

## Final Evaluation Report

We ask all grant recipients to complete a project evaluation that helps us to gauge the success of your project. This must be sent in **MS Word and not PDF format**. 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 – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

**Please DO NOT fill in and submit this form until the project has been completed.**

Complete the form in English. Note that the information may be edited before posting on our website.

Please email this report to [jane@rufford.org](mailto:jane@rufford.org).

Your Details	
<b>Full Name</b>	Agustina Di Pauli
<b>Project Title</b>	Searching for a ghost: filling information gaps in the distribution of the Andean cat in Uspallata, Mendoza, Argentina.
<b>Application ID</b>	42977-1
<b>Date of this Report</b>	September 30, 2025

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

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Obtaining new records of the Andean cat	X			<p>We installed 13 camera traps across three sites, which remained active for 6 months.</p> <p>New records of the Andean cat (<i>Leopardus jacobita</i>) were not obtained. This may be related to the limited number of cameras and the selection of sites. Cameras were deployed in areas where our team had already detected the species and in other locations selected to foster community participation. We faced technical difficulties with some cameras due to weather conditions.</p>
Increased awareness of the Andean cat and wildlife in general		X		<p>Awareness of the Andean cat and other key species increased among community participants, and 81 interviews with different stakeholder groups demonstrated a deeper understanding of the importance of protecting these species. This objective is considered partially achieved, as substantial work remains to expand engagement to a larger number of people, ensure access to information, and strengthen community ownership of conservation actions.</p>
Training for teachers and children on species conservation		X		<p>The Andean Cat Alliance (AGA) educational kit was implemented in two schools, reaching 195 children and 10 teachers, and activities were systematized using rubrics to track learning. This objective is considered partially achieved, as many schools in the region still need to be covered. However, the materials and methodology can be replicated in other schools, offering great potential to expand environmental education about the Andean cat and other key species.</p>
Obtaining information			X	<p>Records of other important Andean wildlife were obtained, including Guanaco (<i>Lama guanicoe</i>), Southern mountain viscacha</p>

<p>on other key species</p>			<p>(<i>Lagidium viscacia</i>), Pampas cat (<i>Leopardus colocolo</i>), Andean fox (<i>Lycalopex culpaeus</i>), as well as other rodents and small mammals, for example <i>Galea leucoblephara</i>, <i>Euneomys chinchilloides</i>, and a marsupial (<i>Thylamys pallidior</i>), and individuals of <i>Abrocoma</i> sp. This record is particularly noteworthy, as the area harbors a microendemic and vulnerable species, <i>Abrocoma uspallata</i>, underscoring the importance of considering future sample collection – to confirm its presence, it would be necessary to collect samples, ideally through live trapping using Sherman traps and obtaining tissue samples for analysis.</p> <p>These records help characterize the local ecosystem, inform educational activities, and guide future conservation measures for both large and small fauna in the region.</p>
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**2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.**

- a). Strengthened community awareness and engagement around the Andean cat and native wildlife through 81 interviews, 6 school workshops, cultural actions such as the mural and the local production of a documentary. We estimate that at least 140 people attended the unveiling of the mural, including students, local residents, and military personnel from the area.
- b). Obtaining records of key species, including *Lagidium viscacia*, *Lama guanicoe*, *Leopardus colocolo*, *Lycalopex culpaeus*, as well as other rodents and small mammals, provides valuable ecological information for the region and supports education and conservation actions.
- c). Implementation of participatory educational processes with 10 teachers and 195 children between 5 and 12 years old, enhancing knowledge of species ecology, conservation challenges, and solutions.

**3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.**

The project faced several challenges:

Technical limitations: Only 13 cameras were deployed in proper working condition, which reduced the overall sampling coverage. Mudslides caused by heavy rains

damaged some cameras, and others produced numerous false images due to changing light conditions, further limiting the effective sampling effort.

Social and political context: The advancement of the San Jorge copper mining project in the region generated significant social conflict, including protests, repression, and arrests of environmental defenders. The Andean cat, whose main threat is mining, became a flag for the socio-environmental struggle, reinforcing its symbolic role in the community.

Institutional changes: The provincial government, strongly pro-mining, changed, as did the local military authority. Collaboration continued, but to a lesser extent compared to the previous year.

Climatic conditions: The unusually cold winter with heavy snowfall delayed and hindered school activities.

Despite these obstacles, the team and community maintained the central activities of the project.

#### **4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.**

The project was implemented in close collaboration with the Uspallata community. Ten teachers and 195 students participated in six training workshops across two schools, increasing their knowledge of the Andean cat and conservation.

We conducted interviews before and after implementing the activities;

##### **Before:**

- There was general awareness of the Andean cat as a mountain felid, influenced by the record we obtained in Uspallata in 2022.
- We observed both correct answers and clear cases of lack of knowledge, including confusion with other species such as the pampas cat.

##### **After:**

- The vast majority were able to correctly identify the species' morphology (similar size to a domestic cat, thick ringed tail, greyish spotted coat, and black nose—unlike the pampas cat, with which it was often confused).
- They recognized its habitat (rocky, arid, high-altitude areas), diet, behavior, and distribution.
- Participants identified key threats, including human pressure, habitat loss, mining, and climate change.
- Several people highlighted what they learned during field trips and monitoring activities.

In summary, we observed a clear and measurable increase in knowledge about the species, its threats, and its ecological importance.

Two local artists contributed to a mural that became a lasting community symbol linked to wildlife. A local audiovisual team produced a documentary with the students, fostering pride and communication skills in the territory.

Community members also contributed territorial knowledge to guide sampling strategies. Different sectors (including education, livestock, tourism, culture, and the army) participated in 81 initial and final interviews, strengthening shared awareness of biodiversity. Additionally, a group of 15 people took part in a field trip to learn about camera traps and local wildlife.

The community-led camera trap campaign to record the Andean cat actively involved both residents and the nearby military community, fostering broader engagement in conservation. Over time, community ownership and pride in protecting the Andean cat grew. An inspiring example is a student who created a small business selling regional products, “El Gato Andino,” demonstrating how the species became not only an environmental symbol but also a cultural and economic one. During the 4-day campaign, 10 of the 15 trained community members participated, organized into different small groups each day. They were accompanied by 5 local military baqueanos, who also live in the area.

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

Plans are focused on consolidating and scaling up the conservation efforts initiated through this project. Key priorities include the continued monitoring of the Andean cat population, sustained community engagement, and the development of species-specific conservation strategies. The implementation of these activities will depend on the availability of resources and institutional support to conduct fieldwork, ensure personnel involvement, and maintain community-based initiatives. At present, we do not have secured funding to continue the work beyond December of this year; therefore, future actions will rely on obtaining additional financial support.

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

Results will be shared through:

- The documentary, produced locally, will be screened in Uspallata and shared on social media. It has been shared on the YouTube channel of the Uspallata Project. Link: [Documentary](#)
- The community mural serves as a permanent awareness and communication tool.
- Local and provincial media, including radio interviews and press coverage.
- Academic and conservation networks, including the Andean Cat Alliance, to integrate results into broader conservation strategies.
- Digital bulletins and communication materials were shared with a list of approximately 200 contacts, selected from the project's stakeholder map of people and institutions we have been working with in Uspallata for several years. E.g., [Andean Cat as a Conservation Flag](#) and [Echo the Andean Cat Poster Series](#).

We presented the results in meetings at the **16th Mountain Infantry Regiment**, the authority responsible for the Uspallata Defense Nature Reserve.

We also shared them with **Villavicencio Nature Reserve**, with whom we collaborate, given the continuity of the species' distribution and the existence of another confirmed Andean cat record there.

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

1. Expanding camera trap coverage in strategic locations to improve population monitoring and habitat understanding.
2. Systematizing community-generated knowledge and consolidating locally produced educational materials to strengthen local capacity.
3. Developing an integrated conservation strategy for the Andean cat and associated species in Uspallata.
4. Strengthening environmental education programs and cultural initiatives that reinforce community identity and long-term stewardship.
5. Continuing to support the proposal to grant the area the highest level of legal protection, such as designation as a National Park.

## 8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

The Rufford Foundation logo was used in project-related materials, including the documentary and digital content.

## 9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

**Rocío Palacios** – Andean Cat Specialist / Trainer. Provided species-specific training and technical guidance on Andean cats.

**Lucila Castro** – Executive Director of Fundación Natura Argentina. Oversaw project management and strategic coordination.

**Agustina Di Pauli** – Project Coordinator / Principal Investigator. Led project implementation and coordinated between the government, scientific community, and local stakeholders.

**Nicolás Palou** – Field Technician / Logistics. Assisted in fieldwork, educational activities, and project logistics.

**Soledad Brandi** – Field Technician / Educator. Conducted field activities, educational workshops, and fauna monitoring.

**Silvana Picone** – Socio-environmental Liaison. Managed community engagement and participatory governance activities.

**Rocío Seco Olmos** – Project Communicator. Responsible for institutional and public communication, audiovisual content, and outreach materials.

**Joaquín Martínez** – Administrative Assistant. In charge of budget management and financial reporting.

## 10. Any other comments?

This project represented a significant step for conservation in Uspallata. Although no new Andean cat records were obtained, progress in education, community engagement, and information collection on other species was substantial.

The Andean cat solidified its role not only as a key ecological species but also as a cultural and social symbol amid mining threats and challenging climatic conditions. Its figure now articulates identity, environmental defense, and even local economic initiatives.

*Links of interest:*

1. [Camera trap deployment campaign](#)
2. [Andean Cat Campaign in Uspallata](#)
3. [Mural unveiling](#)
4. [Andean Cat Alliance](#)
5. [Plastic Artists](#)
6. [Exploring the Andean Cat Through Art](#)
7. [Andean Cat Alliance Educational Kit](#)
8. [A Mountain of Biodiversity: Andean Cat Special](#)
9. [Andean Cat as a Conservation Flag](#)
10. [Documentary - Part 1](#)
11. [Photos](#)

**ANNEX – Financial Report**  
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