

## The Rufford Small Grants Foundation

### Final Report

Congratulations on the completion of your project that was supported by The Rufford Small Grants Foundation.

We ask all grant recipients to complete a Final Report Form that helps us to gauge the success of our grant giving. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work. Please be as honest as you can in answering the questions – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Please complete the form in English and be as clear and concise as you can. We will ask for further information if required. If you have any other materials produced by the project, particularly a few relevant photographs, please send these to us separately.

Please submit your final report to [jane@rufford.org](mailto:jane@rufford.org).

Thank you for your help.

**Josh Cole, Grants Director**

Grant Recipient Details	
<b>Your name</b>	Rocio Palacios
<b>Project title</b>	BUILDING CAPACITY FOR ANDEAN CAT MONITORING IN ARGENTINA'S ANDEAN STEPPE, A PROMISING NEW SITE FOR LONG TIME CONSERVATION
<b>RSG reference</b>	31.07.07
<b>Reporting period</b>	March 2008 – May 2009
<b>Amount of grant</b>	£ 4577
<b>Your email address</b>	<a href="mailto:rociopalacios@gmail.com">rociopalacios@gmail.com</a>
<b>Date of this report</b>	May 2009

**1. Please indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.**

Objective	Not achiev.	Partially achieved	Fully achiev.	Comments
Visits to field sites.			√	We have surveyed 27 different sites looking for carnivores' signs. Of these sites, 12 were in protected areas and the rest in potential protected areas that we were invited to survey. From the initial proposal, some areas we couldn't visit because they are closed to the public and we are not going to work in San Juan Province (2 protected areas). We consider that the work done in the soon-to-be protected areas will compensate this.
Capacity building of park rangers, students and local people in carnivores' field identification.			√	Overall 80 people attended to capacity building courses and did field activities. This number is higher than the expected in the initial proposal because we gave the course in the park ranger's school at Malargue city (42 attendees, between students and park rangers). We also gave the course to all park rangers of Neuquen Province (13 people, 11 park rangers and 2 wildlife rangers). During the post-course survey 100% of attendees informed us that they found new and useful information during the course.
Andean cat and other carnivores' surveys,			√	We spend 207:55 men-working hours in the field, looking for carnivores' signs. As relevant achievements there was an Andean cat sighting made by one of our team members at Villavicencio Private Reserve. Also, 388 cat, 97 culpeo, 26 chilla, 28 puma and 11 skunk scat samples were collected. One new Andean cat genetic record was made, extending the cat's distribution to new ecoregions; the Patagonian Steppe and Monte.
Identification of prey assessment sites			√	At the beginning of the project we wanted to identify three sites for prey assessment studies. After completion of this stage, the Andean cat potential distribution had increased into new locations, so we finally have defined a bigger area to make prey estimates: the Auca Mahuida – Payunia landscape, comprising an area of 40.000 square kilometres that is an ecotone between Andean Steppe and Patagonian

				Steppe and also includes Monte ecoregion in the lower lands.
School workshop	√			The school workshop was not made, mainly because one of our team members that was the contact person with the educational department of the Natural Resources Office left for personal reasons. Instead we decided to design and give for free a laboratory technique (see below) workshop for professionals and biology students.
Laboratory techniques course			√	This project includes a dietary analysis of carnivores in the southern part of the cat's distribution. For this, samples were collected in the field and they are being analyzed in the laboratory that we hand-build in the office, using RSG funding and with equipment provided by IdeaWild. Having this facility prepared for scat analysis we decided to put together a free course for biologists and students to teach this relevant technique, and also give some information about carnivore's identification with emphasis made on the Andean cat. Fifteen people attended the course that was given in three days.
Monitoring workshop			√	This is one of the most relevant outputs of this project. The monitoring workshop included 12 people at Villavicencio Private Reserve. After completion of the course the First Permanent Andean Cat Monitoring Unit was established in the Reserve. Currently we are putting together with Reserve park rangers and authorities a Monitoring plan that includes sign surveys, line transects and camera trapping surveys. Some camera traps are already located in the Reserve and they show an important amount of wildlife.

**2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).**

We faced three difficulties; one was related to the team member that decided to leave, the second the project coordinator studies abroad and the third a national real global inflation of 50%. The first difficulty was related to a member that left for personal reasons and that was the contact person with the local school. We partially solved this issue by using the amount granted for the school workshop in a laboratory techniques course that was over-successful, and we expect to repeat in the future. The course was designed for five people mainly because of the size of the lab, but due to lots of interested people we finally decided to repeat it in two more days totalling 15 attendees.

The second challenge was to do field activities during a compacted period of time when the project coordinator came back from doing studies abroad. This was solved by making extraordinary long field trips each time. In this way we also partially solve the third challenge, the national inflation. Even when the official numbers for Argentinean inflation are around 20% the everyday reality shows that they are around 50%. Making longer field trips help us save in bus tickets (transportation is one of the items most affected by inflation, due to oil costs).

### **3. Briefly describe the three most important outcomes of your project.**

The three most important outcomes during this last year of the project are:

1. The establishment of the **Andean Cat First Permanent Monitoring Unit** in Villavicencio Private Reserve, after the completion of a monitoring workshop.
2. Legacy of **95 people capacity builded** in Andean cat and other carnivores' identification and survey. From these people 15 were also trained in laboratory techniques and 12 in monitoring techniques. Is also relevant that all park rangers from Neuquén Province protected areas has already attended the course.
3. **Extension of the known range** into other ecoregions, the Patagonian steppe and Monte

### **4. Briefly describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project (if relevant).**

This project was designed to involve local park rangers. We recognized park rangers as being on the first line for conservation, not only because they are on the field permanently but also because they act as intermediates with local communities. The project success in this aspect is reflected in the fact that all park rangers from Neuquén province and several from Mendoza province had attended the capacity building courses.

The main team's objective was to train interested people in field and laboratory techniques. Field activities were done with students and park rangers. The activities involved sign surveys and identification, standardized field sampling and others. During the Monitoring Workshop beside those activities we determined signs and vegetation transects to be applied in Villavicencio Private Reserve. Also, the project's camera traps were located and are currently being controlled by park rangers under our technical supervision and support.

### **5. Are there any plans to continue this work?**

This project is an ongoing initiative that will continue in the future. Because of new records of the Andean cat that we obtained during this stage of the project (one by genetic analysis and 5 by surveys to local people) the Andean cat know distribution has been extended into two new ecoregions, the Patagonian steppe and monte. These new sites open new opportunities for research, and at the same time expose new challenges to be faced in pursue of the conservation of Andean cats, mainly because hunting by local people seems to be a relevant issue in this more populated area.

For the monitoring activities we are planning a next visit to Villavicencio Private Reserve for the end of May, using the Per Diem money that was granted to project coordinator. We are in

communication with the Reserve management for signing a cooperation agreement, which will re-enforce the Monitoring Unit that has been established in Villavicencio. We will also analyze, with park rangers, the success of the current location of the camera traps and re-locate them if necessary. Our presence in the area is needed to strengthen the functioning of the Monitoring Unit. We expect that in a near future our presence will be needed just to solve technical aspects.

R.Palacios has recently been granted a national grant for doing her PhD studies and she will do them in relation to main prey – Andean cat relation in the Auca Mahuida – Payunia Landscape. This area was selected after field surveys that showed Andean cat presence in surrounding areas and is particularly important because it involves two huge protected areas with healthy populations of native fauna. This site has been proposed as a wildlife corridor.

## 6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

Our main objective is to share information, we believe that if more people learn the relevance of the Andean cat and other carnivores, they will learn to respect them, and they will be willing to conserve them. We are freely giving the handbook for field identification of carnivores to any interested person. Please visit [www.gatoandino.org](http://www.gatoandino.org) to download a PDF copy or contact project coordinator ([rpalacios@gatoandino.org](mailto:rpalacios@gatoandino.org)) to ask for a hard (paper) copy. We have been interviewed by local newspapers twice while doing the project. There are also two scientific papers that will be published in collaboration with other working groups.

Final reports in Spanish were send to: Natural Resources Office in Mendoza, Natural Resources Office in Malargüe and Protected Areas Department in Neuquén Province. Also, special reports were made for the native Mapuche community that will be granted land as a protected area, and to the Malargüe city hall for the second proposed protected area. Finally, a last report was made for Villavicencio Private Reserve and was send to authorities and park rangers.

## 7. Timescale: Over what period was the RSG used? How does this compare to the anticipated or actual length of the project?

The RSG was granted in March 2008 but was not used until July of the same year. The finalization of activities made with the RSG was in May 2009, with the laboratory techniques courses. Even when we started our activities later than expected we were able to achieve our goals. This is also related with the fact that some protected areas are closed during the winter period so intensive field work was done during the southern hemisphere spring and summer seasons.

## 8. Budget: Please provide a breakdown of budgeted versus actual expenditure and the reasons for any differences. All figures should be in £ sterling, indicating the local exchange rate used.

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Field Equipment	483	261	222	Another grant covered part of the field equipment.
Cameras	1324	169	1155	The cameras will be bought in a near future with money from another grant. We decided to do this because custom expenses are

				really high is better to pay for them just once. The same applies to shipping expenses.
Equipment to be left in parks	127	110	17	
Laboratory materials	102	400	-298	We build a small laboratory facility for making scat analysis and courses. Because we did the construction part ourselves, the overall cost was really low.
Transportation to field and laboratory	509	569	-60	We used money from other fund to cover part of the expenses for field transportation.
Food for field and laboratory activities	275	987	-712	This amount increased because RSG covered food expenses during capacity building courses. We needed to do this because there was a big inflation in Argentina and the provincial governments could not afford this expense.
Workshop expenses	663	459	204	This includes only the expenses of the laboratory techniques course.
Communications	153	88	65	
Office supplies and photocopies	229	97	132	We used money from other fund to cover part of the office expenses
Per Diem	714	714	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>	4579	<b>3854</b>	725	This money will be used for cameras

### 9. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

We consider important to continue with the capacity building courses in Mendoza province, looking for the establishment of new Monitoring Units in other areas. We are currently building an email list of interested persons for putting together an internet group. Our main wish is that the Monitoring Units will work together and that they won't be depending on particular projects.

The "discovery" of the Andean cat in Monte and Patagonia ecoregions present new challenges that should be faced immediately. An important aspect involves local people and should be directed to reduce hunting of Andean cats. Community workshops, school activities and other mitigation actions will probably help by introducing people into the relevance of native carnivores.

The finding of Andean cats in the huge ecoregions opens new opportunities for research and also shows how scarce what we know about wildlife in the region is. Carnivore assessment by interviews, camera trapping and genetic analysis of samples should be a priority to better design conservation strategies.

Also prey assessment studies in this new ecoregion are important because we expect prey assemblies to be different from those in the altoandino and puna regions. The immediate

conservation relevance of this is explained by the fact that in some regions of Patagonia prey are already “ecologically extinct” (Novaro et al. 2000) and this can have unexpected impacts in carnivore species.

**10. Did you use the RSGF logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the RSGF receive any publicity during the course of your work?**

We printed T-shirts with the RSG Logo and used them during field work. After each course (capacity building, monitoring, or laboratory) the RSG was properly recognized as our donor at the end of the PowerPoint presentation. In the official and nonofficial reports presented to local agencies, the RSG was recognized in the acknowledgments, also in the scientific publication that is actually under review. In the last newspaper interview (still unpublished) the RSG was also recognized.

**11. Any other comments?**

As project coordinator, I’m very grateful to Jane and Josh as contact persons for their help and advice. This grant allowed us to extend our conservation activities and we expect to be able to continue our work in the area, to ensure the conservation of some of the earth last wild places and their native fauna. The Andean cat is umbrella specie of one of the most beautiful and wild landscapes on earth.