

2018 Wild Felid Legacy Scholarship Recipients

In 2018, WFA awarded 3 Wild Felid Legacy Scholarships to important projects focusing on the Andean cat, the Western Hemisphere's most threatened wild felid. All three projects have been endorsed by the Andean Cat Alliance (Alianza Gato Andino or AGA). The Scholarship Committee and WFA Council would like to thank all the applicants and congratulate this year's recipients.

Working with rural schools in the conflict mitigation program.

Project Leader: Maria José Bolgeri, macomdp@gmail.com

Award amount: \$2,000

Maria José Bolgeri has a PhD in Biology from Universidad Nacional de Comahue, Bariloche, Argentina. For the last ten years she has been leading projects to reduce human-carnivore conflicts that directly affect Andean cat conservation. She believes that education of students is key to the long term success of these projects, by increasing the sensitivity of local people to wildlife and the habitat. Bolgeri's team has been working on two strategies in their Conflict Mitigation Program: developing conflict mitigation tools and techniques, and working with the natural resource agencies of Mendoza and Neuquen to develop management policies to reduce these conflicts. Bolgeri wants to increase the impact of this program by implementing education activities in local schools. The main goal of her proposal is to implement a comprehensive education strategy that will boost present and future conservation programs, ensuring an increase in knowledge of the Andean cat and its landscape and facilitating community engagement. The Scholarship will partially fund the design and implementation of educational activities in 3 rural schools in northern Patagonia, in anticipation of reaching about 100 students, their teachers and local park rangers.

Filling the gaps: completing a genetic assessment and the distribution map of the Andean cat.

Project Leader: Rocio Palacios, rociopalacios@gmail.com

Award amount: \$1000

Rocio Palacios is a PhD candidate at the National University of Córdoba, Argentina and has dedicated her career to Andean cat conservation. Her studies have provided a baseline of information in



northern Patagonia where, in 2005, a population of genetically different Andean cats was discovered. Her current PhD research is looking to identify local factors that could explain Andean cat presence in this region. Given current low population numbers and the threat of global warming it is critical to complete a distribution map and identify connecting corridors between populations. Rocio's team has a working hypothesis that: the Andean cat is comprised of several genetic management units associated with climatological and/or geological factors; ensuring the connectivity within and between these units will facilitate the species' long-term conservation. The project objectives are to: a) Fill information gaps and complete the species' distribution map using non-invasive techniques; b)

Characterize Andean cat population genetic diversity and identify Management Units; and c) Design

protocols for implementing noninvasive techniques that will allow continued monitoring of Andean cat populations.

Catcrafts: crafting a shared future for Andean cat and local communities.

Project Leader: Mauro Lucherini, Senior Research Scientist, CONICET (Argentine Commission for Scientific Research), *lucherinima@yahoo.com*

Mauro received his PhD from Universita di Siena, Italy and, since moving to Argentina in 1996, has been working on carnivore research and conservation efforts there.



The project goal is to “develop traditional craftsmanship as a creative and income-generating tool, enabling us to support Andean cat conservation through increased engagement of local people while reinforcing the cultural identity of the High Andean communities. The project will empower native people, particularly women as social leaders, through a strategic combination of ancient artisan techniques and contemporary design to create handcrafted products that are expected to appeal to an international market, to be sold through conservation-friendly fair trade sale channels.

Participating communities will also benefit through educational activities raising awareness about wildlife relevance and conservation.” The AGA states: [We expect] this proposal will create an attitude change in the perception that local communities have of wildlife.”