

Annual Report

Colocolo Conservation Project

2024



COLOCOLO
CONSERVATION PROJECT



Prologue

Who cares about the colocolos?

The name Colo-Colo comes from a Mapuche leader, and it is also the name of Chile's most popular football team. In this country (Chile), there is no one who hasn't heard the word "Colo-Colo." But, unlike the football club, very few are familiar with the cat. A native, fragile and small wild cat... and paradoxically, almost unknown. So, who cares about the colocolos?

The one speaking to you, through this prologue, has taken on the leadership of a group of people as diverse as they are surprising: veterinarians, biologists, philanthropists, dentists, athletes, donors, and more. Ordinary people, in the end. They all converge here, often setting aside days with their families and friends. Instead of resting after a long week of work, they hop into a truck, travel on dirt roads, wake up early, sweat, and get dirty... All for a cause. All for an ideal.

Because the question is: what drives someone to donate time, effort, or money for a cat they may never see with their own eyes? The answer is simple and powerful: ideals. There are two types of people. Those who think the

world is going in the wrong direction—that climate change, deforestation, and poor political decisions are leading us to collapse—but only comment about it on social media or just share "states". Then there are the others. Those who think the same, but act. People who, even though they know that "the Bad" always seems bigger than oneself, still choose to fight. They still choose to save the world's biodiversity. I have seen our dentist leave her practice in Santiago on a Friday night, drive for hours south, sleep barely three hours, and the next morning be sweeping dog fur from animals being sterilized. She is saving colocolos.

The veterinarian who gives up a weekend of their life to sterilize and vaccinate dogs and cats is saving colocolos. The volunteer who visits a school and teaches children about conservation, and the person who donates, even a little, to make all of this happen... they are also saving colocolos. The one who does something, no matter how small it may seem—like deciding to be vegetarian, reduce their carbon footprint, or protect a tree—is also doing something. They are the ones who care. They are Colocolo Conservation Project.

Camtraptions and Francisco Andreas

This year, photographer and Antarctica expedition guide Francisco Andreas wanted to collaborate with us through his specialty: wildlife photography. But... how do you photograph a Small Wild Cat that almost no one manages to see?

Francisco introduced us to the Camtraptions system, a methodology widely used around the world to capture elusive animals. It consists of a motion sensor connected to a DSLR camera, installed in strategic locations where we know the animal will pass by. All that's left to do is wait... and the result is stunning images.

The photograph was featured on the cover of local magazines, and today, it has become a classic of the species. Having high-quality images allows us to bring the public closer to this little-known feline, fostering admiration and raising awareness for its conservation.

“For me, being able to photograph Chile’s only endemic wild cat marked a turning point in my life. I had always dreamed that through photography, I could contribute to something greater, and when Carlos challenged me to photograph a Colocolo in its natural habitat, I knew it was my opportunity. This process involved exploring a new area of photography, and it took me a whole year to build, set up, and test the system until I was confident, we could achieve something. This journey was also incredibly inspiring because I had the luck of working with an amazing team and learning a great deal from the research team led by Carlos, who has spent hundreds of hours in the field studying this enigmatic feline and generously shared all their knowledge with me to select the best locations for a possible photograph.”

— Francisco Andreas Gómez



Sterilization of Dogs

The situation of free-roaming dogs in Chile is critical. It is estimated that over 3 million stray dogs wander and reproduce uncontrollably. Adding to this is legislation that prohibits lethal control—dogs cannot be killed in Chile—and a clear lack of enforcement: many dogs with owners roam freely, despite the law requiring responsibility from their guardians.

As if this were not enough, there are stray domestic dogs and cats roaming unsupervised in all Protected Wildlife Areas of the country. This represents

an alarming danger, not only to small wild felines but to all native wildlife. The truth is clear: today, in Chile, there are no truly protected wild areas.

Because of all this, at Colocolo Conservation Project, we have launched dog sterilization campaigns. During 2024, thanks to the work of Dr. Christian Chandia and his team, we managed to perform 52 sterilizations in the Maule Mountain Range: 26 dogs (10 males and 16 females) and 26 felines (6 males and 20 females). A small step, but a necessary one, to address an enormous problem.





Meeting in Ecuador

This year, we had the honor of being invited to the II Small Wild Cats Conservation Meeting – Latin America, alongside other groups working for the conservation of small wild felines in the Americas. Institutions like Big Cat Rescue, Panthera, Wildlife Conservation Network, and Small Wild Cats Conservation Fund were also present.

At this meeting, we learned from our colleagues from different parts of the world, shared experiences, strengthened bonds of camaraderie... and of course, we had a great time!

The event took place at the La Hesperia Biological Reserve, whose members are part of the Pampas Cat Working Group. Our hosts welcomed us with great warmth, teaching us how to harvest and roast our own coffee and cacao beans. Some of us expressed our gratitude for this hospitality by planting new trees for the reserve.

We deeply thank Jim Sanderson and Alexandra for the invitation and for receiving us with open arms.

We will undoubtedly meet again!

Dog Vaccination

We've already discussed the danger posed by free-roaming dogs, but it's also important to mention the dogs belonging to drovers —an additional, and significant, risk.

In the mountains of Chile, it is still common for Drovers to go up to find their livestock accompanied by their dogs. The problem is that, in most cases, these animals are neither vaccinated nor dewormed. This creates another major threat to wild carnivores: the transmission of diseases.

For this reason, during 2024, we carried out a vaccination campaign focused especially on shepherds' dogs.

We managed to vaccinate more than 200 dogs!

This is the second consecutive year we've vaccinated pets in rural areas... and with your help, we hope to continue doing so!



Repairing Chicken Coops

As is well known, the main cause of death for carnivores worldwide is human retaliation. These animals attack livestock—whether sheep, goats, or chickens—and in response, owners seek various ways to eliminate them.

Our approach is simple: we identify the problem, fix the chicken coops, and replace the lost birds. In Chile, small felines often attack backyard chickens. Thanks to the support of our funding partners, this year we were able to expand our work beyond Vilches Alto and visit seven other towns: El Cajón del Maipo, Los Andes, Chaihuín, La Candelaria, La Rufina, Chacayes, San Fabián, and Fresia.

As part of this initiative, we installed 23 camera traps in chicken coops to monitor attacks, reinforced 6 chicken coops, and delivered 53 chickens to local communities.



School Visits

This year, we visited four schools to share our love for small felines and conservation. At the Rural School of Vilches Alto, we talked about these enigmatic felines and played “Cat with Cats,” a fun game that delighted the students. We also shared “Completo” (Chilean hot dogs) with them, creating an unforgettable moment.

At the Rural School of El Manzano, in Cajón del Maipo, we worked alongside students, teachers, and volunteers to paint a large mural featuring the colocolo cat, the puma, and other wild animals chosen by the students themselves. We also visited a school in Santiago and another in Chaihuín, where, in addition to talking about small feline conservation, we gave away the latest posters of Chile’s felines.



Research in Altos de Lircay

Our work with the colocolo cat began in 2018 at the Altos de Lircay National Reserve. Since then, we've learned a great deal about the colocolo. Unfortunately, we've found the presence of dogs, and this year, domestic cats have begun to appear in the same areas where colocolos are found.



Conservation cartoon

We are developing an animated series that will address the conservation issues facing the colocolo cat. It's a mini-series consisting of four episodes, each focusing on one of the main threats to this species.

The first episode will cover the impact of wild dogs; the second, the transmission of diseases from pets to wildlife; the third will address death by retaliation, when our character attempts to hunt a farmer's chickens; and in the last episode, our protagonist will face the devastation of her habitat caused by a forest fire.

We hope to release the videos in 2025. They will be available on YouTube, on our Instagram, and there will also be a download link so anyone can

watch and share them at home or at school, without needing an internet connection.



Cerro Poqui Cleanup

In collaboration with our partners at the Sanctuary of Nature, we carried out a successful cleanup day at the main hill of the Sanctuary of Nature, Cerro Poqui. Thanks to the efforts of about twenty volunteers, we managed to remove a significant amount of waste..



Colocolo Camp

We are excited to share with you about this new Colocolo Camp! In this edition, students from Santiago and the small town of Las Cabras traveled to experience the habitat of the colocolo cat in the mountains.

We held the camp during winter, and it was an unforgettable experience for the children, many of whom saw snow for the first time. In this white and cold landscape, they learned about conservation, sampling techniques like the use of camera traps, bird watching, and much more.

We believe that activities like these are essential, especially in a world where children spend so much time in front of screens. Here, with no phone signal, they lived an adventure they will never forget. And the best part: these memories will always be tied to their new favorite small wild cat, the colocolo.



We are deeply grateful to Refugio Biota Maule for welcoming us once again and making our experience even more special. Their support has been crucial in making this camp a success and continues to inspire future generations of conservationists.

Workshops

This year, we participated in 6 workshops in different locations throughout Chile: 3 in Santiago, 2 in the Maule Region, and 1 in the O'Higgins Region. In simple terms, we aimed to bring people closer to wild cats, discussing the importance of their conservation and how it can benefit us all.

Fairs

This year, we had the great opportunity to participate in important educational fairs. We were present at the Environmental Fair, in front of the Government Palace, and for the second consecutive year, at the Day of Wildlife, an event organized by the Jane Goodall Institute Chile. During this event, more than 7,000 people visited the Museo Interactivo Mirador (MIM), a space dedicated to educational learning.

We were also invited to the beautiful town of Aculeo, where we received a warm welcome and shared our work with the community.

At each of these fairs, our life-sized colocolo cat sculpture was a major highlight, sparking curiosity and interest among both adults and children. And with excitement, we tell you that we now have a new addition: the güiña!

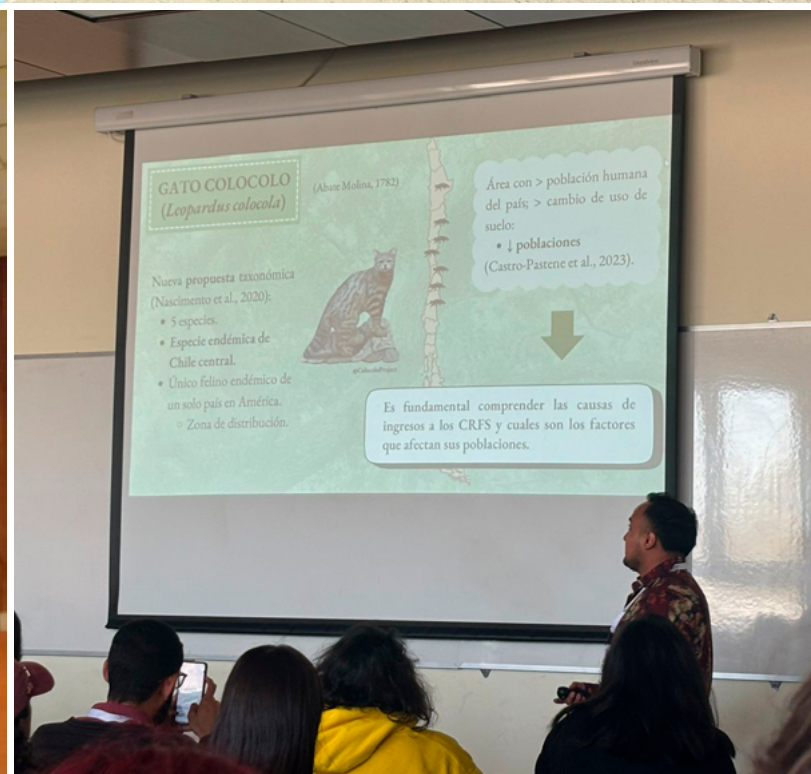


Participation in the First Zoology Congress

The Colocolo Conservation Project had a high level of participation at the First Zoology Congress of Chile, where students like Mariafernanda Schnettler presented posters related to the conservation of the colocolo, and student Esperanza Zenteno and Veterinarian Claudio Ahumada gave an oral pre-

sentation about the reasons these animals end up in rescue centers.

Carlos Castro-Pastene was invited to participate in the roundtable discussion on responsible pet ownership and the role of free-roaming dogs, where he shared the efforts CCP is making to mitigate this issue.



Acknowledgments:

Special thanks to Camilo Vera for the cover photo, Paula Wolff for the güiña photographs, and to Hostería de Vilches and Biota Maule for always welcoming us with open arms and to:





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