Project Update: December 2008

October 2008
This is the month when rural settlers in collaboration with us do the capture, shearing, and released of the guanaco (photo 1). Before this begins we estimated the density of guanacos in the management zone and collected faecal samples (photo 2). We collected 200 faecal samples and the density was 21 individuals km^{-2}. In addition we measured the vertical and horizontal structure of the vegetation, we did 4 transects for each habitat type. The xerophytic vegetation belongs to the Patagonian shrubby steppe, where the dominant species are *Panicum urvilleum*, *Sporobulus rigens*, together with *Poa lanuginosa* and *Stipa speciosa*. The shrub layer is dominated by the creosote bush *Larrea nitida* and in second place are *L. cuneifolia* and *L. divaricata*. In the management programme the rural settlers captured 100 individuals; each one is classified according to age, gender and reproductive state. In addition, during shearing we took blood samples, cardiac and respiratory pulse, faecal sample and rectal temperature.

November 2008
After the wool harvesting finished, we conducted our third survey (photo 3). During this field trip we collected 100 faecal samples. Each sample was collected immediately after an animal's defaecation; date, time, identity (age, gender, dominance status and reproductive state) of the donor animal were recorded, together with habitat description and food availability. In addition we measured the vertical and horizontal structure of the vegetation, and we did 4 transects for each habitat type. At the laboratory we freeze-dried faecal samples by lyophilization and then make a powder of the sample. Because steroids are often not evenly distributed within faecal samples we homogenised the powder. We tested different protocols of extraction with several solvents (in different concentration) to extract faecal glucocorticoids (GCs) and then to quantify the concentration of GCs we test several commercial radioimmunoassay kits (DSL-MP-DPC, Etc.).