

Project Update: March 2020

I have been completing fieldwork lately. The project is articulating an initiative to analyse the genomics of the Andean bear in Colombia, headed by the Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt (Investigation Institute of Biological Resources Alexander von Humboldt), a dependency of the Ministerio de Medio Ambiente (Ministry of Environment) in Colombia, and with which we seek to determine the number of individuals, relation between sexes, genetic connectivity, and the possible augmentation or decrease of the bear population in Colombia.

I currently work for them as an expert on the Andean bear in the eastern mountain range, but the most interesting thing of all is that these results could support our ecological models. We are maximising efforts to train the personnel of national natural parks of Colombia and, at the same time, evaluate the connectivity, occupation patterns, median and big mammals, their activity patterns, the assembling of niches and birds from the undergrowth. The Museum of Natural Sciences of Houston, Texas has also recently joined this initiative.

What we have achieved is excellent, but the volume of information is daunting; to date we have 139,418 videos, which represent 581 video hours, roughly equivalent to 24.2 continuous days of video. Therefore, we have the support of two voluntary park rangers in one of the four protected areas. They are helping us in data systematisation, and we already have complete databases for zones such as the PNN Tamá and the external block Miralindo, Cocuy and Pisba, and the external block Chita and Mongua, as well as the Palermo sector.

Given the recent assassination of a park ranger in the PNN El Cocuy by the ELN, the closure of the area, the prohibition of parks and, the obvious psychological consequences on the personnel from the protected areas in question, has complicated and slightly delayed our work.