

CAT news

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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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Small wild cat working groups of the Neotropics: results of the first group leaders meeting

In May 2022, the First Small Wild Cat Working Groups Meeting of the Neotropics was held in Piura, Peru. In this meeting, seven Working Group WG leaders presented their threat mitigation activities on behalf of the conservation of 10 species of small wild cats distributed in Latin America. Because threats are similar for all small cats co-occurring in the same landscape, we agreed to have an integrated approach and target multiple species in all conservation projects of the Working Groups (Ocelot WG, Pampas Cat WG, Geoffroy's Cat WG, Guigna WG, Tiger Cats WG, Oncilla project, and Andean Cat Alliance). As species ranges are large, each WG will focus their conservation efforts on specific regions with clear communication among one another.

With funding from the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, America's small wild cat working group leaders met for the first time ever at Margarita Zoo in Piura, Peru on the 15th–20th May in 2022. The objective of the meeting was for participants to interact and get to know each other personally, while presenting the different conservation initiatives that are being implemented to protect each species, providing project updates, and sharing views on the many threats faced by small wild cats in Latin America.

In attendance were Mariam Weston (Mexico, Ocelot Working Group OWG), José D. Ramírez-Fernández (Costa Rica, The Oncilla Project under Costa Rica Wildlife Foundation), Alvaro García and Cindy Hurtado (Peru, Pampas Cat Working Group PCWG), Tadeu G. de Oliveira (Brazil, Tiger Cat Conservation Initiative TCCI), Flávia Tirelli (Brazil, Geoffroy's Cat Working Group GCWG), Rocío Palacios (Argentina, Alianza Gato Andino AGA), Nicolás Gálvez (Chile, Guigna Working Group WG), and Jim Sanderson (Small Wild Cat Conservation Foundation; Fig. 1). Included with the Pampas Cat Working Group were Pedro Heredia, Patricio Muñóz, Paloma Alcazar, Zoila Vega, and Renzo Ojeda. Margarita Zoo founder Pedro Navarro and staff also attended, providing all the needed facilities for our meeting. These seven organisations have multiple conservation projects on behalf of all small wild cat species in America (ocelot *Leopardus pardalis*, margay *L. wiedii*, tiger cat complex *L. tigrinus* complex, Southern tiger cat *L. guttulus*,

guinea *L. guigna*, Geoffroy's cat *L. geoffroyi*, pampas cat complex *L. colocola* complex, Andean cat *L. jacobita*, bobcat *Lynx rufus*, and jaguarundi *Herpailurus yagouaroundi* with the exception of the Canada Lynx *Lynx canadensis*; Fig. 2).

Multi-species approach

Following several days of talks, it was clear that conservation actions on behalf of one species could protect all small wild cats present in the same area. For instance, improving chicken coops to prevent retaliatory killing of Geoffroy's cats could also avoid conflict with jaguarundis, pampas cats, ocelots, and margays when their distributions overlap. This example is representative for all the threats described

in Mugerwa et al. (2020). The integrated approach of benefiting multiple species has already been carried out by the First Continental Vaccination Campaign held on 25 March 2022, where 17 projects from six Neotropical countries, from four different working groups (TCCI, OC, OWG, PCWG) participated. This initiative, led by TCCI, aimed to tackle the widespread and common threat of disease transmission by domestic carnivores. This action benefited all 10 taxonomic entities of small cats, jaguar, puma, and other carnivores simultaneously.

Regional conservation efforts mitigating shared threats

Due to the large geographic range of most of the species, which exceeds the ability of any working group leader to organise and coordinate conservation projects effectively, we debated that the focus should be on shared threats throughout the range of species as an effective and financially efficient way to mitigate threats. For instance, the Ocelot Working Group also includes the margay and jaguarundi, whose geographic ranges extend from northern Mexico to northern Argentina, rendering coordination difficult. Additionally, this focus provides working group leaders with a more realistic coordination of logistics when species are broadly distributed. We believe that the concentration of efforts per geographic region, independent of the particular species, is the way forward for many mitigation intervention strategies (e.g. vaccination or chicken coop management). Hence, we decided to divide the



Fig. 1. Working Group leaders. On left, left-to-right: Jim Sanderson, José Ramírez-Fernández, Cindy Hurtado, Alvaro García; on right, left-to-right: Rocío Palacios, Nicolás Gálvez, Flavia Tirelli, Mariam Weston and Tadeu de Oliveira (Photo Small Wild Cat Conservation Foundation).



Fig. 2. The 16 species/taxonomic units of medium-small sized cats found in the Neotropics with conservation action in motion. From left to right: bobcat, jaguarundi, ocelot, margay, oncilla *Leopardus (t.) pardinoides oncilla*, Andean tiger cat *Leopardus (t.) pardinoides*, lowland northern tiger cat *Leopardus (t.) tigrinus*, southern tiger cat, desert cat *Leopardus garleppi*; Pantanal cat *Leopardus braccatus*; Uruguayan Pampas cat *Leopardus munoai*, Colocolo cat *Leopardus colocola*, Argentinean Pampas cat *Leopardus pajeros*, Andean cat, Geoffroy's cat, and guña.

broadly distributed geographic ranges of wildcats into manageable regions (Fig. 3). Working group leaders will focus their conservation efforts within their regions. For example, Mariam Weston from the Ocelot Working Group, will oversee projects on ocelot, bobcat, margay, and jaguarundi in Mexico and Belize. José Ramírez, the Oncilla Project, will oversee efforts of the same species (with the exception of bobcat) in Central America. Tadeu G. de Oliveira, Tiger Cat Conservation Initiative, will include margay, jaguarundi, ocelot, and pampas cat in his conservation efforts on behalf of all three tiger cats. Within its area, TCCI would typically cover seven, and eventually up to 10 different small cats' taxonomic entities. Additionally, Andean Cat Alliance conservation projects in the Andes also benefit the Pampas cat, thus allowing Alvaro and Cindy, Pampas Cat Working Group, to focus their efforts in the western regions of Ecuador and Peru. In Chile and Argentina, efforts of the Guña

Working Group could also benefit the *L. colocola* complex, particularly in central Chile. Rio Grande do Sul in southernmost Brazil is a global felid hotspot with eight species, including six species of small wild cats (Nagy-Reis et al. 2020); one of which Brazil recognizes as Critically Endangered *Leopardus munoai*. Since Flavia Tirelli, Geoffroy's Cat Working Group, is a resident there, Flavia will dedicate all of her efforts in the hotspot (Fig. 2) while still coordinating efforts for Geoffroy's cats elsewhere. Where species overlap, working group leaders will communicate closely. With respect to the Amazon basin, the area is largely continuous and the threats to the only three small wild cats (ocelot, margay, and jaguarundi) are relatively low (except along the threatened deforestation arch forests and the Amazonian savannas) and efforts focusing on the jaguar *Panthera onca* will also help conserve small cats (Fig. 2). In order to do a follow-up of our threat mitigation activities, evaluate project effec-

tiveness, or redirect our conservation efforts if needed, the next working group leaders meeting is tentatively planned for late 2024 in San José, Costa Rica.

Photo credits:

Wild Cats Americas, Felinos do Pampa, Andean Tiger Cat Project, Peruvian Desert Cat Project, Alianza Gato Andino, M. Mooring/QERC, Patricio Muñoz, Rodrigo Nuñez, Nicolás Galvez, Jim Sanderson.

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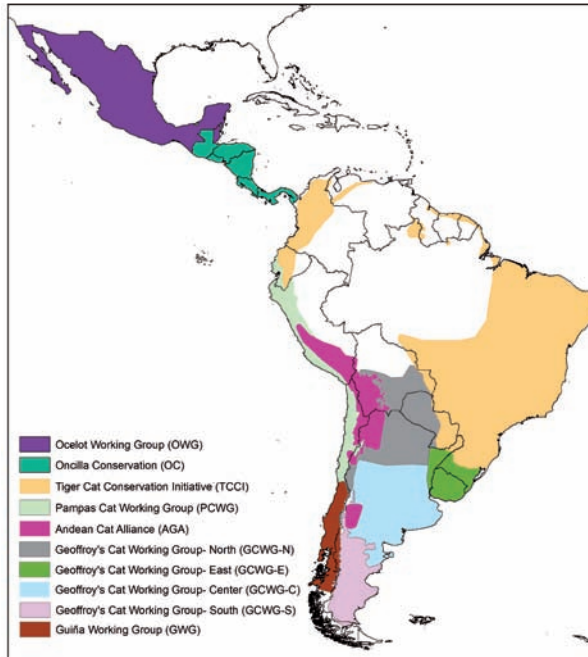


Fig. 3. Conservation activities divided into regions lead by WG coordinators. OWG: Mariam Weston, OC: José D. Ramírez-Fernández, TCCI: Tadeu G. de Oliveira, PCWG: Cindy Hurtado & Alvaro Garcia, AGA: Rocio Palacios, GWG: Costanza Napolitano & Nicolás Gálvez, GCWG-N: Paola Ascarruz & Lucia Soler, GCWG-E: Flavia Tirrelli, GCWG-C: Lucila Castro, Thamara Fariñas & Soledad Albanese, GCWG-S: Mauro Lucherini.

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