

Notes from the Field

SUMMER 2019

PROTECTING
PANGOLINS

TODAY'S SCHOLARS

LEARNING ABOUT A
CAT YOU DON'T SEE



WCN

Wildlife Conservation Network

Protecting Pangolins, Wildlife's Ultimate Underdogs

Paul was laser focused on the rustling coming from the underbrush. He was part of a small group of conservationists watching with bated breath as a raccoon-sized Sunda pangolin rummaged for its lunch along the ground. The group was in the forested outskirts of Singapore, the island's relentless humidity clinging like a second skin. Just a heartbeat away was the city proper, a transit point in the global illegal trade that is decimating pangolin populations. They had only a few moments before the pangolin, timid and elusive by nature, withdrew back into the forest.

Though Paul Thomson—WCN's Director of Conservation Programs—has been working for their protection for over a decade, this was the first

time he had seen a wild pangolin. He was struck by how heartbreakingly fragile it appeared. A sad irony for an animal whose defining feature is its scales; pangolins are armored like medieval knights suited and ready for battle. As the world's most illegally trafficked mammals, pangolins are indeed fighting for their lives, and it's a battle they cannot fight alone. This is why Paul co-founded Save Pangolins 10 years ago and why in May 2019, WCN and Save Pangolins, in partnership with the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, launched the Pangolin Crisis Fund.

When threatened, a pangolin rolls into a protective ball, a tight circle of overlapping scales impenetrable even to a lion. But this defense is no match for a poacher's grasp; a balled up pangolin is easy pickings. Throughout Asia, pangolins are in demand for their meat, considered a delicacy, and for their scales used in traditional medicine. All eight species of pangolins in Asia and Africa have been declared threatened with extinction. Since 2014, more than 1 million pangolins globally have been slaughtered, traded, and consumed. And this is likely just the tip of the iceberg. A pangolin crisis is undoubtedly upon us.

Compounding this crisis is a lack of public awareness that deprives pangolins of the champions, resources,

and funding needed to end the trade that threatens their survival. The Pangolin Crisis Fund hopes to sound the alarm to garner broad support for this struggling species while empowering conservationists' efforts to protect pangolins and offering opportunities to strengthen their work through collaboration. Modeled after the Elephant Crisis Fund and Lion Recovery Fund, the Pangolin Crisis Fund will invest in projects to stop the poaching of pangolins, stop the trade and demand for pangolin products, and raise the profile of this little-known animal.

Pangolins might be the fragile underdogs right now, but it's not too late to save them. The Pangolin Crisis Fund offers a way to galvanize the support urgently needed to quickly and permanently end the illegal trade, ensuring a future for this endearing species. We can do more than root for the underdogs, we can help them win. ■

Visit pangolincrisisfund.org to get involved.



Today's Scholars, Tomorrow's Wildlife Heroes

As the grandson of a former hunter, Peter Abanyam knows how hunters think and work, and he uses this insider knowledge to protect animals. In 2014, Peter helped rediscover the presence of the critically endangered Preuss's red colobus—a burgundy-hued primate—in Nigeria's Cross River National Park, where it was once thought to be extinct. This monkey faces many threats, but primarily is poached for bushmeat. Peter's experience of how hunters operate has been an asset in his collaborations with law enforcement to improve anti-poaching efforts in the park. As part of his master's degree, he is devising a conservation program that will encourage communities living around the park to help safeguard wildlife.

In her home country of Bolivia, Carmen Julia Pacheco is one of the few people studying to be a conservationist and the only woman pursuing a Ph.D. in the subject. She grew up listening to folk tales about bears and watched as people dressed as bears during the Carnival. She understood these animals held a deep cultural significance in her community, but she found little was being done to protect them. Today she is developing solutions to tackle conservation challenges in the Bolivian-Tucumano ecoregion, which holds one of the world's most threatened dry forests and is home to Andean bears, jaguars, pumas, and other wildlife.

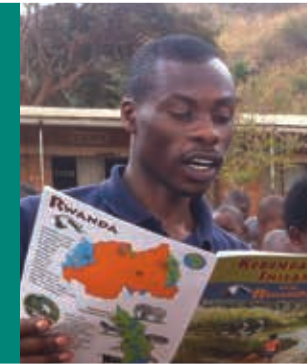
Peter and Carmen are recipients of the WCN Scholarship Program, two of 12 scholarships granted this year. Founded over a decade ago, the program has proudly supported 114 scholars pursuing graduate degrees in conservation. These emerging conservationists hail from 37 countries across the globe. By investing in these scholars, WCN can expand its conservation efforts even further, providing protection to a wider range of endangered species. With the support this program provides, we can help turn today's scholars into tomorrow's wildlife heroes. ■



Minh Nguyen
VIETNAM
Sydney Byers
Scholarship
PhD – University of
Montana
Large-antlered muntjac



**Melissa Micaela
Arias Goetschel**
ECUADOR
Pat J. Miller Scholarship
PhD – University
of Oxford
Jaguar



**Jean Ferus
Niyomwungeri**
RWANDA
Sydney Byers
Scholarship
MSc – University
of Rwanda
Grey crowned crane



Peter Abanyam
NIGERIA
Sydney Byers
Scholarship
MPhil – University
of Cambridge
*Cross River gorilla, forest
elephant, slender-snout-
ed crocodile, Preuss's red
colobus monkey, Nigeria-
Cameroon chimpanzee*



**Juan Carlos
Huaranca**
BOLIVIA
Handsel Scholarship
PhD – Universidad
de Los Lagos
*Andean cat and
Pampas cat*



**Carmen Julia
Quiroga Pacheco**
BOLIVIA
Steven K. Beckendorf
Scholarship
PhD – University of
Southeast Norway
*Andean bear, jaguar,
puma*



Muktar Abute
ETHIOPIA
WCN Veterinary-track
Scholarship
MSc – Addis Ababa
University
Ethiopian wolf



**Teddy Mulenga
Mukula**
ZAMBIA
Handsel Scholarship
MSc – Montana State
University
Cheetah



Shashank Poudel
NEPAL
Pat J. Miller Scholarship
PhD – Cornell University
Leopard



Damber Bista
NEPAL
Handsel Scholarship
PhD – University of
Queensland
Red panda



Thomas Mutonhori
ZIMBABWE
Sydney Byers
Scholarship
MPhil – National
University of Science
& Technology
African wild dog



James Watuwa
UGANDA
WCN Veterinary-track
scholarship
MS – Makerere
University
African elephant

Learning About a Cat You Don't See

THEY ARE SPARSELY SPREAD OUT OVER SUCH A VAST RANGE AND BLEND SO SEAMLESSLY WITH THE DUSTY BACKDROP OF THE ANDES, THAT ANDEAN CATS ARE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO SPOT IN THE WILD.

Andean cat photos on right were taken by different camera traps set by AGA.

The vizcacha, a small, beige rodent, watches Constanza and her team of conservationists from Andean Cat Alliance (AGA) warily from its spot on a rock, high up in Chile's Andes mountains. Its long whiskers and rabbit-like ears anxiously twitch as it surveys the group. After hours of navigating steep cliffs and jagged rocks and weathering freezing temperatures to get here, the vizcacha was a welcome sight. As the Andean cat's favorite food source, its presence signaled to the team that Andean cats may be close by.

Slightly larger than a house cat and sporting a bushy tail and mottled stone-colored fur, the Andean cat is the most endangered wild cat in all of the Americas; less than 1,400 adults are thought to remain. Andean cats reside in the mountains of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru. They are sparsely spread out over such a vast range and blend so seamlessly with the dusty

backdrop of the Andes, that Andean cats are almost impossible to spot in the wild. Because of their scarcity, AGA has devised many non-invasive techniques to



Sebastian Kemmerich

track and study these cats without having to actually see them. Over the next few months, Constanza and her team will use these techniques, namely scat analysis



and camera traps, to gauge the presence of Andean cats in the Arica y Parinacota Region of Chile; the data they collect will be added to AGA's range-wide record of Andean cat populations.

A few feet ahead, the group spots a cave. Inside, the cave floor is littered with cat feces, some still fresh, indicating the presence of wild cats nearby. Constanza motions for the team to collect samples—these will be sent to their lab for analysis—and heads outside to set up a camera trap. In the coming weeks, footage gathered from all of the camera traps they place will help AGA to document the number of cats living in the area. Camera trap footage also helps AGA to document the movements of individual cats by identifying the distinctive spots on their coats, unique to each cat.

Additionally, conservationists can glean a tremendous amount of information

from scat analysis. By extracting DNA from Andean cat feces and studying its unique genetic sequence, AGA can determine the sex of a cat and if it belongs to an isolated or a connected population. Isolated populations are prone to extinction as their movements are limited to a specific area, making it hard for Andean cats to breed and further their species. So, when isolated populations are discovered, it is important for AGA to identify pathways to connect these populations, removing any barriers blocking these corridors.

As Andean cats have low genetic diversity, preserving all populations and finding safe corridors that will allow them to move freely may be the key to long-term conservation of the species. The information Constanza and her team gather in real time is critical in helping AGA achieve this goal. ■

Discover the Wild Wildlife Conservation EXPO

October 12 • San Francisco, CA
Tickets on sale at wildnet.org/events

WCN protects endangered wildlife by supporting conservationists who ensure wildlife and people co-exist and thrive.

Invest In Wildlife Conservation

We greatly appreciate your dedication to protecting wildlife. Your kind support is vital to our partners' heroic and enduring work in conservation.

WAYS TO GIVE

- ▶ Donate by mail, phone, fax, or online
- ▶ Become a monthly donor
- ▶ Give a gift on behalf of someone else
- ▶ Include WCN in your estate plans
- ▶ Donate stock or other securities

WCN maintains Charity Navigator's highest possible 4-star rating. Charity Navigator is America's leading independent charity evaluator, and rates over 8,000 charities on their Financial Health and Accountability & Transparency.



EIN # 30-0108469 • CFC # 63038

If you prefer to receive the WCN newsletter in electronic form, please let us know by calling 415-202-6380 or emailing info@wildnet.org.

NONPROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
OAKLAND, CA
PERMIT NO. 259

WCN

Wildlife Conservation Network



209 Mississippi Street
San Francisco, CA 94107, USA
Ph. (415) 202-6380

wildnet.org