations with native carnivores such as pumas and foxes, where LGD are victorious. However, these confrontations are far from reality. The simple presence of the LGD in the herd usually acts as a deterrent to carnivores and avoids

predation. Direct encounters between LGD and wild carnivores are extremely rare, as the dogs focus on guarding their herd, and never wander far because they are fed by the herders. Dogs mark their territory, as all carnivores do, and this practice clearly establishes the boundaries where the herd moves. Pumas and foxes interpret these signals wisely and stay away from these protected herds, avoiding conflict.

Thanks to the cooperation between AGA, WCS Argentina and EUKANUBA Argentina, in the 2023-2024 season, 11 new Livestock Guarding Dogs have been added to the 13 already active in previous years. These 24 dogs are not just protecting livestock, but making lives easier for 24 families of herders in Patagonia Argentina. The presence of Andean cats and pumas have been confirmed where LGD are active, supporting the effectiveness of this methodology to protect livestock without negatively affecting wildlife.



Pawsitive thoughts

It's the middle of the night, outside it's freezing and the alarm goes off after less than three hours of sleep. Tired growls arise from the other room, but everyone gets up to go check the live traps to see if a fox has been captured. One objective of this project, done in collaboration with Dr. Sophia Di Cataldo from the Argentinean Council of Science and Technology, is to analyze disease prevalence in both domestic and wild carnivores, particularly culpeo foxes and domestic dogs. For this, the team installed live traps and lured them

with chicken, to attract culpeo foxes. During the last revision of the night there are no captures. The team disables the traps during the day, and starts doing all the activities required to comply with the second objective of the project: to visit local herders in Andean cat habitat providing health services to their dogs and cats. These include vaccines, anti worming and anti fleas medicines and the occasional vet consultation. This last day of the field campaign, the sanitary department of the Municipality of Malargüe will





be doing a neutering and spaying campaign, and AGA's truck will be in service to move dogs and cats animals from herders that are far away from town. During the afternoon, a talk is scheduled in the local high school, to talk about responsible ownership.

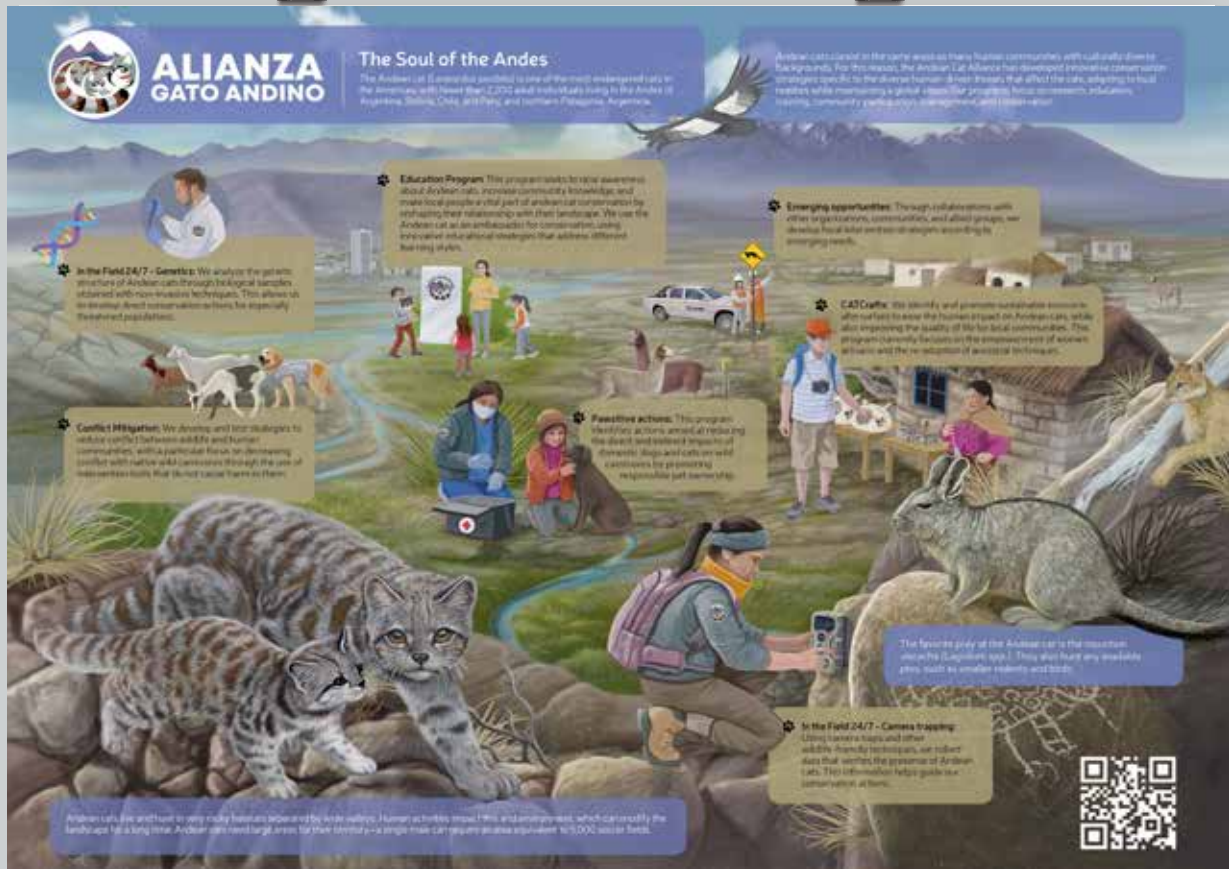
The final goal of this whole program is to increase responsible ownership of pets to reduce encounters of domestic carnivores with wildlife, diminishing potential transmission of disease and direct attacks on native species. Domestic dogs and cats are an increasing conservation concern in South America. Pets that don't have proper care affect not just wildlife, but also the herders' livelihoods, because of livestock attacks. Families are affected too, because of the potential of disease transmission to the owners of the dogs and cats that roam free.

To face this massive challenge, first, we need to learn from others. We had discussions with other Partners from WCN to learn from their experiences. Second, we need to give to others, and that is why we provide these health services to domestic dogs and cats from herders, and are planning education activities that specially address this threat. Finally, we need to work with others, and that is when collaborations become indispensable. Agreements with local governments and social organizations are the foundations for this to be able to be sustained in the long term. Public perception and changes in social behavior are slow, but they do happen. We have seen them occurring during these previous years, and they give us hope for a better future. For the period reported here, we have already vaccinated over 160 dogs and cats, in two different sites, and we believe that, with a Pawsitive attitude and persistence, these changes will happen.

Find out how many Andean
cat individuals there are

Let's play!





How to reinvent a tryptic

Resources for conservation are scarce, so we are always struggling to create the most effective multi-purpose tools. When it was time for AGA to create a new tryptic, the goal was not just to show the conservation programs but also how they interact and work together. It also needed to be appealing, a visual art piece that people would enjoy keeping. Finally, it needed to have a clear image of an Andean cat, with all its characteristics. Here we present you with the Andean cat poster, that AGA member Alonso Salazar designed and that is already being used in fieldwork.

Adapting strategies

AGA is a groundbreaking organization. From the first conservation plan for the species to the latest Strategic Plan, we approached conservation from an organized and coordinated perspective. In the last ten years AGA's conservation programs have been growing so fast that the existing Strategic Plan

lost relevance, and is in need of an urgent review. With this goal in mind, and the support of WCN, AGA members met in Buenos Aires in April of 2024 to start developing a more tactical approach to conservation in this changing scenario. A blueprint will be ready soon!





Under the storm, in search of the Andean cat in Pitumarca.

In the village of Pitumarca, Cusco it's sunny and quiet. Just 4 miles up the mountain, Diana and the team take shelter under a rocky outcrop to protect themselves from rain and hail. It is the last day of a week-long journey installing camera traps in the native community of Chacco Huayllasca. Members from the rock climbing organizations 7ma Escalada and Uma Rumi, people from the community, and volunteers from the Vertebrate Research Center joined AGA to install these traps. As everyone waits for the storm to pass, they joke and talk about finding the Andean cat, which would lead to implementing more conservation programs in the area. Suddenly, as quickly as the storm began, it was over, signaling that it was time to install the last cameras. The team will meet again in November to recover the cameras, maybe not under the same rock, but with the same desire: to find the elusive Andean cat in this area and work with the community for its conservation.

Chilean Wildlife Day

In Chile, the Jane Goodall's Institute celebrates Chilean Wildlife Day. This is an occasion where people get together to celebrate Chilean fauna and share time with conservationists and social organizations. In 2016, the Andean cat was the ambassador animal of the event, and from that moment on we have always been an active part of the celebration. In 2023 the ambassador species was the colocolo opossum (*Dromiciops gliroides*) and the Andean cat was there to celebrate diversity!



Educational Kit

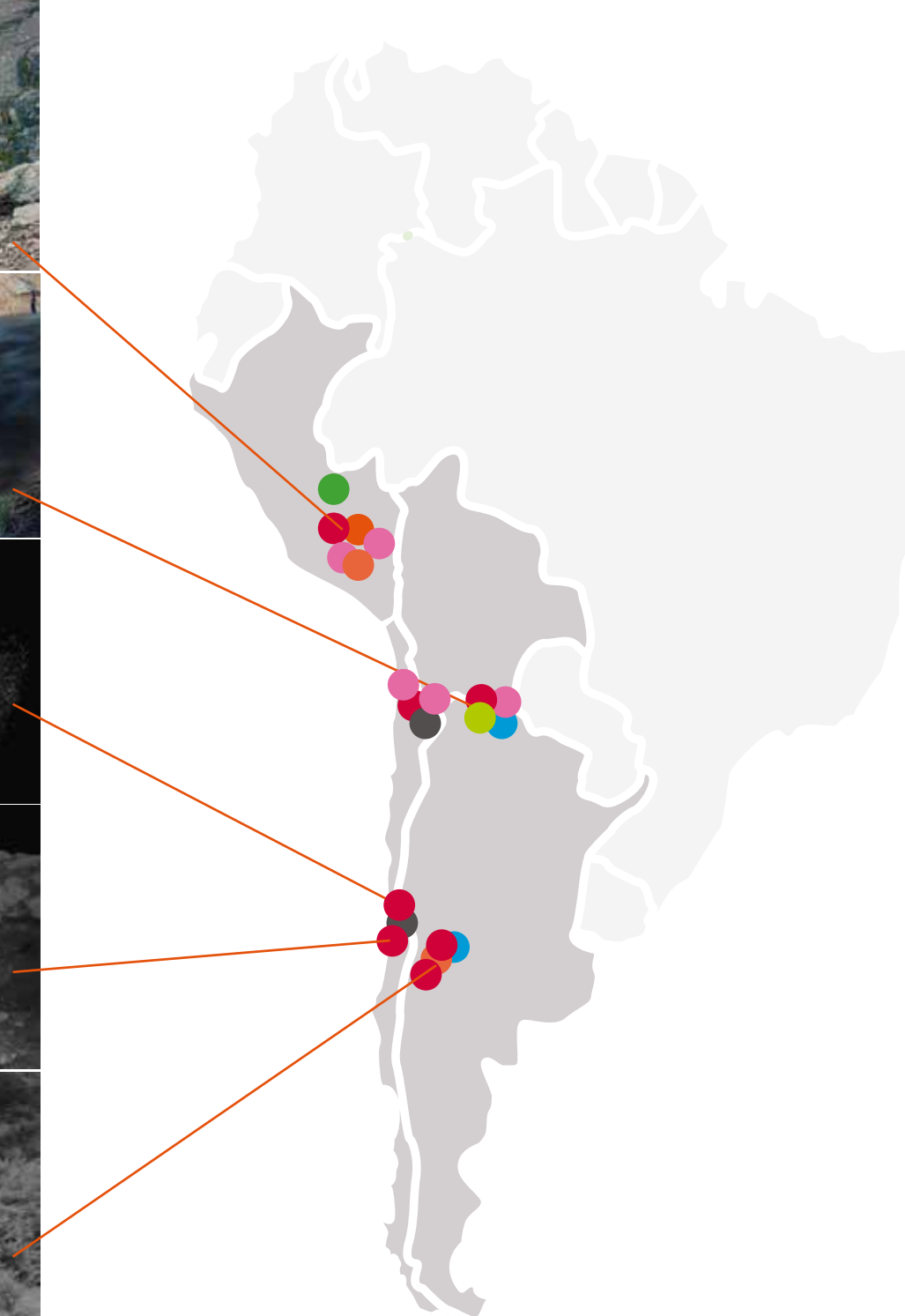
There is a final draft of the educational kit, written by Gabriela Aguirre and Daniela Ulloa, coordinators of the Education Program. This initial version will be tested and edited before final printing during the next period. We want to celebrate and honor our colleagues and friends from Proyecto Titi who shared their experiences and lessons learned, making this a more effective tool that will make a huge difference for Andean cat conservation in all its distribution. More news coming!



Fireworks at work

Fireworks are of increasing concern worldwide, not just because of the risk of fires, but also because of how noise affects more sensitive beings. To our surprise, during fieldwork we learned that this noise can benefit coexistence with wildlife. Herders in southern Peru use fireworks to chase pumas away, reducing threats to livestock. When the herder believes a puma is closing in to the corral, they light up some noisy fireworks chasing the animal away without any direct confrontation. At first, this practice surprised our teams, but we quickly learned to support it because it was an easy -even when loud- way to keep everyone alive and happy.







New cats recorded this period

Pawsitive actions



CATCrafts

In the field 24/7



Conflict Mitigation program



Education program



Permanent monitoring

Where we Work



7 + 2 New Andean cats detected



+100 Vaccinated dogs and cats.



+30,000 mi traveled in the field.



11 + 13 Livestock Guardian Dogs protecting argentine patagonia.



72 fireworks + **8** foxligths



50 craftswomen.



40 Child reporters.

Key Persons List Andean Cat Alliance 2023 - 2024

General Coordination

Director: **Rocío Palacios**

Programs director: **Cintia Tellaeche**

Administrative director: **Lilian Villalba**

Communications director: **Anthony Pino**

Conflict Mitigation Program

Interim Coordinators

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Peruvian Field Officer: **Anthony Pino**

CATCrafts Program

General Coordinator: **Mauro Lucherini**

Argentinean Field Officer: **Silvina Enrietti**

Chilean Field Officer: **Gonzalo Cruz**

Peruvian Field Officer: **Anthony Pino**

Education Program

Co-Coordinators: **Gabriela Aguirre &**

Daniela Ulloa

Children Reporters Field Officer: **Silvina Enrietti**

24/7 In the field Program

Global Genetics Program

Coordinator: **Constanza Napolitano**

Camera Trapping Program Coordinator:

Juan Reppucci

Chilean Protected Area Project Coordinator:

Cristian Sepulveda

Pawsitive Actions

Interim Coordinators & Argentinean Field Officers

Rocio Palacios & Cintia Tellaeche

Country Focal Points:

Argentina: **Juan Reppucci**

Bolivia: **Gabriela Aguirre**

Chile: **Nicolás Lagos & Gonzalo Cruz**

Perú: **Dennis Huisa**

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