

## **Invited symposium**

### **Approaches to involving local communities in mammal conservation in South America.**

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: A PARTNER IN THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF VICUÑA IN ARGENTINA.

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The vicuña (*Vicugna vicugna*, Camelidae) possesses a fine fleece, highly valued for luxury textiles. Unsustainable harvesting practices brought the species close to extinction by the 1960s. After 3 decades of conservation, the recovery of some populations has led to conflicts with pastoral communities, whose livestock compete with vicuña for forage resources. As a result, vicuña in many communities are less appreciated now than earlier, when they were perceived as “endangered”. In Cieneguillas (a town in north western Argentina, with a high density of wild vicuña), we adopted an environmental education (EE) approach in an attempt to give the local community the tools they needed to turn a “problem” of vicuña grazing into an “opportunity” to gain a financial return from harvesting the fibre. Outcomes of the EE were: a) involvement of the community in fibre harvest activities, b) positive attitude to the presence of wild vicuñas, c) over 100 campesinos trained in captures, d) incorporation of vicuña management in village school activities - drawings, stories and “coplas” (traditional songs) e) 83 teachers in 18 villages trained in EE techniques; f) a book on regional EE written and given free to teachers and schools.

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Power-Point projector