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Editorial

The creation of the Iberá National Park has been approved

In the mid-1990s Douglas and Kristine Tompkins visited Iberá for the first time, because authorities from Argentine National Parks wanted to convince them to buy land in this great wilderness area to create a national park. And in 1997, Conservation Land Trust (CLT), a member of Tompkins Conservation, started its Iberá Project with the purchase of San Alonso ranch; that property and subsequent acquisitions of private ranches increased CLT holdings to reach 370,000 acres within the Iberá Nature Reserve. Advised by Argentine scientists, Doug noted from the beginning of the project that the future national park would need a significant ecological restoration work before being established, since Iberá (like the whole Province of Corrientes) had suffered one of the worst defaunation processes in northern Argentina. At least five mammal species had disappeared from the region (jaguar, giant anteater, tapir, collared peccary, and giant otter) and others were following the same path, such as the pampas deer, the ocelot, the maned wolf, and the cougar. Likewise, large birds such as the bare-faced curassow and the green-winged macaw had been locally extirpated, while the glaucous macaw became globally extinct. With this conservation and landscape context, in 2005 the Iberá Rewilding Program was launched. We at CLT believed it was necessary to include a complete ecosystem that would host all the species that coevolved in the area if we were to donate a large park to Argentina. Or, as we often say, “If we are going to create a great natural cathedral, it better be complete.”

Our Rewilding Program has always been linked to the idea of land restoration and donation to create a national park. In 2016 this vision took a decisive step to become reality. First, the Corrientes authorities, with a clear long-term vision and despite some resistance by those who do not share the idea of having a large National Park in the province, approved the law that allows CLT to donate land to the Argentine Nation. Soon after approving this law, Argentine President Mauricio Macri signed an agreement with Kristine Tompkins (President of Tompkins Conservation, to which CLT belongs) to start the land donation process and help create the 346,000-acre Iberá National Park. The new national park will form a continuous management unit with the adjacent Iberá Provincial Park, for a total protected area of roughly 1,360,000 acres, the largest park in Argentina. As a result of this agreement, on November 6 (National Park Day in Argentina), the first portion of CLT lands was donated to the Argentine Nation, a nucleus of 57,000 acres located in the North of Iberá and known as Cambyretá.
Over the next three years all of CLT’s privately assembled conservation lands will be donated to the National Parks Authority, as the government is committed to approving the law for the establishment of Iberá National Park. One of the most notable results of this process is the generation of joint management agreements for the Iberá Park between the province of Corrientes, the national government, and CLT; this agreement includes our commitment to maintain the rewilding program at least until 2026, to ensure that the large Iberá Park will have viable populations of all animals that were previously extinguished in the region.

With these advances in the last months, we ensure not only that Iberá will have a large park under public ownership and management, but also that it will have the array of native wildlife species that flourished here prior to European settlement. After more than a decade of work, we see how the wildlife restoration process not only has a positive ecological impact, but also serves to unite political will and create institutional alliances. More notably, it has helped to communicate the importance of the region as a natural paradise that deserves to be visited, setting the foundation of a new economy that thrives due to the maintenance and restoration of natural ecosystems rather than their destruction. No doubt our cofounder Doug Tompkins would be proud that we have come to this situation.

Ignacio Jiménez Pérez
Conservation Director
CLT-Argentina

Photo: Noelia Insaurralde

First image of two species that now share the same habitat after decades of absence.
Recent arrivals to our on-site Jaguar Breeding Center

### Key Facts

- Two new jaguar males arrived at the breeding center.
- Tobuna has mated several times with Nahuel without getting pregnant.
- For the first time a wild animal is transferred to Argentina to be part of a breeding program for reintroduction.

Since we published our latest newsletter on wildlife restoration, the on-site Jaguar Breeding Program in Iberá has made significant progress. At the beginning of 2016 the first male jaguar arrived at the Jaguar Experimental Breeding Center (or CECY, as it’s known in Spanish). This male, named Nahuel, entered the project being twelve years old, and was born in a zoo in Uruguay; he was later acquired by the owners of a zoo in the province of Rio Negro (Argentinean Patagonia). It took months of formalities and procedures for Nahuel to arrive at his new home in Iberá. Initially, it was necessary to carry out a prescribed genetic analysis to prove that Nahuel was not directly related to Tobuna, the female that is currently in the CECY, and at the same time to verify that he belonged to the genetic lineage of the Argentine jaguars. Once this step was completed, the Bubalcó and Buenos Aires zoos coordinated their actions to bring about the male’s donation to the project.

Before arriving in Iberá, Nahuel spent a quarantine period in the facilities built for this purpose near Corrientes city. Once this phase was successfully completed, the male traveled to San Alonso island, his new home. The animal’s release into the 1,200-square-meter enclosure where he has been living since then, adjacent to that occupied by the female Tobuna, was witnessed by a small group of people including the Minister of Environment of Argentina, Sergio Bergman, and the provincial senator Sergio Flinta. A moment of deep emotion was experienced when the male came out of his transport cage to step onto Iberá soil for the first time.

The arrival of Nahuel, the first male jaguar to steps on Iberá soil after decades of absence, in front of the watchful eye of the National Minister of Environment and the CLT team.

Photo: Leo Bayol

Photo: Rafael Abuín

Photo: Rafael Abuín
The following day, a public event was held, attended by the Minister of Tourism of Corrientes, the provincial directors of Parks and Wildlife, and the vice-president of the National Parks Administration. Next to them, there were also present provincial and national park rangers, the mayor of the neighboring town of Concepción, a representative of Techint company (which donated more than a thousand iron pipes with which the CECY was built), and the directors of the Bubalcó and Buenos Aires zoos, who made the arrival of Nahuel to Corrientes possible.

Everybody went to see the new male jaguar, which was already comfortable in his new environment, next to his future “girlfriend” in the adjacent enclosure. Once back to San Alonso’s main buildings, hopeful words regarding the return of wildlife to Iberá as well as the local development derived from it were expressed. A particularly emotional moment occurred when the inspiring role of the late Douglas Tompkins, who initiated all this process, was recalled by the Minister of Environment (and rabbi) Bergman, who asked for a minute of silence. Feelings became even more vivid when local singer Juan Carlos Jensen recited his poem “La Reina” (the Queen) dedicated to Tobuna, our first female jaguar.

Soon after being close to each other, Nahuel and Tobuna grew comfortable with one another, and gradually were allowed to be together. The first encounters were followed with great anticipation, and after some short-lived fights, several mating events occurred. We monitor Tobuna’s hormonal levels daily using fecal matter samples. This method allows us to recognize the reproductive cycle phases she is going through, and will help us to identify a possible pregnancy. However, so far there has been no pregnancy. During 2016 the couple’s meetings were followed with great interest and expectation from the public through social networks.

Meanwhile, we have installed video surveillance cameras in the CECY breeding pens, which will allow

Experts and authorities meeting to review and plan the Jaguar Project in Iberá.
us to keep track of the breeding period and future cubs. Some refuges, where Tobuna can be quiet at the time of giving birth, have also been built there. Since arriving in Iberá Tobuna has greatly improved her hunting skills, which gives us confidence that she will teach her cubs to get their own food. An evaluation and planning meeting of the breeding and reintroduction project was also held last year, in which experts and scientists from Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa participated together with the CLT team, and parks and wildlife authorities from Corrientes and Argentina. This meeting was useful to further improve our working protocols and solidify relationships with authorities and experts.

We began 2017 with the arrival of a second male to the project: Chiqui. This jaguar, about 10 years old, was born in the wild and was confiscated as a cub in the town of El Olimpo, near the Paraguayan Pantanal. Since then he has lived in the Atinguy Wildlife Refuge, belonging to the Binational Yacyretá Entity (EBY). Chiqui has been loaned for a time to the project, with the aim of adding a new member to the breeding center. Chiqui’s importation to Argentina has involved a great commitment and help from the Paraguayan government, SENACSA, the Environmental Ministry, and the EBY. This is an historic event, as it is the first time that a wild animal has been donated from a neighboring country to be part of a breeding program for species reintroduction. After coming through the quarantine phase and sanitary checkups, Chiqui was moved to his octagonal enclosure in San Alonso. Again, the arrival of a new jaguar to the project was an event that convened authorities from Corrientes and Argentina, the representatives of the government of Paraguay and the Antinguy Refuge that donated the animal, as well as journalists. Since then, Chiqui has been living comfortably in his enclosure next to Tobuna and Nahuel, and he has already had the chance to mate with Tobuna on one occasion, although her estrus was weak and no copulations were registered.

We are currently completing the procedures to bring a young female from Brazil and also Tobuna’s daughter, which could replace her mother as a breeder in case she does not become pregnant after copulating several times with the two males. Tobuna, who is about 13 or 14 years old, is at the limit of the reproductive age for jaguars and may not be able to give birth.
News of the giant anteater reintroduction in Iberá

**Key Facts**

During 2016 we recorded the birth of 11 cubs, combined with the death of two young animals released and three cubs born in San Alonso.

We continue to remove radio-harnesses from animals already established in the wild, and follow them through trap-cameras.

Both populations continue to increase, with an estimated 70 animals in Socorro and 27 in San Alonso.

By the end of 2017, the Anteater Reintroduction Project in Iberá will be 10 years old. These years allowed us to learn about the management and biology of a relatively little known animal (in fact, we knew very little when we started) thanks to the monitoring of dozens of released individuals.

Throughout these years, we had the opportunity to rescue and care for 94 anteaters in our rescue center. Our team has gained tremendous experience in the care and handling of these animals, each of which requires care and specific conditions depending on the state in which they arrive. Between 2016 and early 2017 we have been able to rescue 11 anteaters thanks to the collaboration of dozens of individuals and the authorities of northern Argentina.

As mentioned in CLT’s previous rewilding program newsletter, the process of removing radio-harnesses from animals has continued in the Socorro population of anteaters. The goal is to avoid the disturbance associated with collars and to continue with non-invasive tracking through trap cameras. Thus during 2016, radio-harnesses were removed from all the animals of this population with the exception of the female Mishky, who continues to be monitored by telemetry. This ongoing monitoring allowed us to verify that Mishky had her fourth offspring, which has survived the age of...
independence and is about nine months old.

After almost eight years of being monitored, Tota had her radio-harness removed; she is probably the anteater monitored by radio-telemetry for the longest time in the world. This 14-year-old female, who entered the project in 2007 as an adult, has given birth to five offspring within the Socorro reserve, carrying her latest offspring still on her back when she was last captured. In the San Alonso population, which was established more recently, we have already removed harnesses from nine individuals, and 10 animals are still being monitored through telemetry. We try to wait for the individuals to settle in one place and, in the case of the females, to give birth at least once before finally removing their radio-harness.

Thanks to the placement of trap cameras we can verify the survival of the released animals, which have some distinctive marks on their ears. Through this system, we have found some notable cases in Socorro, such as the survival of Poty (the only one of our anteaters born in captivity) after four years of her release, or the appearance of Mishky’s penultimate offspring, already the size of an adult animal. In the case of San Alonso, where cameras are placed in selected forest patches, we were able to verify the presence of Akahatá, the first anteater to have his harness removed, after months of not being sighted.

The nearly 10 years of tracking telemetry data from Socorro anteaters were also used in a postgraduate study conducted by the biologist Talía Zamboni at Oxford University. Talía used the monitoring data accumulated during these years (births, deaths, number of females who gave birth, fire frequencies in the area, etc.) to generate a model that projected the evolution of the reintroduced population over time. In turn, it was possible to analyze the proportion of optimal habitat that the anteaters have in and around Socorro to expand the population, identifying sites with greater probability of anteater occupation. The results showed an optimistic outlook for growth and a 99 percent survival probability of the population in the long term, which surpasses that obtained in the population viability analysis carried out before the project began. This data gives us peace of mind regarding the population growth expectations and will help us select where to place the trap-cameras to better track the animals.

Without a doubt the best story that the anteaters gave us in 2016 has been that of Lucia, the traveling anteater. This animal had been spotted on a slope in

Yurumina, proud with her first cub in San Alonso.
San Alonso for the last time in January 2015, after which she moved several kilometers to a marshy area away from the other reintroduced anteaters. Although there were several overflights confirming that her radio-collar continued emitting activity signals, it was impossible to get close to her on the ground, due to the inaccessibility of the area. On Christmas Eve, after a three-day campaign of intense work traversing the wetland on horseback, Jorge, our wildlife veterinarian, along with Pablo, a monitoring technician, and Don Sotelo, a local park ranger, were able to find and capture the animal. Surprisingly, for the type of marshy environment where she had been living for more than a year, Lucia was in perfect condition and was transferred to Socorro, where she has been released near other anteaters.

In summary, 2016 and the first months of 2017 have shown growth in both anteater populations. In San Alonso, six new anteaters were released and eight cubs were born (three of which came from first-time mothers), while at Socorro at least six offspring were born (two from the same animal). Unlike the previous year in which there was no death of any of the 32 anteaters monitored in both populations, during 2016 we recorded the death of two females released in San Alonso. In both cases the animals had arrived to the island being quite small, and they died during the winter months, which are the most stressful for these animals. We were also able to verify the death of three of the offspring born in San Alonso. Our next challenge will be to know the status of both populations by trap-camera tracking which, even if it does not allow estimates as accurate as radio tracking, will avoid having to recapture the animals regularly to adjust their harnesses.
The new pampas deer population in Socorro is well established

Key Facts

The first reintroduced population in Iberá continues to grow, currently holding between 90 and 100 individuals, while some animals from this nucleus have begun to appear in other areas of the park.

During 2016, seven new deer were translocated to a second population in Socorro, where 14 individuals currently live. In this population a new 74-acre pen has been built so that the animals are better established in the area and can even reproduce inside it.

With the San Alonso reintroduced population clearly settled and growing rapidly since its founding in 2009, our current challenge is to set up a similar population in Socorro. In 2015 four deer from the Aguapey region were translocated to Socorro, and three more animals from San Alonso joined them later (see Newsletter nº 2). Two females from the first group gave birth to two offspring, one shortly after arriving and the other during 2016, but none of them survived.

In 2016, with the intention of strengthening and anchoring this group in a safe area in Socorro, three more animals from San Alonso, and four females from the original population of Aguapey joined the group. This transfer could be done thanks again to the collaboration of the forestry company Aguará Cuá SA and El Potrero Reserve from Entre Ríos.

For a while (as usually happens in the early stages of establishing a new population) the bad news accumulated. First, two of the released females died. Then, in spite of different attempts to “fix” the animals in the same area—from burning or cutting grass to placing other individuals’ feces on site to signal deer presence—the released animals seemed determined to move away from the conservation area and, in addition, to do so separately. This posed a great risk to their survival; outside the reserve they are more likely to be hunted, attacked by dogs, or to end up in areas that were unfit for foraging and breeding.

Given this scenario, in order to fix them in that area, we decided to create a large pen or pampas deer “sanctuary” where the animals could stay for a longer time and even have offspring. This large, 74-acre corral containing grassland and wooded savannah areas was finally completed when the animals that had been dispersed began to return to the conservation area and regroup. We can now say that the reintroduced nucleus has begun to thrive with four adult specimens (one male and three females) and three offspring within the enclosed sanctuary, and a second group consisting of six adults and one fawn, which live free in our reserve about six kilometers from the first group. Our idea is to continue reinforcing the small nucleus in the fenced sanctuary, where their offspring can be born, for later release; the goal is that they will be completely “anchored” to the zone, preventing their potential dispersal towards areas where they lack adequate protection.

Meanwhile, the San Alonso population continues without difficulties. As the number of animals increases, it becomes more difficult to verify the number of offspring born and to estimate total population numbers. However, during 2016 we have observed at least 11 of the marked females (both those which carry radio-collars and those with ear-tags) in the company of their offspring, together with several unmarked
females that surely have also given birth during this year. Also noteworthy is that our park rangers have twice seen pampas deer in other areas of the Iberá Park neighboring San Alonso, but outside that island, which could indicate that the species is starting to colonize new areas.

In order to find methods allowing us to have reliable estimates of the San Alonso population, two researchers, one from the National University of Córdoba and another from the National University of Costa Rica, have been carrying out their theses on evaluating counting methods in this population. One of the studies seeks to estimate population abundance using aerial photos, while the other compares different counting methods (aerial and terrestrial) in order to recommend the most effective. Both works are under analysis, and soon we will have more accurate estimates of the number of deer that the island supports, and we will learn which method will be most convenient to use in the future.
Currently, we estimate that San Alonso probably shelters a population of around 100 individuals.

As we do every year, CLT biologists conducted a pampas deer census in the Aguapey region. The team traveled pre-established transects within the region, spotting 33 deer (two less than the previous year) and counting only two offspring. The number of deer sighted in the last two years has been low compared to previous years (in 2008, for instance, 183 animals were observed). This could point to a population decline. We believe that the presence of temporary workers in the pine plantations, minimal controls on hunting, and the fact that last winter was especially hard could be factors negatively affecting the population growth. In any case, these data are cause for concern, reinforcing the importance of having generated new nuclei of deer in protected areas such as San Alonso and Socorro. By “not having all the eggs in one basket” even if the Aguapey population (distributed within private lands outside protected areas) decreases, the species would continue to thrive in the Iberá Park.
Collared peccaries: releases, acclimatization, and births

Key Facts

At least 22 peccaries are already living free in Socorro.

After a year without seeing any offspring, we have seen several cubs born in the wild.

In the previous newsletter, we mentioned that the seven peccaries from the first reintroduced group in Socorro were well, as were the two cubs born in that group. Unfortunately, shortly after communicating this news, we no longer saw the offspring, suggesting that they did not survive.

Of these animals, five females and one male were consolidated in the same group, while a second male (Saiky) parted from them. After several months in which the peccaries had to be regularly supplemented with food, they finally managed to be completely independent and currently feed without any intervention from us. As a curiosity, in recent months we have observed them feeding on carcasses, which undoubtedly adds extra protein to their diet.

In 2016, a second group of 10 animals donated by the Native Wildlife Station from the province of Salta arrived to our quarantine facilities. From these, six were released in an area close to that occupied by the other group, after having spent several weeks in their

Photo: Emanuel Galetto
acclimatization pen. During the most delicate weeks of adaptation to the natural environment, two of these six animals died and another was taken back to captivity because it showed what we considered an excessive dependence on people. This high initial mortality appears to be normal in peccaries. In a Texas reintroduction project of the same species, out of 29 released animals, only eight remained in the release area, from which the population grew and settled rapidly. In our case, there is also the disadvantage that the released animals come from captivity, which makes it difficult for them to adapt to the wild environment, decreasing their chances of survival.

Shortly after releasing this second group from Salta, we received 14 new animals from the Horco Molle Experimental Station (Tucumán), which has meant the largest number of animals simultaneously transported in the history of our program. Fortunately, all these animals successfully overcame their quarantine stage, and were released in another sector of Socorro, after having spent the acclimatization time in their pre-release pen.

During all these months, we wondered why there were so few piglets being born. One hypothesis would be that the replacement of the dominant male in the first group by another male could have encouraged infanticide by the second one, or at least inhibited reproduction. Another possible explanation would be that the mothers were too young and could have lost their offspring before we even detected them, because they were insufficiently adapted to their new environment. Fortunately, in early 2017 we have been able to see the birth of eight peccaries. Again, several of them soon disappeared (two of them probably drowned when crossing a stream with their mothers during a heavy rain) and currently there is only one cub that we frequently see and which has managed to survive the most critical weeks.

In summary, we can verify that at least 22 free peccaries live in Iberá, which come from three groups released so far. Because these animals are especially abundant in zoos and wildlife centers in Argentina, we hope to continue releasing more individuals during 2017. As far as we are aware, this is the first project to reintroduce the species in South America.
An update on the three maned wolves released into Iberá

Key Facts

The young male released from captivity already lives free and independent.

One of the released females is being regularly monitored, while the other one has not been observed for several months.

In the previous newsletter, we mentioned the arrival to San Alonso of Nambí, a male juvenile maned wolf which was kept in a large pen waiting to grow until we could place a collar on its neck. During that time, we could see that Rita, another female maned wolf previously released, periodically visited the pen where the young male was living. In recent months Nambí was finally released. Although it is an animal that grew up with people, we think it will be safe in San Alonso, an area exclusively occupied by our project staff or neighbors with whom we have excellent relationships. Since then, we have been able to hear the radio-collar signals from both male and female maned wolves, especially in the southern part of San Alonso island. A positive fact is that Nambí currently shows no tendency to approach the area of the reserve occupied by people. Meanwhile, we have not had any signs from Koé, the other female released, which had been located to the north of the island in the last half of 2016. Maned wolves have really extensive home-ranges, which makes them especially difficult to track. We are trying to increase the frequency of overflights to search for the radio signal of this animal.
Rewilding Iberá

The reintroduction of tapirs, the largest land mammal in South America, begins

Key Facts

This large ungulate disappeared from Iberá and Corrientes in the middle of the last century. Seven tapirs currently live free in the Iberá Park.

The South American tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*) or *mboverí* in Guaraní language, is the largest land mammal in South America. Related to rhinos and horses, tapirs can weigh more than 200 kilograms, and exhibit a peculiar physiognomy from their elongated nose trunk, which is used to grab leaves, grass, branches, and roots. The tapir is considered a keystone species in the landscapes it inhabits, both for its role as the largest herbivore and for dispersing the seeds of forest trees.

The species is distributed from Central America to northern Argentina, where we can still find tapirs in the provinces of Salta, Jujuy, Formosa, Chaco, and Misiones. Alcides D’Orbigny, a mid-nineteenth-century explorer, cited it as a rare species for the area of Iberá, usually found in marshlands. The last individual recorded in Corrientes province was hunted in 1975. Currently, this large mammal is listed as Endangered for Argentina. According to the IUCN Tapir Specialist Group, tapirs are ideal candidates for reintroduction or translocation programs, due to their high adaptability to changes in

Photo: Rafael Abuín
diet, environmental conditions, and habitat. Considering all these factors, in 2016 we decided to start reintroducing tapirs in Iberá.

The first site chosen for the return of this large mammal was CLT’s Socorro reserve, due to the availability of water bodies and forest patches, considering the tapir’s forest and aquatic habits. We estimate that this reserve could hold a minimum of 50 animals, with the potential to disperse to adjacent areas of the Iberá Park. In order to achieve this, we have received the support of the Native Wildlife Station from Salta and Horco Molle Experimental Reserve from Tucumán, who donated seven individuals (four females and three males). They all come from captivity (although some were born in the wild) and lacked experience living in the wild. In September 2016, the first pair of tapirs was taken to Iberá, after going through the prescriptive quarantine phase and health checks. Shortly after, another male was taken to the same area, and in April 2017 the last four animals were released, leaving seven tapirs already living in Iberá. These animals live in an area where forest is mixed with grassland and swamps, and the first pair has been seen mating several times. This species has a gestation period of thirteen months, so we must be patient for the eventual birth of the first offspring.

As often happens in the early stages of our projects, these months have been especially useful for learning. We had to make improvements in the radio-col-lars placed on the animals, supplement their diet with food after they left their acclimation pens, and carry out intensive management and monitoring. This is typical for reintroductions that use animals that come from captivity; with the other species we have reintroduced, almost all, with the exception of the pampas deer that came directly from a wildlife habitat, were previously captive animals.

A few days ago we experienced one of the worst frights of our project when we found Nato, a strong female, with wounds on her body, which made us think she had been hit by a car on the road. This is the first time one of the reintroduced animals of any of our species appears to have been run over by a vehicle. The day after she was found, our veterinarians attended the animal, which was anesthetized and moved to the pre-release pen to provide her treatment and monitoring. During the immobilization of the animal, CLT vets Jorge and Carolina did not notice any fractures in the affected hind leg. Fortunately, the animal is recovering well. With tapirs now being reintroduced to the Iberá, we see how the puzzle pieces of the landscape are slowly coming together in an environment that had been profoundly altered over the past century.
Training green-winged macaws so they can fly free in Iberá

Key Facts

Seven green-winged macaws are currently making flights around a large bird pen located in the Iberá Park.

Four other individuals are being trained inside the bird pen until they can be released.

A macaw that had left the management area has survived more than two months without receiving any help or food.

Our macaw reintroduction project has represented a bigger challenge than expected, but has taught us many useful lessons about managing the species. As mentioned in the previous newsletter, after the first release of macaws in Cambyretá, the only animal that was found was recaptured and taken to the pre-release pen. (Presumably, the others perished.) New macaws donated by the zoos of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Olavarría and the Aguará Wildlife Rescue Center, joined the initial bird, and after going through the quarantine phase, were added to the Cambyretá group.

Since then, we have started a long and complex training process for the macaws so they are able to fly long distances, identify local fruits, and escape from predators. To develop this training program we have depended upon the advice of ethologist Fabián Gabelli, who has decades of experience in training all kinds of animals. In addition to instructing us on how to train the animals, Gabriel helped us to design improvements to our pre-release and acclimatization facilities. Among these improvements, the bird pen has been extended to encourage longer flights, and moved to an area with more forest, and the macaw feeders have been redesigned so they can only be accessed by flying. Macaws also have received exercises of aversion to predators such as raptors and cats, which will allow them to escape from them when they are living in the wild.
During the previous release of macaws, we found out that radio collars did not work properly, so we had to change the models and to support the monitoring effort by placing fixed antennas in different forest patches, allowing us to locate the released animals. We are helping the macaws adapt to eating more native fruits, which are abundant in the local forests. In turn, they have reduced exotic fruits in the diet, with the exception of chinaberry, a common tree in the area. Because macaws destroy the seeds when eating fruit, they do not act as seed dispersers.

In order to further improve our working methods, the team in charge of the macaw project visited similar projects in Mexico and Brazil. One of these visits was to a wild population of green-winged macaws in the state of Parana, Brazil. This population lives in a rural landscape of grasslands and plantations, with low-rise islands of Atlantic forest in regeneration, very similar to the Cambyretá forests. During this visit, we observed how the macaws can adapt to highly disturbed environments, and we confirmed that Northern Iberá can accommodate a viable population of this spectacular bird.

Learning to eat fruits present in the area.
Learning from the African rewilding maestros

Without a doubt, Africa has the most experienced and advanced conservation projects in the world focused on rewilding. No other region of the globe has managed to restore entire ecosystems by reintroducing dozens of large carnivore and herbivore species like elephants, giraffes, rhinos, buffaloes, hippos, lions, wild dogs, cheetahs, etc. To have a comparison point, the program for large mammal restoration in Iberá is the largest of America in terms of number of species, and after 10 years of work we have released nearly 200 individuals of four mammal species. Across the Atlantic Ocean, park restoration initiatives such as Pilanesberg, Madikwe, Phinda, and Majete have included reintroducing 6,000, 8,000, 1,500, and 2,000 individuals of dozens of species, respectively, in each park. Currently, Africa has institutions such as African Parks, SANParks, &Beyond, or Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (to name a few) with decades of experience in the capture, translocation, and monitoring of wildlife.

After discovering this fact, the CLT team decided that we needed to learn from these efforts and from the “masters” of wildlife reintroduction working on that continent. Thus, Ignacio Jiménez (who has been in charge of the rewilding program from 2006 to 2015) relocated with his family to South Africa throughout 2016. The idea was to visit many projects and talk to many professionals to learn not only about rewilding, but also about the management of protected areas and their relationship with ecotourism. The experience was extremely rich and allowed us to gather a great wealth of knowledge that is not seen in books, documentaries, and websites, and that can only be learned through direct contact with wildlife professionals and projects. During that year, 15 technicians or coordinators from CLT made visits to different projects in South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Rwanda. A delegation from Corrientes was also received in South Africa during 2016 and a delegation from the National Parks Administration traveled to the same country in 2017.

Our goal is now to encourage a greater exchange of professionals between the two regions, and this November we will organize a course on wildlife translocation taught by two of the most experienced vets in Africa, who have captured and relocated more than 150,000 animals combined. Capitalizing on this experience and adapting it to the context of Argentina and neighboring countries will help us not only to improve our work in Iberá, but also to install a more progressive culture for conservation and ecological restoration in South America, that should aim not only at being satisfied that “things do not get worse,” but also to strive to help ecosystems recover.
The people behind the return of wildlife

Personal profile: Alicia Delgado - In charge of the anteater rescue center and quarantine

Alicia Delgado (or Ali, as she is often called) was born in 1979 in Mercedes, near Iberá, and grew up on her family ranch. Since childhood she was influenced by her father who encouraged her curiosity about nature. These experiences sparked her interest in the natural world and prompted her to study Conservation Biology in Córdoba, where Alicia was attracted to applied work rather than to pure research. After finishing university studies she returned to Corrientes and soon had the opportunity to start working on an ambitious project that was just beginning—reintroducing the extirpated wildlife in Iberá. She knew she had found her place.

Once a part of the Conservation Land Trust team, Alicia began working for the pampas deer project in the Aguapey in 2007. Since then, she has conducted annual surveys that provide insight into the state of this rare deer in Corrientes, which inhabits private cattle estancias and forestry lands. During this task, Alicia and her assistants visit local ranches and talk with their owners and workers, to obtain and provide information about pampas deer ecology and conservation. Doing this work, which often involves days of traveling on dirt roads under the rain or heavy heat, is important for learning the status of the population, which serves as a source of animals to fund new populations inside Iberá Park.

In addition to this role, since 2009 Alicia has been responsible for the anteater rescue center and quarantine in the Biological Station located at Corrientes. There she is responsible for hand-rearing the orphan anteaters arriving each year. Alicia’s maternal instinct and her experience as a mother of two girls, together with her great interest in conservation and animal welfare, have been key for a center that has managed more than 90 anteaters over ten years. Alicia also decides the right time for the anteaters to be taken to their final destination in the Socorro or San Alonso reserves, where they are left under supervision of the management and monitoring team in the field. Something that comforts and excites her is to know that most of the rescued animals, in many cases saved from a sure death, have the opportunity to be rehabilitated and live freely in a natural environment.

The expertise that Alicia has acquired over the years makes her one of the most experienced conservation professionals in ex situ anteater management in South America. Along with these tasks, Alicia and her team are responsible for the care of other species that go through the quarantine facilities, including peccaries, tapirs, jaguars, and maned wolves. Upon returning home each evening, with an occasional scratch on her arms, Alice always has interesting stories to tell her daughters Isa and Ana, who share their mother’s affection for the animals from the Center.
The people behind the return of wildlife

Personal profile: Sebastián Di Martino - Present Coordinator for the Rewilding Program

Since he was a child, Sebastián (born 1969) knew he wanted to become a biologist. Probably the camping trips he did with his family every summer visiting various national parks influenced this early vocation. In his native Bahía Blanca, at only 14 years old, he began to attend an environmental association, for which he later took part as a member of the executive committee.

While he was trained as a biologist at the University of La Plata, he volunteered to monitor carnivores with members of the Wildlife Conservation Society in Esquel (Chubut). That experience began to tip his interests towards conservation. After finishing his studies in biology, Sebastián declined an offer for a doctorate in the United States, preferring to start working on protected areas in the province of Neuquén, which cemented his vocation. There, over 18 years he gained experience managing and restoring protected areas. During that time he also had the opportunity to work on conservation projects in San Juan and even Antarctica, and to complete a master’s degree in Spain focused on protected areas.

Fate apparently prompted Sebastián to attend a leadership course in Full Nature taught by CLT in Iberá in 2014. His abilities quickly attracted attention, so he was invited to do an internship in Iberá, and then to gradually to replace Ignacio Jiménez as program coordinator.

Those who know Sebastián rarely will see him flustered despite the multiplicity of tasks he is in charge of: coordinating a team of 13 people, making reports, managing permissions with authorities, meeting with institutions or donors, traveling to learning from other projects, or dealing with contingencies that may daily arise with the animals on the ground. His calm nature leads Sebastián to what he enjoys the most—seeing concrete results at the end of each day. For this, he relies on a team of people attuned to their work, who carry out simultaneously the reintroduction of six different species in Iberá. In his own words, Sebastián says, “it is a pleasure belonging to an institution that shows every day how to have a positive impact on conservation, to dispell the rumors and distrust that many people had when CLT came to Argentina.” Sebastián still gets excited every time he goes to the field and touches an animal. After all, since a child he knew what he was passionate about.
Publications and technical reports

Various publications and technical reports related to the Iberá Rewilding Program that have been published in recent months:


Acknowledgments

The Iberá Rewilding Program is carried out by The Conservation Land Trust-Argentina with support and authorization from the wildlife and parks authorities from Argentina, Corrientes, and several Argentine provinces that donate animals. The program is funded primarily by CLT with support from donors such as Leonardo Di Caprio Foundation, Bromley Charitable Trust, the BBVA Foundation, Artis Zoo, and Ferrero.

The progress made over the past year could not have been achieved but for the active collaboration of many institutions and individuals. We acknowledge the support of all, although we could be forgetting some names. Native Wildlife Station (EFA) from Salta and Horco Molle Experimental Reserve from Tucumán have donated the first peccaries and tapirs reintroduced into Iberá. The Zoos from Córdoba, Buenos Aires, and La Plata, Guaycolec Rescue Center from Formosa, and the Ecology Ministry Misiones have donated macaws to the project. Aguara Cuá Reserve from Pomera forestry company allowed us once again to carry out the pampas deer translocation from their fields to Iberá and El Potrero Reserve in Entre Ríos, and once again supported this translocation by facilitating a helicopter and a pilot. Chiqui’s (the second male jaguar) cession and transport was possible thanks to the collaboration of Yacyre-ta Binational Entity, mainly of Atinguy Wildlife Reserve, the Environment Department (SEAM) and the National Service of Animal Quality and Health (SENACSA) of Paraguay and SENASA and Wildlife Division of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina.

Photo: Leo Bayol
Pet food factory Primia helped by donating food for deer, peccaries, and tapirs, and the ACINDAR company donated material for the construction of pens in the CECY. Health professionals (veterinarians, radiologists, and dentists) from the UNNE and particulars from Corrientes, collaborated on the endodontic intervention made to Nahuel, one of the jaguars, for which Avalon Biomed Inc of USA Lab donated material. We also thank the Chair of professionals from Human Physiology of the Medicine Faculty of the National University of Córdoba, for the jaguars’ hormonal analysis.

As always, we want to reiterate our thanks to the Biological Station of Corrientes (Ebco) in San Cayetano Provincial Park and its staff, and to the Aguará Conservation Center, where many animals are hosted temporarily. We thank the Natural Resources Department and the Parks and Reserves Department of the Ministry of Tourism of Corrientes for their continued collaboration. We add our thanks to the new park rangers of the Iberá National Park who collaborate with the CLT team.

Finally, a special thanks to all the volunteers who have gone through the various projects and worked selflessly during their stay. We hope that the project has been able to give them back as much as they have provided to us.