

Project Update: March 2022

Since the last progress report, we have had difficulties carrying out field work, mainly due to bureaucratic problems to obtain the governmental authorisation from the Dirección General de Biodiversidad y Áreas Protegidas de Bolivia (DGB), the office that is responsible for reviewing and approving scientific projects in Bolivia.

Before we obtained the Rufford grant, we carried out a project that was approved by the DGB titled "Knowing the current state of the remaining populations of Chinchilla in the Eduardo Avaroa REA Andean Fauna Reserve- Bolivia". When we obtained the Rufford grant, we submitted an addendum (January 30, 2020) to this project to carry out the telemetry using radio collars in wild chinchillas. This addendum was rejected by the DGB (appendix 1, March 13, 2020), and they requested more information on the procedures and protocols to perform telemetry with this endangered species.

Unfortunately, the process for the new project authorisation in Bolivia take several months to obtain a response or the approval, for this reason we made an addendum to our approved project to begin field work.

However, with the addendum rejected, we had to prepare an entirely new project titled "Home range of the endangered Short-tailed Chinchilla in Bolivia, discovering part of its natural history" (July 20, 2020) detailing information on telemetry and other equipment, materials, personnel, methodologies, protocols, agreements, travel schedule, etc. In this case, the DGB responded several months later requesting clarifications, especially regarding the type of radio collars to be used, but also indicating that they reject the project. Additionally, a few weeks later, the DGB sent a letter requesting that our Museum of Natural History Alcide d'Orbigny had to renew the certification as an Accredited Scientific Institution (ICA). The renewal process took several months and was finally approved in August 2021. During this renewal process, we could not send any project authorisation requests or even enquire for clarification on their rejected letter.

Once the museum obtained the ICA approval, we requested the authorisation for our project again. In this instance, we modified the document based on the comments and concerns expressed by the DGB in the previous rejection letter. We also added a method to monitor the collared individuals using camera traps, and more information on the telemetry methodology. We also included letters of support by national and international researchers, who reviewed our methodology and telemetry equipment (including radio collars) and deemed it suitable for chinchillas. These researchers have ample experience with this species and methodology, especially Dr Jaime Jiménez, a leading researcher in telemetry with chinchillas. We decided to include these letters because the concerns expressed by the DGB were completely unfounded and inexperienced of the methods we plan to carry out.

Currently this new request for project authorisation is being reviewed by the DGB. We believe that it is being considered positively, mainly because there was a change of authorities in the DGB. We are waiting for the response and as soon as we obtain the authorisation, we will let you know.