

2022 Wild Felid Legacy Scholarship Recipients

The WFA Council is pleased to announce María Emilia Perucca and Mitchell Parsons as this year's recipients of The Wild Felid Legacy Scholarship. The WFA scholarship committee received 8 scholarship applications, and after difficult deliberation, made their selection. Both students will receive awards of \$1250, with María's specifically honoring the memory of founding WFA member, Deanna Dawn. WFA was able to provide this year's scholarships because of generous support from Teri Jinks, The Cougar Fund, and "Evergreen" donations from four WFA members. Congratulations to Maria and Mitchell, and we extend our thanks and appreciation to all of these dedicated students for their desire to understand, conserve and coexist with wild cats. We have provided information on the scholarship recipients' projects below.

María Emilia Perucca, emiliaperucca6@gmail.com, MS candidate, National University of Costa Rica.



Advisor: Victor Montalvo Guadamuz, PhD;
victor.montalvo.guadamuz@una.cr

Thesis title: "Individual patterns and prey selection by *Puma concolor* in Monte León National Park, Santa Cruz, Argentina".

Research objectives: Analyze individual prey selection patterns in a population of pumas (*Puma concolor*) in Monte León National Park (MLNP). Specifically: 1- Estimate the abundance of potential puma prey in each home range of pumas previously marked with GPS collars in MLNP. 2- Evaluate individual differences in prey selection by pumas in MLNP. 3-

Examine the proportion of domestic and wild prey in the puma's diet in order to identify wildlife-rancher's conflicts.

Completion date: field work by September 2022, thesis by November 2022.

Maria writes: I'm doing my thesis fieldwork in Argentina [my home country]... The lack of research [on the] dynamics of predator-prey populations in Argentina [was an impetus], especially considering the importance that top predators like the puma have in the ecosystems, [especially] where they have [suffered] years of anthropogenic impacts, [as] in the Argentinian Patagonia. I ... now I have the opportunity work in feline conservation in my country, as I always wanted."

Mitchell Parsons, parsonsmitch953@gmail.com, PhD candidate, Utah State University, USA.

Advisor: Dr. Julie K. Young, julie.young@usu.edu

Dissertation title: Ecological interactions of cougars, deer, and wild pigs in the Central Coast Range, California

Research objectives: 1) Evaluate spatial and foraging ecology of cougars, with emphasis on their use of wild pigs as a prey item. 2) Evaluate effects of scavenging by wild pigs on cougar foraging ecology. And 3) Evaluate the potential for apparent competition between pigs and deer.

Completion date: December 2024

Mitch explains: "The response of cougars to wild pigs has implications for numerous native species. As an abundant prey item, wild pigs may support dense predator populations, leading to apparent competition. As omnivorous scavengers,



pigs may scavenge on cougar kills, influencing cougar feeding dynamics. Evaluating these novel interactions requires diverse partners and has implications for conservation, management, and human dimensions, and offers an opportunity to hypothesize about and evaluate complex ecological pathways.” Advisor Dr. Julie Young writes: “This is an exciting and unique study with important implications for wildlife conservation and management. [Mitch] has done a great job in designing a study that is ecologically and statistically sound, [brought] together several people from diverse organizations to work together on the objectives, and already carried out pilot work that was highly productive and successful. [Mitch’s] foresight and initiative are hard skills to teach but extremely important to the success of his research and training.”