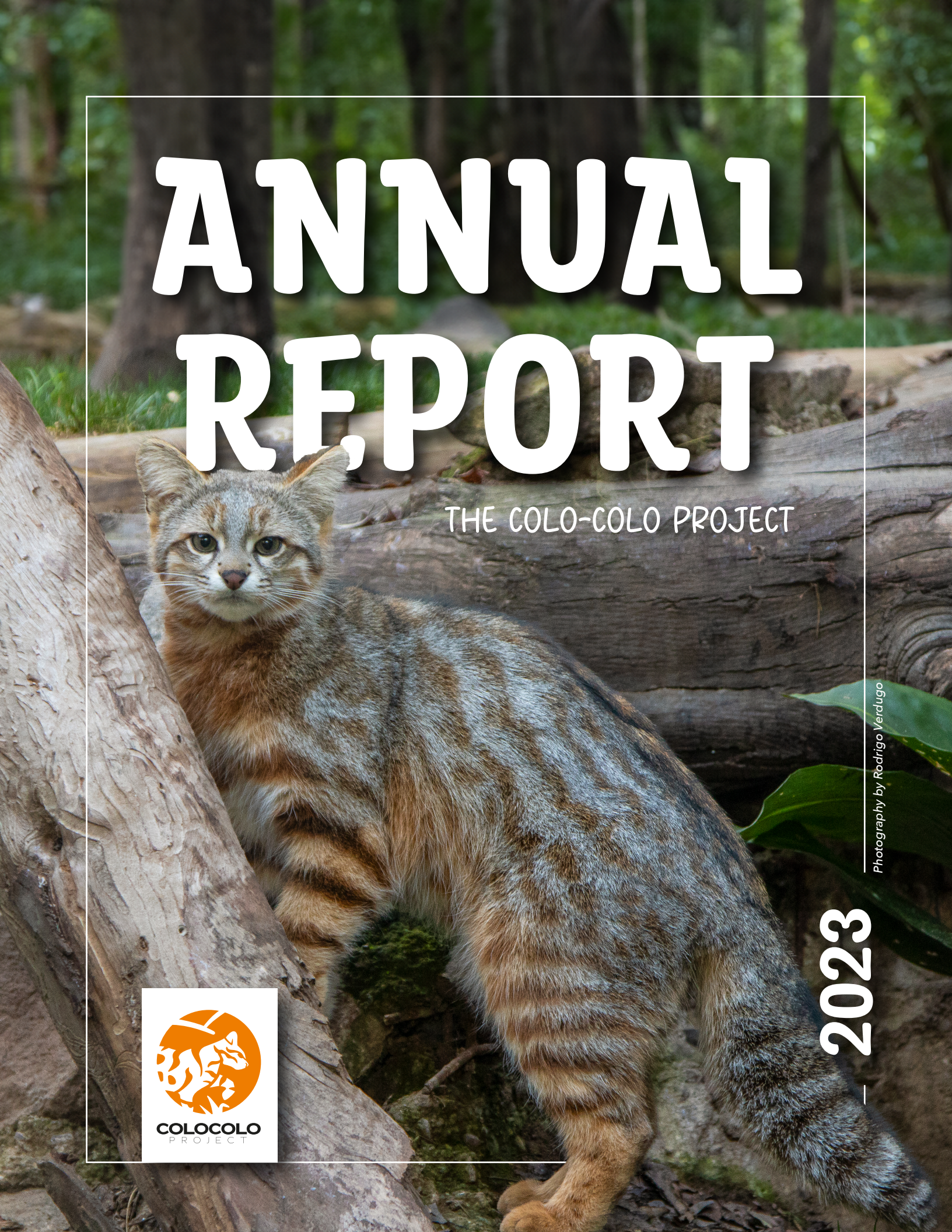
ANNUAL REPORT

THE COLO-COLO PROJECT



Photography by Rodrigo Verdugo

2023

COLOCOLO
PROJECT



COLOCOLO
PROJECT

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COLOCOLO PROJECT

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PARQUE NATURAL
TRICAHUE

We belong to:

PC WG
Pampas Cat Working Group

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PROLOGUE

From the new taxonomic proposal, the colocolo cat conservation has represented a huge challenge for our work team, since now, this exclusive species of our country entrusts its existence to the people who share their environment with this feline, being no minor responsibility for all chileans. This represent a huge challenge, specially considering that colocolo cat coexist mainly in surrounding areas near big cities, thus facing reprisal hunting, diseases' spread by domestic pets, run-overs, habitat loss and other risks associated with coexistence in the same area with other species, and competition for resources.

However, in this annual report, I would like to share with you all, how the Colocolo Project team has successfully renewed the hopes for the conservation on this unique feline, thanks to shared ideas and collaborations.

One of our biggest achievements -that fills us with joy as a team- is to have turned the colocolo cat from a complete unknown to the children's favorite. The evident joy in the voices of the little ones when referring to this felines, encourages us and conveys hope for the future.

The Colocolo Project is not only the result of personal achievement by one person -the one speaking to you - but is also thanks to a full set of people committed to a common goal. Therefore, I would like to express my gratitude to every volunteer in the project, and -specially- the leaders we have trained. Catalina Chappuzeau, Carlos David Montes de Oca and Nicole Morales have been outstanding leaders, passionate defenders and exemplary guides to our volunteers, they have disseminated an enormous amount of love towards our species and their conservation.

A very special thanks also goes to our financial partners: Small Wild Cats Conservation Foundation, Big Cat Rescue, Earth Foundation y Mohamed bin Zaed Species Conservation Foundation. Without their economical support this project would have been unreachable.

Additionally, the Vilches Alto community gets an acknowledgement as well, for they have opened their doors, not only to their homes, but also to their barnyards in order to rescue the colocolo cat, this kindness and constant collaboration have been essential. Also, we would like to express thankfulness to our partners: Biota Maule and Vilches Hostería, whose endorsement is immensely helpful. We cordially thank Bio Nativa's director, Eduardo Donoso, for his generous donation of camera traps, a priceless resource for our -slippery- colocolo cat research. We also want to thank our friend Rodrigo Verdugo, who always helps us selflessly with his photographs, drawings and designs.

Having nothing further to say, we invite you to dive into the fascinating colocolo cat universe through the reading of this report. Discover how we have been working day and night for its preservation, and, maybe this words will inspire you to contribute to this unique species conservation.

¡Let's go!

Carlos Castro Pastene

COLOCOLO
PROJECT



Carlos Montes de Oca



Catalina Chappuzeau



Nicole Morales

CONTENTS

06 **The Mapuche Effect**
How a chicken helps save your predators

11 **Chain Health**
Protecting the wilderness through healthy pets

13 **Mystery in the forest**
Studying the slippery colocolo cat in Altos de Lircay

14 **Collaborative work**
The key for success in conservation

16 **It is up to the entire Chile to save the colocolo**

18 **Chilean wildlife day**

20 **Colocolo summer camp**
Scouting for kids

21 **Conservation for all**

23 **Conservation and local guides**

24 **Small rural primary schools**

25 **¿How to get a better encounter with children?**

23 **Future challenges**



COLOCOLO PROJECT

THE MAPUCHE EFFECT:

How a hen helps to save its predators



One of the prime reasons why the conservation of wild cats is threatened is because those animals follow strict carnivore diet, and occasionally they attack poultries in private barnyards, which generates - in most cases- aversion by people who breed livestock, and the cats end up dead due to reprisal hunting.

Henhouses' improvement is a mayor item in our project: if the feline doesn't find the easy entrance to the -bird only- structure, then it won't be able to ambush chickens at night. A part of our project is handing the building materials to affected hen's owners, or paying for masonry works if people can't fix their henhouses by themselves; this being usually for elderly couples who live without any other relative.

Our method is simple yet effective: improved henhouses block attacks committed by wild cats at night. But we have a missing point: many people release their farm animals in order to eat, walk or rest during the day, so, a new question seems to appear: how do we prevent diurnal strikes?



> Moreover, felines usually capture hens by the tail, and since this breed doesn't have one, their escape from predators is more likely to succeed.







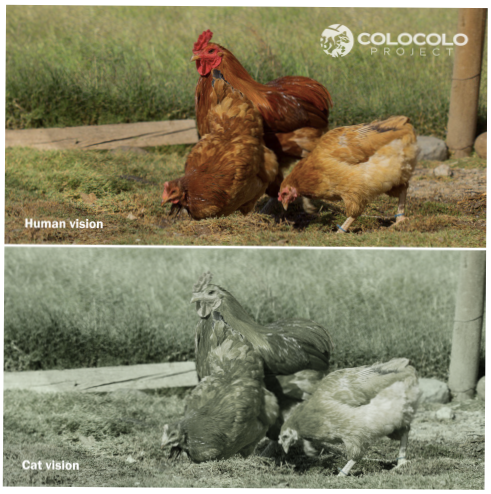


Currently, we are considering in our project the delivery of Mapuche hens for people affected by the colocolo cat attacks.

Why Mapuche hens?

Since this breed has originated in Chile synchronously with these carnivore cats, they have evolutive adaptations to evade them. For instance, the Kollonka hen is usually reddish colored and has no tail.

While wild felines have a dichromatic vision, so they can not differentiate red or green colors, resulting in a comparative advantage when it comes to camouflaging in forests and grasslands, as the chilean mountain areas are.



Example of dichromatic vision

Unfortunately, most people in rural areas can't access to buy Kollonka hens because of their high trading price, and this hen's population have decreased since the coming of spanish colonization in Chile, more than five hundred years ago, thus nowadays it's almost an exhibition hen. Our project seeks to generate the reproduction of Kollonka hens and give them for free to people.

People that have suffered from attacks by wild felines, not only receive a protective and better hen than the one they eventually lost, but a more profitable one, since Kollonka eggs have a high sale price on farmers' market, due to its unique greenish blue color.


Chicken coop before


Chicken coop after



Also, enhanced henhouses remain monitored with camera traps for both owners and our project, allowing us to observe which animals try to attack some poultries. Thus we make clear the effectiveness and longevity of this method.



"Nowadays, thanks to the Mapuche Hens Project, the Vilches Alto community feels protected against small wild felines attacks. And every time an event like this happen, people around the village gets notified word of mouth, and the Colocolo Project comes to the aid, preventing small wild felines deaths."



ONE HEALTH:

Protecting the wilderness through healthy pets

The presence of cats, dogs, and domestic pets loitering unattended throughout the wild and rural areas - where the colocolo cat lives - is, sadly, something common. Thereby, diseases' transmission coming from domestic to wild animals is quite frequent. One of our most intense jobs is to vaccinate and deworm as many domestic cats and dogs living in the vicinity of the Altos de Lircay National Reserve as possible.

Last year -2023- the first vaccination and deworming campaign was carried out in Vilches Alto, thanks to funding provided by Small Wild Cats Conservation Foundation and Mohamed bin Zaed Species Conservation Foundation.

This campaign's relevance lies in that rural and/or mountainous areas are quite abandoned places by the local government, whereas veterinary care is out of reach. If residents want to take responsible care with their animals, it's almost compulsory to go to the nearest town or city to look for medical assistance.

During that campaign, over one hundred and fifty animals were vaccinated and dewormed.

Also, thanks to our partner's support, we were able to bring more than thirty veterinarians to Vilches Alto to give medical assistance to local people's pets.

When the pet care and medical activities were performed, it was explained to the owners that funding and money comes from the colocolo cat projects. By doing so, today they know that thanks to the little wild felines inhabiting the forest, people and their animals can reap the benefits of living near them.





Today, due to this activities - and the hen's project- the colocolo cat is perceived as a good neighbor.

MYSTERY IN THE FOREST:



Studying the slippery colocolo cat in Altos de Lircay



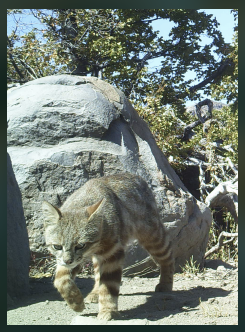
Since 2018 we have been doing some research about the colocolo cat throughout Altos de Lircay National Reserve, located in Maule region, Chile. Progress has since been slow, yet significant, this is mainly due to the low population density of the colocolo cat.

During the first few years of research, when we got the first footages of this feline at Santiago de Chile's south, and up until now, we have learned about colocolo habitat, their behavior, and its wide range of natural activities. Certainly, some scientific papers about this cat have been published by our team, but some things about its natural history remain unknown. ***For the purpose of continuing investigations, we are currently monitoring the felines with camera traps throughout the four seasons.***





Additionally, we've been counting recently with the assistance of university students, who will conduct research projects for their graduate and postgraduate thesis related to the colocolo cat, through our organization.



COLOCOLO PROJECT



COLLABORATIVE WORK:

The key for success in conservation

As the title above suggests, we, the Colocolo Project, believe that in order to have a successful feline conservation in our land, *there must exist a collaborative network.*



We are currently working with several colleagues from many chilean locations, and with these people we discuss about applying to fundings and how to succeed in conservation projects.

One of them is Christofer Olea that lives in San Vicente de Tagua Tagua, O'Higgins region. He began a conservation project with our help. His aim was to mitigate the effects of the severe drought in Chile's central zone.

Christofer's work consists in installing drinking troughs for güiñas to have access to this scarce resource. His camera traps provide evidence of this project's success, as every summer the number of wild cats that come to drink from the drinking points increases.

The Poqui Nature Sanctuary hill is a "Biodiversity Island" in central Chile. Surrounded by small cities, this Sanctuary located in the Coltauco commune works as a refuge for güiñas and colocolo cats.

A group of young conservationists protect this hill, and besides their work in situ, these people are working and developing activities such as guided interpretation trekking trail, speeches about environmental education at schools and related fairs, artistic wall painting, etc.

SANTUARIO DE LA NATURALEZA
CERRO POQUI
Región de O´Higgins - Coltauco





Last year, a vaccination and deworming campaign was carried out in the vicinity of the Poqui Sanctuary, due to the large amount of pets that wander the area.







THANKS TO REVERDECIDO ORGANIZATION VOLUNTEERS', AND ALSO SOME VETERINARIANS, THE PUBLIC WAS MADE AWARE OF THE PROBLEMS TRANSMITTED BY PETS TO WILDLIFE. THIS WAS POSSIBLE THANKS TO DEALS AND COLLABORATIVE WORK MADE WITH OUR ORGANIZATION, COLOCOLO PROJECT: OUR HELP CONSISTED IN ORGANIZING THE ACCESS TO VACCINES AND ANIMAL MEDICATION.







Another collaborator we had this year was Phillip Assmus, who thanks to the support of the Colocolo Project, was able to shoot a short documentary film about Lleb Lleb, the last remaining güiña at Quebrada de Córdova, this activity was complemented by educational lectures at local schools.



WE HOPE THAT IN 2024 WE WILL CONTINUE TO COLLABORATE WITH OUR AFOREMENTIONED FRIENDS, START NEW PROJECTS AND WORK TOGETHER IN NEW LOCATIONS, SUCH AS CAJÓN DEL MAIPO, AT THE METROPOLITAN REGION WITH MILLANTÚ NGO, AND ALSO IN TRICAHUE PARK, LOCATED AT PASO PEHUENCHE, MAULE REGION.



IT IS UP TO THE ENTIRE CHILE TO SAVE THE COLOCOLO

The new taxonomic proposal, which classifies colocolo cat as a chilean endemic feline, comes with leaving the responsibility of the conservation of this species in hands of people who live in this land. But these days, the colocolo cat remain as one of the most unknown chilean felines.

Cougars and güiñas are the most famous and knowns by the population, and speaking about another feline species is something that doesn't escape the specialist circle such as biologists, veterinarians, naturalists, and so on. For this reason, we created the **"Wild Felines from Chile"** poster, a very didactic illustration showing every wild feline from Chile, the drawings were made by *Alonso "Loncho" Salazar* and *Carolina Fuentes*.

We have made a wide poster's distribution to kids and grown-ups when we celebrated the Chilean Wildlife Day, rural small primary schools, museums, zoos and enthusiastic children.

Moreover, we give the poster away and introduce it to restaurants, public entities, companies, and every public institution to break the specialization knowledge of endemic cats. This way, a wider range of people can learn about our wild felines, subsequently keep them in mind and maybe protect them.





The illustrated poster has a QR code leading to videos explaining our teamwork: fixing henhouses, giving Mapuche hens, and other variety of activities we have done to conservative the colocolo cat. If more chilean people get to know the colocolo cat, there will be more chances to protect it.



This poster's realization was possible thanks to the collaboration of ***SWCCF, Big Cat Rescue and Earth Foundation***, their financial support was fundamental: we printed six thousand copies, which have been delivered from Iquique to Punta Arenas, in almost every corner of Chile.







IN ADDITION, TO FIGURE AN IDEA OF THE COLOCOLO CAT – SINCE WE CAN'T SEE THEM AROUND PEOPLE– A REAL SCALE HYPERREALISTIC SCULPTURE WAS MADE BY OUR TEAM. THIS CAT'S SCULPTURE IS SHOWN TO THE PUBLIC IN FAIRS, SCHOOLS AND CAMPINGS. CURRENTLY, THE LITTLE STRUCTURE IS EXHIBITED AT VILCHES ALTO LOCALITY, SO THE RESIDENTS CAN LEARN ABOUT THE IMAGE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE COLOCOLO CAT.



CHILEAN WILDLIFE DAY

Chilean Wildlife Day was celebrated this past November 3rd and 4th, at San Cristóbal hill, located in Santiago de Chile.

. This event was organized by the Jane Goodall chilean institute, which brought together over eight thousand five hundred visitors. There, Colocolo Project's volunteers were working both days lecturing on the topic of camera traps, conservation and wild felines.

¡Audience's reception was terrific!



The Colocolo Project's stand was far from empty, everybody wanted to participate in our cat memory game, people came in to take pictures with the real-size colocolo cat and asking for a copy of our chilean cat poster.





"¡They all returned home with valuable teachings of the Colocolo Project!"

COLOCOLO SUMMER CAMP:

Scouting for kids



In Vilches Alto, the past year we had some visitors: a group of students from a Las Cabras school, they came from this commune to participate in a special activity organized by Colocolo Project.

With the assistance of their teaching staff - who successfully arranged financial support on transport -, their parent's will -who provided food supplies -, and Colocolo Project - responsible for arranging accommodation- we made the first "Colocolo Summer Camp".







Among the activities we made a tour of the Altos de Lircay national reserve. Children had the opportunity to know camera traps, the actual habitat of the colocolo cat and make some research questions. Our first and small workshop was the kid's first meeting with one of our national endemic cats.



CONSERVATION FOR ALL

During last year, Colocolo Project received an unusual request. The petition came from Talca's Belén Children's Home, a foster home for children with different both physical and mental capabilities. Their request for us asked if two of their students could eventually participate in our outdoor feline monitoring at Altos de Lircay national reserve.



We agreed to their petition, and Jorge and Marcelo were the two students awarded with the accompanied trip to the national reserve, both of our guests were incredibly amazed with the terrain they had never seen before. That day, we made a review of the camera traps with them, saw the feline paths and trails, and by the end of the day the team learned so much about nature surrounded by itself.







Conservation and Local guides

If we want to aim a beneficial conservation, we need to integrate the community we work with, and their issues, as part of the discussions and solutions.

Inside our work team we are already counting on residents from Vilches Alto, one of them is Paulina Ayala. At Paulina dad's home, a few years ago, occurred an attack on poultries caused by a güiña.

Today, she helps with the camera traps' monitoring inside the national reserve, likewise.









SHE HELPS US LOCATE PEOPLE WHO MAY HAVE SUFFERED

FROM THE SAME STRIKES BY FELINES.

SMALL RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS



In Vilches Alto exists a small rural primary school with only seven students. As the Vilches Alto population is rather small, **we have acquainted the students' parents, at a meeting we give them some of our illustrated posters and camera traps to encourage them - both kids and parents- on the colocolo cat.**







> We have even shared talks with the community to strengthen the relationship between Colocolo Project and the local people.

¿HOW TO GET A BETTER ENCOUNTER WITH CHILDREN?



Ensuring the trustworthiness among the community is a principal objective we must aim and not lose sight of, specially with kids. Keeping this in mind, we created Rayitas, the official mascot of Colocolo's Project. Rayitas is a female colocolo cat with human-like features, she is able to talk and communicate values and emotions, just like us. The meaning beneath this is having easier encounters with children, who empathize with our friendly cat, the latter being the conservation goal.

"We look forward to make an animation of Rayitas, so we can have videos of her in our platforms."

The name of our female colocolo mascot was given by the very people who follow us on social media, we are constantly reading their requests and Rayitas was born.



FUTURE CHALLENGES

Conservation is not about making one single action and assume the species' conservation. We all must know that this has to be a constant discipline, we can't give up on it. While the feeling of the team is the achievement of many things in a short time, we understand the commitment of an exertion and lasting work for the colocolo cat conservation.

Some of our next objectives are: to accomplish the expansion of our henhouses repair project and delivery of Kollonka hens to some other locations, the implementation of a feline rescue center, and to continue monitoring and researching wild felines.

WE ALSO ASPIRE THIS YEAR TO MANAGE A DOG AND CAT STERILIZATION OPERATION IN VILCHES ALTO, IN ORDER TO REDUCE THE POPULATION OF STRAY AND ABANDONED DOMESTIC ANIMALS.



Photography by Rodrigo Verdugo

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