



¡Following the Puma track!

Old registers prove the presence of the puma species around these mountains and valleys even previously to the creation of the Torres del Paine National Park on 1959. This land and the herbivores that feed on it depend on this top predator to keep the natural ecological cycle.

For these reasons, the *guardaparques* (rangers) of the PNTP have always studied these species and tried to estimate its abundance within the park. Historically, this estimation was done by simple observation. Thus, the *guardaparques* were people who lived in the park during long periods and they would know some pumas by running into them while doing other tasks. When the Conservation Program of the PNTP was created the puma population surveys did start. An area of the Park called Peninsula (5.000ha.) is every year surveyed and the puma population abundance estimated through the comparison of the obtained results.

Although the knowledge of this species compiled through these methods was useful for the population management at the time, now the Conservation Program aims to acquire a much more accurate and wide distributed knowledge about the puma abundance in Torres del Paine National Park. ¿How? ¡Through collaboration with Wildtrack NGO!

The Conservation Program of the Torres del Paine National Park has started a collaboration with a north American NGO named Wildtrack with the aim to survey accurately the puma population within the park. To achieve this goal we need help from everyone involved or visitor of the park, we need you to send photographs of the wild tracks you may find on your way.

The traditional survey methods for puma populations are usually expensive, hard to apply in the field and above all, they may disturb the normal behavior of this elusive species by being too intrusive. These methods include capture and radio collar of individuals, or the colocation of expensive camera-traps. On the other hand, survey methods based on sign tracks are much more respectful towards wildlife, although they used to be less accurate than the first ones.

Wildtrack NGO is achieving what seemed impossible. Using puma track photographs they design an algorithm capable of distinguish between individual's tracks, and therefore between different individuals of the puma population of Torres del Paine National Park. ¡Is like getting the ID of each puma!

The methodology proposed by Wildtrack allows anybody, scientific or non, *guardaparques* and even visitors to help us wider our knowledge about this emblematic and key species, by using citizen science.

In this line, Wildtrack NGO has taken part in the conservation of threatened species as the pandas, polar bear, white rhino or the Amur tiger. We are really excited for being the first Latin-American National Park using this new and respectful method.

