

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2008)

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 2008</i>
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	<i>HYR 3</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).

Overall the project's research, educational and networking activities have progressed according to the timetable. The timescale slipped, however, for certain outputs and we have been granted an extension for project completion until April 2009.

The collection of ecological data is completed, with the exception of the final field campaign in Argentina that culminates in December. The common database now includes data from a total 241 standard transects and over 100 genetically identified carnivore faecal samples, including the first records of Andean cats for Eduardo Avaroa Reserve in Bolivia. The combined analysis of this dataset is in progress, and the visit by Magdalena Bennett (GIS analyst from Chile) to Oxford in October, contributed to the substantial progress made on habitat suitability models for carnivores and prey in the tri-national area. The student projects are either finalized (1 graduation thesis from Bolivia) or near completion (2 from Chile, 1 from Bolivia, and part of a PhD thesis from Argentina). Camera trapping results from Argentina are providing the first estimate of population density for small cats in High Andean regions, and these will soon be applied to calibrating the standard transect method for that study area.

Benefiting from their participations in this project, two members of the team qualified for scholarships this year. Juan Reppucci received field training in Mongolia by the Snow Leopard Trust, and theoretical training at the US Geological Service research centre of Patuxent in USA; Magdalena Bennett is starting a Masters in Biodiversity, Conservation and Evolution in the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain.

The project continues to stimulate networking within AGA, leading to new projects in the areas of population genetics of Pampas and Andean cats; temporal segregation between the niches of High Andes carnivores; and the mitigation of 'off-road' tourism in the tri-national area. Related publications include a paper in press in *Mastozoología Neotropical* (abundance estimates of Andean cat's main prey) and four other submitted manuscripts.

Awareness and educational campaigns continued in all countries. In Argentina these are now mainly conducted by people from the local communities, benefited from the previous training programmes for rural school teachers and Local Community Officers. Project staff continues

providing advice and monitoring progress, and recently visited three villages where Education Officers are working. The book *Stories for Children of the High Andes*, published in 2007 by Daniel Cossío (AGA Peru) and Maria Jose Merino (project Education Coordinator) was extensively used for the educational activities (currently being reprinted). In Bolivia a new training programme on environmental education applied the Guide for Educators produced by this project and the technique called “Ecology Education in the Schoolyard”. This consisted of 3-days long workshops to 9 teachers in schools in two localities of the Eduardo Avaroa Reserve, followed by game activities with children on a second visit, and an evaluation of progresses on a third visit to be carried out soon. The same technique was used to raise conservation awareness among reserve rangers, and to strengthen their capacity for independent research, during 3-day workshops completed in March and evaluated in June, when 16 rangers shared and discussed their projects’ results. In Chile the education team visited 11 schools, where presentations on the conservation value of High Andes resources reached to 248 students; it organized a training workshop with 12 park rangers from CONAF (the national agency administering protected areas) in San Pedro de Atacama in August; and conducted dissemination talks to 15 tourist guides in The Explora Hotel in September.

Communication and dissemination activities, targeted to the broader public and partners, included the project’s Newsletter #6, focused on conservation education and capacity building (www.wildcru.org/andeanecat); news of the project broadcasted on a local radio in Bolivia; two presentations about the project and its outputs on a National Conference on Biodiversity Conservation in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and another in the 7th Wildlife Conservation Network Expo in San Francisco, USA; and an article published on a tourism magazine in Argentina about the problem of off- road traffic in the tri-national region.

In August, Claudio Sillero travelled to Argentina and Chile to meet national and regional authorities of Protected Areas and Wildlife Conservation agencies. The objective of the visit was to establish a direct rapport with the government representatives and local NGO’s that participated of two previous international workshops for protected areas staff and leaders. With this visit the project leader contributed to create a consensus about the importance of an agreement of cooperation between managers of the protected areas that converge in the triple frontier. We are progressing on the organizing of a final meeting, to be held in Tilcara, Argentina, on December 10th, when we expect PA authorities to sign a framework for cross-border cooperation, a draft of which project members are currently discussing with authorities from their respective countries. Participants include representatives from Eduardo Avaroa Reserve, the Protected Areas National Service from Bolivia (SERNAP), the National Forest Corporation of Chile (CONAF), the Administration of National Parks from Argentina (APN); the Regional Office of Natural Resources and the Environment from Jujuy, Argentina, and the High Andes Flamingo Conservation Group (GCFA).

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The progress of two graduation theses has been unexpectedly slowed down due to problems with DNA contamination of the faecal samples collected in the field.

Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

No

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: no

Changes to the project schedule/workplan:

Project extension to 31 March 2009 already granted by the DI Secretariat.

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Not required at this stage.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with the Darwin Secretariat directly.

Please send your **completed form email** to Eilidh Young, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme at Darwin-Projects@ectf-ed.org.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 14-075 Darwin Half Year Report**