

# Notes from the Field

FALL 2020

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AN ANDEAN CAT'S BEST FRIEND

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UNTANGLING THE GILLNET  
PROBLEM

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A WOLF'S RESILIENCE



**WCN**

Wildlife Conservation Network



# An Andean Cat's Best Friend

Rodrigo Villalobos got the call early in the morning. In the cold summer night, Adrián Muñoz, a goat farmer living in the small town of Cuncumén, heard his dog barking frantically. Outside, he discovered a puma prowling around his herd, and his dog ready for a confrontation. As Rodrigo drove through Chile's Choapa Valley to reach Adrián's mountain home, he feared the scene that might await him. But when he pulled up to the farm, he was greeted by the panting Anatolian shepherd, Correcampo, and his smiling owner.

Adrián is a farmer participating in the Andean Cat Alliance's (Alianza Gato Andino, or 'AGA') Conflict Mitigation Program. Since 2015, this initiative has provided farmers with guard dogs, like Correcampo, to protect their livestock from carnivores; this safeguards their livelihoods and reduces hostilities between humans and native predators. After a five-month training period that helps the dogs bond with goats, Rodrigo, AGA's coordinator for the program, brought Correcampo to Adrián's farm. The main perpetrators of livestock predation are pumas, feral dogs, and culpeo foxes, but a farmer's vengeance can be indiscriminate. Because livestock are so essential to farmers, they will take great measures to defend their herds. This can include targeting innocent carnivores, like the rare and endangered Andean cat.

Due to their elusive nature, many locals were simply unfamiliar with Andean cats or mistook them for other wild cats. This is why AGA's work to raise awareness about the species is so critical. Andean cats are too small to prey on livestock, but because they are



Adrián Muñoz, a farmer benefiting from AGA's Conflict Mitigation Program, in his goat herd's grazing area.

wild cats, they can fall victim to retaliatory killings sparked by the actions of larger predators. Within the last four years, AGA has recorded multiple cases of Andean cats killed in retaliation for lost livestock, three of which were mistaken for puma cubs. The number of Andean cats killed is likely underestimated



Francisco Rojas-AGA

Correcampo keeps a watchful eye on Adrián's goats after months of rigorous training to protect the herd.

as some farmers that kill wild cats cannot correctly identify them as Andean cats, and since these killings are illegal, they often go unreported.

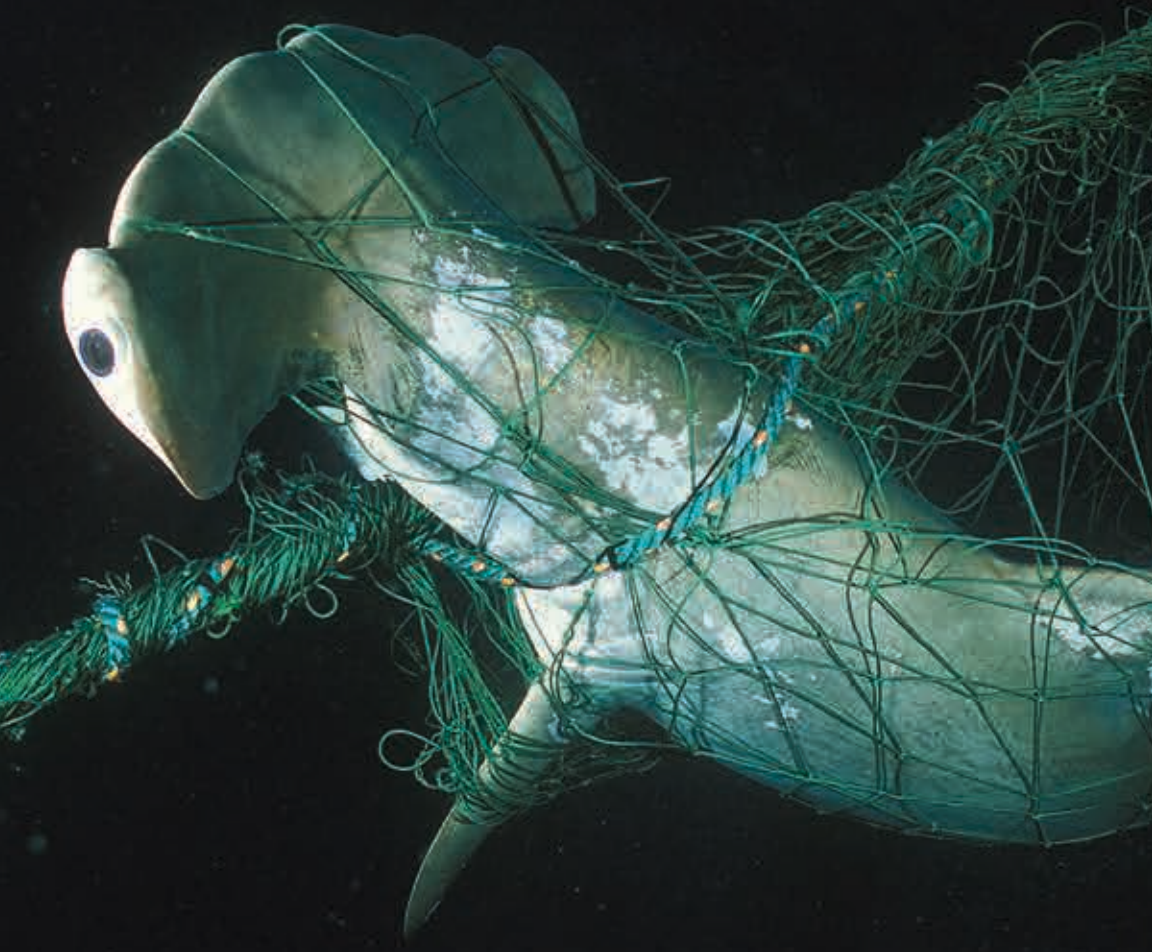
AGA also utilizes fortified corrals and motion sensor lights as deterrents, but the dogs are the true backbone of the program. When the puma attacked Adrián's herd, Correcampo fearlessly defended his goat family, sustaining some light injuries while fighting off the big cat. While one goat was lost in the incident, Adrián was thankful that no further casualties occurred and grateful to the brave dog that protected his livelihood. He later told Rodrigo that no other puma attacks occurred for the rest of the season.

Stories like Correcampo's give Rodrigo Villalobos hope that deadly human-wildlife conflict can be prevented by AGA's effective strategies. After seeing success in Chile, AGA introduced the Conflict Mitigation Program to farmers in Argentina in 2018, launched it in Peru earlier this year, and plan to continue its expansion. There are fewer livestock predation events reported by farmers, grazing areas are safer for herds, and retaliatory killings of Andean cats and other predators are decreasing in participating areas. Guard dogs like Correcampo prove that deploying the right measures can foster peaceful coexistence between humans and wildlife. ■





# Untangling the Gillnet Problem



**Above:** Discarded gillnets float through the deep, capturing and killing countless fish, like hammerhead sharks. **Opposite page, top:** Fishers use gillnets to maximize their catch, but this harmful practice leads to long-term devastation of their livelihoods. **Bottom:** Gillnets can easily trap hammerheads due to the unique shape of their heads.

Dan cut the engine and let his boat gently bob along the waves near the coastline. Below, schools of snook and mackerel swam in the coastal waters of the Caribbean. He wondered if these fish stocks might finally start to rebound after being depleted by extensive gillnet fishing. Dan Castellanos was once a net fisher, like his father before him, observing over time there were fewer fish to find. Today, Dan strongly opposes gillnets and works with MarAlliance to transition other fishers in Belize to more sustainable methods. For years, this transition process was slowed by lack of government support, but this summer, after ongoing advocacy by the Coalition for Sustainable Fishing—a group of fishing associations, private sector representatives, and MarAlliance—Belize has gotten closer than ever at banning gillnets.



Shane Young

Gillnets do an unbelievable amount of damage. Used to capture large amounts of fish, they kill not only targeted species, but any creature that swims into them. Critically endangered hammerhead sharks are particularly vulnerable to being caught as their unique T-shaped heads become easily entangled. Imagine if on land a single hunting trap was set in a forest and caught not just one animal, but hundreds—every rabbit, deer, squirrel, and song bird across acres. Similarly, gillnets empty the seas. Fishers use them because

the payout seems big in the short-term, but in the long-term, they eviscerate fish stocks, devastate fishing livelihoods and marine ecosystems, and reduce populations of threatened marine wildlife like hammerheads.

MarAlliance and several partners have spent over 15 years advocating for a gillnet ban in Belize. It's been slow going, but the Coalition and Oceana Belize recently gained the government's formal stamp of approval to transition the country's last gillnet fishers to sustainable practices or alternative livelihoods. This action is a precursor to what MarAlliance hopes will be a national ban enacted in January 2022. Over half of the remaining 81 gillnet fishers have agreed to stop using nets, and with the Coalition's assistance, MarAlliance is optimistic the remaining fishers will comply.

Embracing sustainable fishing is critical for the persistence of Belize's fish and for its long term food security, but conservationists at MarAlliance know that even if gillnets are banned, there will still be challenges. The sea is a graveyard for gillnets that have been abandoned. Though these 'ghost nets' no longer have an owner, they continue to capture fish, threatening some of the most enigmatic creatures in the ocean, like deep sea sharks. Just this August, anglers forming part of MarAlliance's network of recreational fishers, rescued a deep water smooth-hound shark entangled in a ghost net.



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With Coalition support, gillnet fishers can transition to sustainable methods such as hook and line. Dan is particularly eager to include his father—who never fully stopped gillnetting—into this process. These efforts are a key step towards a full ban, which would save the livelihoods of fishers, the lives of endangered sharks and countless other marine species, and will demonstrate to other countries that banning nets is necessary and possible. ■



# A Wolf's Resilience

In the thin alpine air, Getachew scanned the landscape, but saw no sign of an Ethiopian wolf. Despite the aid of powerful binoculars, neither Getachew nor his colleagues from Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Program (EWCP) could see past the thick fog draped across the Simien Mountains. Fortunately, the particular wolf they were searching for was wearing a GPS collar, meaning they could rely on eyes in the sky to pierce through the mountain mist. Before long, Getachew Assefa, EWCP Simien Team Leader, picked up a signal. They had located Terefe.

The story of this Ethiopian wolf began in May of this year, when Simien Mountain National Park scouts informed EWCP that they had discovered an injured wolf hiding under a bridge. After capturing the frightened two-year-old canid, the severity of his injuries became clearer: a gunshot wound and a fractured femur. While human attacks on Ethiopian wolves are rare, the nature of these injuries combined with the scarcity of Ethiopia's remaining wolves alarmed EWCP. Getachew and his team set about providing the best veterinary care to their new patient, who they named Terefe, which means "lucky survivor" in Amharic.

**Opposite page, top: Terefe's leg heals in EWCP's improvised enclosure in the first-ever prolonged rehabilitation of an Ethiopian wolf. Bottom: Getachew Assefa (on right) and his colleague prepare the GPS collar to be placed on Terefe during his release.**



Getachew A.

The resilience that inspired Terefe's name proved vital on his road to recovery. In addition to his injuries, Terefe also bore the distinction of being the very first Ethiopian wolf ever kept away

Although his initial reintroduction to the wild was successful, EWCP soon noticed that the young wolf was traveling far outside his normal range, exploring nearby territories of other packs. To pinpoint the cause of these unusual excursions, EWCP closely followed Terefe as he wandered for weeks in the foggy Simien Mountains. Satellite tracking allows Getachew to locate Terefe via his GPS collar, and EWCP is monitoring his movements to better understand wolf behavior.

Terefe's groundbreaking rehabilitation is a powerful story of resilience. The collaborative efforts of EWCP and national park management saved this remarkable Ethiopian wolf and created a plan of action for future rescues. Getachew

from his pack for a prolonged period of time while being rehabilitated by conservationists. There was much uncertainty regarding how he would handle the months-long captivity needed to heal. In a joint operation with national park managers, Getachew's team designed an improvised enclosure for Terefe, making EWCP's Ayenameda outpost his temporary home.

Fears that Terefe might respond poorly to captivity proved to be unfounded. Over five weeks, he remained alert and showed a survivor's spirit. EWCP's veterinarians noted his positive response to treatment and his mood improving. In late July, EWCP released a fully recuperated Terefe. Muktar Abute, EWCP Vet Team Leader, placed a GPS collar around his neck and Terefe was set free in his Ayenameda territory. Given Terefe's unprecedented absence from his pack, the Simien team was unsure about how his homecoming might be received. Luckily, a week later, EWCP's monitors spotted Terefe being greeted warmly by his packmates.



continues to track this lucky survivor as he explores further into uncharted territory, the start of a new journey made possible by EWCP. ■





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