



# Annual Report

20 years unraveling the mysteries  
of the Andean cat



*July 2019 / June 2020*



Rocio Palacios  
Andean Cat Alliance General Coordinator



During this year we all went through moments of despair. Sometimes these moments were linked to situations that we, or our loved ones, went through; but other times despair was related to projected situations, "maybes". We have all been forced to stop and contemplate our own fragility, putting things in a new perspective. We revalorize things that we took for granted like travelling, getting a coffee with a friend or going to a theatre.

Like an unexpected twist in a novel that makes us valorize the story more, this pandemic made us cherish life more. A daily hug from a loved one, our cat's purr at night or the wet nose of our dog waking us

up in the morning. If we are lucky, we would have realized by now that sharing our life is what makes it memorable.

When we speak about coexistence, the concept always has a strong projection into the future, but it really is something that is built in the present. Coexistence is not always easy, but is what makes life possible, and is what we work for in the Andean Cat Alliance: we want the Andean cat to thrive, coexisting with other wildlife and human communities.

Thanks for sharing our vision and supporting AGA during this year of special need. We wish you a happy coexistence!

### **Collaborators in this report:**

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**Images:** cover image: Seeking the Andean Cat/ AGA / Page 2: AGA / Page 4: J. Reppucci - A. Madrid - G. Llerena / Page 6: J. Reppucci / Page 7: S. Kennerknecht / Page 8: M.J. Bolgeri / Page 9: M.J. Bolgeri / Page 10: M.J. Bolgeri / Page 11: O. Torrico-WCS / Page 12: O. Torrico-WCS. Page 13: N. Lagos - J. Reppucci / Page 15: M. Ratner – M. Ogburn. / Page 16: Seeking the Andean Cat - C. Sepúlveda / Page 17: AGA/R.N. Villavicencio – R. Palacios / Page 18: J. Constanzo / Page 19: A. Pino Charaja / Page 20: Seeking the Andean Cat/AGA



AGA  
= 20 YEARS =





20 years has passed since a small group of visionaries decided to start working together across borders, to protect a mysterious and rare small cat that nobody knew about. On November 7th, 2019, the Andean Cat Alliance celebrated its 20th anniversary revisiting all the achievements of this long and bumpy road. Different activities were organized for community awareness in all countries, talks in universities and zoos, educational workshops, photography expositions, community gatherings, and more.




New AGA's logo. With the aid of our friends and supporters we updated AGA's logo. This new design was created by our friend Alonso Salazar "Loncho" and represents the mountains protecting a mother, who, in turn, wraps her tail safeguarding her offspring. This image represents our vision of hope about the permanence of the species in the landscape, the intrinsic relationship with the mountains and our role as guardians of this mysterious cat.



# Climate change and conservation

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Climate change is affecting the planet in the most diverse ways. Andean cat habitat in general has low precipitation and is considered dry, with extreme temperatures. These characteristics will be increased by effects of climate change. Glaciers are melting, wetlands are going dry, and prey colonies are disappearing. The scarce wetlands appear as biodiversity hotspots, and each one that disappears creates a huge empty space that changes predator-prey balance, translating in the former having to roam further to find the latter. This, in turn, affects the whole population structure and reduces their survival chances. There are still gaps in the distribution of the Andean cat that prevent us from understanding how this species uses the space, so it is not possible to assess how the effects of climate change impact this species and its prey.





Last year we started the program “In the Field 24/7” that aims to fill those distribution gaps. This is a highly ambitious program that takes advantage of AGA’s strengths and expertise and we expect it will generate “information that will allow us to palliate climate change impacts”. We are surveying key locations looking for carnivore signs, using a combination of techniques to increase the chances of finding the Andean cat. An additional positive aspect of this program is that thanks to the camera traps we obtained new Andean cat records in northern Patagonia, even under lockdown!



# “The guardian of dreams”

By Cintia Tellaeché

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As biologists we are used to measuring things with numbers. It's the way we do it most of the time. We count how many cats we detect with our camera traps, and one more or one less means something to us. We count how many scats we collect, with the more being the merrier because they help us understand the diet of these cats and their genetic diversity. But when you work with people, it is not possible to measure success in numbers, so you have to develop a new gauge of success for your program.

When you drive to a remote place and talk with a family that primarily lives alone and spends all day taking care of their livestock, you forget about the numbers and start to think from the heart. These people reflect the strength and rigidity of the rural landscapes that they live in. They usually avoid showing their feelings, but with our traditional Argentinian “mate” as an icebreaker, we can usually create a friendly and trustworthy space to build relationships. “Mate” is a powerful drink, not because of





the caffeine, but because of the sense of communion it creates as it passes from one hand to another. If you feel that something is worrying the other person, you usually drink a few “mates” before asking about it.

This story begins as almost all stories in Argentina begin: with one person putting the kettle in the fire to heat water for “mate”.

María José, who goes by “Maco,” is the Conflict Mitigation field Program coordinator in Argentina. She has a guard dog breeding center in her own house and she is highly committed to the program. Part of her job is to periodically visit the homes where the dogs have been working, to check on them and assess if they are behaving as expected, accompanying the herders in the final process of dog training. When she arrived at one of the homes, Marta received her by putting the kettle on the firepit and moving the ashes to heat the water, and went to look for her husband Martín, who was out with the livestock. As soon as they came back, Maco could feel that something was wrong. She thought the dog named Nehuen might have been causing some mischief. Martín’s eyes looked tired and deeply sad, but Maco knew she should wait, and after several “mates” Martín finally told her that Nehuen had died unexpectedly, possibly due to some trauma he sustained in the field.



Guard dogs are not house pets, they are working dogs and they don't develop the kind of relationship we perceive as "normal" with their owners, so it was surprising how deeply affected Martín was. He explained that for the first time in his hard - working life, he and Marta could sleep through the night, with Nehuen guarding their livestock 24/7. Concern now weighed heavily on their chests as their goats were again susceptible to predator attacks.

This story showed us that dogs are not just numbers, and even "1" can mean a lot more than it appears. Nehuen was so much more than a "1" to Marta and Martín because he represented peace of mind and a full night's sleep.

Thanks to the constant support of our donors and friends, Maco could guarantee to Martín and Marta that when the next litter of puppies arrives, one of them will be theirs.







## Green Gold Program

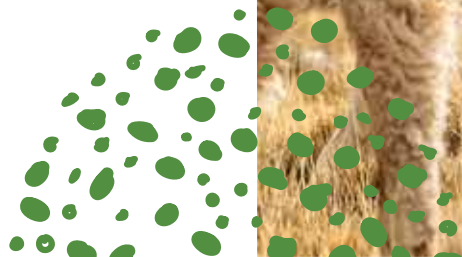
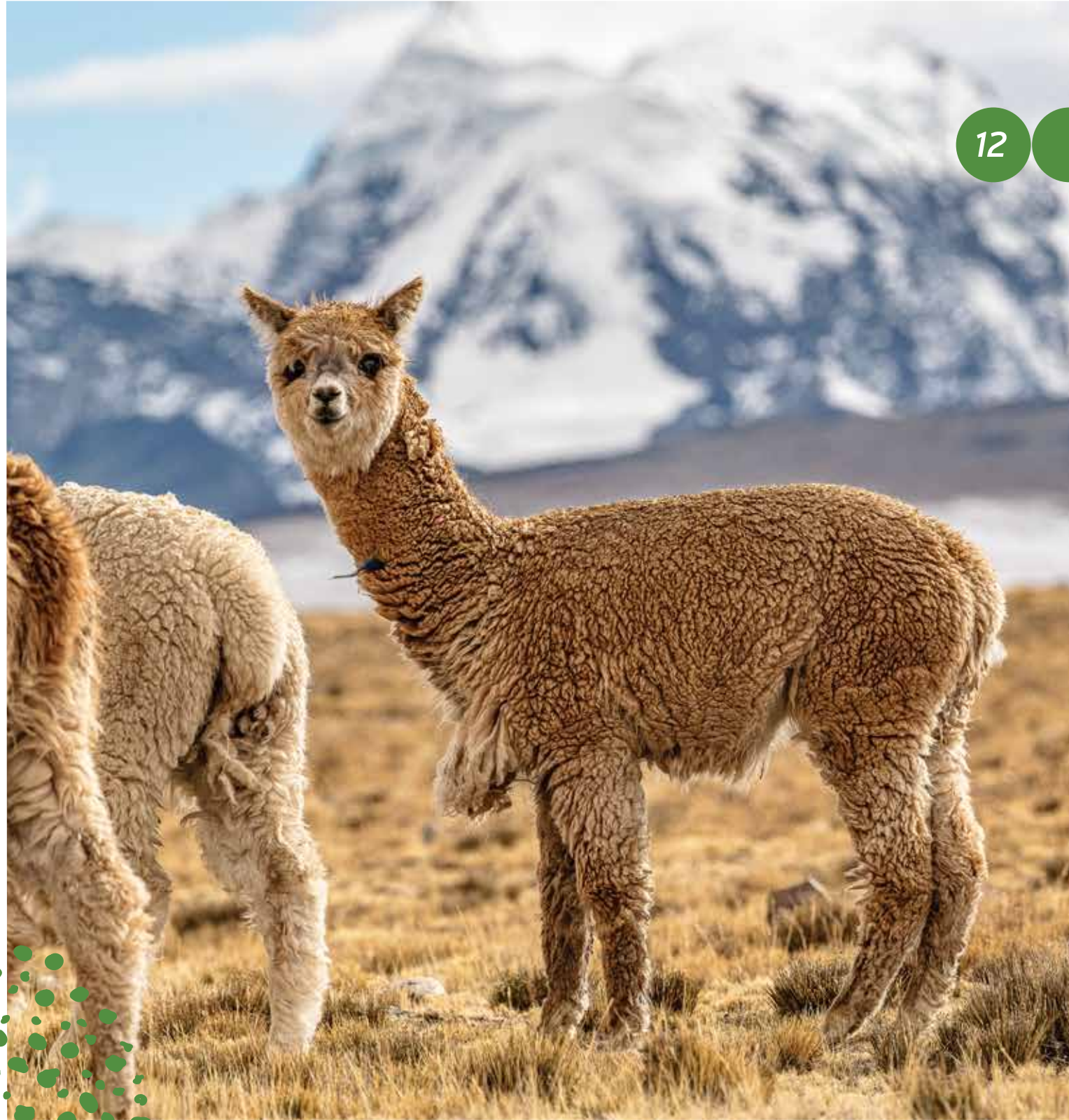
Remigio Mendo is a miner and a local reference in the Golden Eagles Traditional Gold Mining Cooperative in Bolivia. This Cooperative has been working really hard for making their activities environmentally friendly, and as part of this process they selected seven wildlife species as their flagships for conservation. Luckily for us, one of this species was the Andean cat, so we had the honor to meet people like Remigio that after several visits to the field started sharing some of their ancestral knowledge.

Gabriela, the Green Gold Program initial coordinator, had the opportunity to ask what “nature” means to him, and his answer was inspiring: “for me It is a privilege to live in this area because we have the opportunity to coexist with wild animals, we respect them and we understand that nature gives us the air to live, the vegetation; nature generates positive



energy, living energy,  
in short, nature gives  
us life”

His words, embellished  
with the magnificent  
Andes as background,  
that make us feel not  
more or less than the  
rocks or the stars, pro-  
vide context to all that  
we work for. Thanks  
Remigio, and to each  
one of the people from  
the communities that  
are in the front line of  
conservation.





- Catcrafts \_\_\_\_\_



# New visions

Lorena and Magdalena are 25 and 45 years old, respectively. A common day in their lives includes the attention to their kids and husbands, as well as taking care of the house and animals. Their mothers and grandmothers did the same and women are usually the ones who stay closest to the village and their families in the remote village of Lagunillas, a town immersed in the middle of the Andes that seems to have been forgotten by time.

When Lorena and Magdalena started doing felted handcrafts as members of the CATcrafts program, they did it thinking that it would be good to have an additional family income. They never thought that they would be chosen by the same group of artisans to represent Argentina in the bi-national meeting that took place in Chile in November 2018. They were awed by the travelling experience. The trip was full of “first times”: first time to travel to another country, first time of sharing their knowledge and techniques with other artisans, even first time on an escalator!

Lorena and Magdalena's lives changed after this trip. They not only learned new techniques to share with the other women from their community, they also had a new vision of the world and their place in it. They transmitted this vision through stories that were eye openers to the other women in the community, who discovered that preserving the Andean cat through their handcrafts opens a lot of unexpected doors.





## Donor reception

In September 2019 our friend and supporter Kristine Karnos organized a reception for the Andean Cat Alliance. This was a fantastic event to attract new cat conservation enthusiasts from the San Francisco South Bay. Kristine went above and beyond taking care of every single detail, and with a team of volunteers they created a wonderful event! We had a healthy and yummy snack table thanks to Sherree Curtiss, with drinks provided by Koli Boesch. Mike Bromberg and Armen Varteressian did a wonderful job in designing flyers and badges. Darci Brogan designed jewelry and Erin Salter donated creative cross-stitch to be sold for fundraising purposes. We even had two special guests, the wonderful cartoon characters “Andy and Viz” created by Marc Ratner, we expect to see more stories about them in the future!

It was truly a wonderful evening and the audience was thrilled with the presentation, as shown by all the questions they had afterwards, it was a nice conversation!

Kristine and her partner Jay are an inspiration to us all. This was her first fundraiser, but Kristine says it is wonderful when you realize how many talented people you know, and inspiring to see those talents brought together for a good cause. They felt they did a “small thing”, but it is as when we adopt a rescued pet: maybe it’s a small thing for ourselves, but is a life changing experience for the companion animal. Thanks so much for them, volunteers and attendees!

# Short news

🐾 Seeking the Andean cat, our allies working in creating a documentary about an Andean cat population in Chile, are working really hard to achieve their dreams. They received recognition for their efforts in the Adventure Film Festival, the Santiago Wild Film Festival 2020 and the documentary is one of the finalists in the 2020 Latin American Nature Festival.




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🐾 Another mystery has been unraveled! The Andean cat genome has been completely decoded, thanks to a collaboration of Dr. Constanza Napolitano with the specialists Dr. Eduardo Eizirik and Dr. Warren Johnson. This is a great step in planning for conservation that will help in preserving the low genetic diversity of the species.





 The Villaviciencio Private Reserve is a beautiful area in northern Patagonia, with a huge commitment to wildlife conservation. They have a team of park rangers that have been monitoring carnivores and their expertise was invaluable to locate the camera traps of the 24/7 program. With these cameras we recorded Andean cats again, after 11 years of no records! These images were so powerful that appeared in lots of national media in Argentina, creating national-scale awareness about the relevance of the species.

 During April 2020 all of our countries were “on hold” with different quarantines being implemented broadly. We were away from the field, but not inactive. Dr. Jim Sanderson from SWCCF capacity builded all AGA members in the utilization of Camera Sweet, the software he created for handling camera trap images with a special focus on small wildcats. He is not only a worldwide expert in the area, but also is a very generous educator, making the event fun and enjoyable. AGA counts with new knowledge that will allow us to organize information in more effective ways.



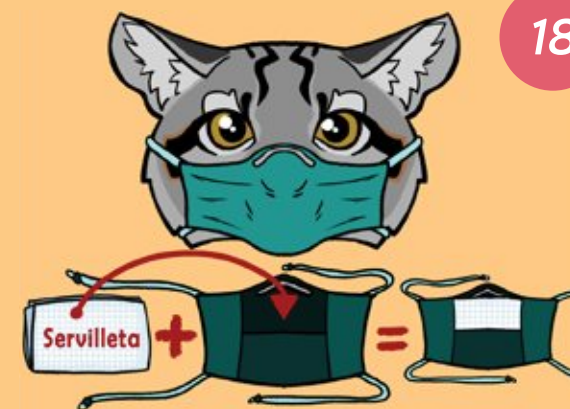
# COVID-19 and conservation: unexpected challenges.

2020 was a year that put our lives on hold. Is the first pandemic of this century, and just something that we never expected. We learnt about pandemics, we know they happened in the past never expecting to live through one, and without thinking twice about how it will affect our lives and the world dynamics in these hyper-connected times.

Isolated communities seem to be safe from these effects, but there is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration: how forgotten these communities are by local governments. Isolated communities don't have access to proper medical attention, and are the last ones to receive official aid. In short: if this contagious disease enters a community, the mortality rate will be at

its maximum because of the long distances to the closest cities and the lack of accessibility to vehicles that can transit the battered roads.

We realized early that we needed to prevent the disease from entering the communities, providing what they required to be safe. AGA showed its strength: people in all four countries working together to find solutions for each challenge, even when we were under complete lockdown. The first thing we did was contacting the communities to listen to their needs. We realized they were scared because they required supplies but were not confident to go to the cities to buy them. They were also confused, there was so much information in the media with mixed messages, that it made them feel vulnerable.



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EL VIRUS SE MUERE  
SI LAVAS BIEN TUS MANOS!







AGA members did quests of finding enough hand sanitizer and masks for communities in the Peruvian Andes and in central Chile, to a mission for developing creative ways to safely deliver masks, thermometers and other supplies for miners and their families in Bolivia. To complement all these efforts, an AGA team did a creative spree to develop specific flyers with clear, easy-to-follow safety recommendations. These flyers could be easily printed and were sent to local schools and community centers, the only locations with printers in the communities, to have them delivered to anybody that needed them.

These communities are the first line of conservation, not only for the Andean cat, but for the majestic Andean landscape. We are more than allies, we are friends.

Mother Theresa said once “the most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved”. In AGA we provided supplies and information to the communities, but the most important aspect of this process was to listen to them, helping to reduce fear making them feel less alone during this pandemic.

# Our team

General Coordinator: **Rocío Palacios**  
Administrative Coordinator: **Lilian Villalba**  
Communication Coordinator:  
**Cintia Tellaeche**

## ***CATcrafts Program***

General Coordinator: **Mauro Lucherini**  
Argentina Field Coordinator: **Cintia Tellaeche**  
Chile Field Coordinator: **Nicolás Lagos**  
Peru Field Coordinator: **Anthony Pino**

## ***Conflict Mitigation Program***

General Coordinator: **Rodrigo Villalobos**  
Argentina Field Coordinator:  
**María José Bolgeri**  
Chile Field Coordinator: **Cristian Sepúlveda**

## ***24/7 In the field Program***

Genetics Program Coordinator:  
**Constanza Napolitano**  
Camera trapping Program Coordinator:  
**Gabriel Llerena Reategui**

## ***Green Gold Program***

General Coordinator: **Juan Carlos Huaranca**

## ***Focal Points:***

Argentina: **Juan Ignacio Reppucci**  
Bolivia: **Gabriela Aguirre**  
Chile: **Nicolás Lagos**  
Perú: **Gabriel Llerena Reategui**

CONAF Liasion. **Jorge Valenzuela**

## ***Additional Team***

Active members : **Agustín Iriarte Walton**  
**Dennis Huisa. Maria Jose Merino**  
**Alejandra Torrez**

## ***Collaborators***

**Fabian Beltrán. Magdalena Bennett**  
**Alex Cruz. Gonzalo Cruz. Florencia Chiapero**  
**Úrsula Fajardo. Eliana Flores. Giovana Gallardo**  
**Mayli Hayes. Sebastián Kennerknecht.**  
**Anali Madrid. Sandra Rivera. Francisco Rojas.**  
**Carlos Ruelas. Omar Torrico**



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