

## **Dra. Constanza Napolitano / In the Field 24/7, Genetics Program Coordinator**

Since she was a little girl she was attracted by nature, she liked to play with organisms from the sea or the mountains in family walks through Chile. Coming from a family of human doctors, she had to hold fast to her position of studying nature and animals, and she did.

During university, she worked on the reintroduction project of the Andean condor, passionate about the Andes mountain range. But when she learned about the Andean cat, the mysterious feline that lived in Chile but of which nothing was known, she immediately decided to do her undergraduate thesis on this species to contribute to its knowledge.

She spent many months in the Chilean altiplano, collecting faeces from latrines in rock caves, with an extreme climate and more than 3,500 meters above sea level. Back in Santiago, in the laboratory she extracted DNA from the faeces to identify the species of origin through genetic sequences. She found that the latrines were shared by different high Andean carnivores, describing their diet and spatial distribution. This first research experience cemented in her a deep interest in science and conservation, specializing in genetics and conservation of native felids in Chile.

Constanza has been a member of Alianza Gato Andino since 2004, where she currently coordinates the Global Genetics Project, whose objective is to fill information gaps in its distribution, and identify Management Units for Conservation. In 2016, she participated as advisor to the core group of the National Conservation Plan of the Andean Cat in Chile, an initiative led by CONAF.

Constanza is a Veterinary Doctor and Doctor of Science from the University of Chile, and has received the Jóvenes Talentos (Chile, 2011) and Emerging Leaders in the Americas (Canada,

2010) awards. She is a member of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group. She is currently an associate professor at the Department of Biological Sciences and Biodiversity, at Universidad de Los Lagos in Osorno, southern Chile, and a researcher at the Institute of Ecology and Biodiversity, Faculty of Sciences, University of Chile in Santiago.