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When you partner with Denver Zoo, you help us save wild animals and wild places, create connections between people and the planet, and help our community learn, grow, and thrive.

In Pursuit of One of the World's Rarest Cats, Denver Zoo's Mystery in the Mountains

Not many people have been to the highest reaches of the Andes. Unsurprisingly, as a result, scientists know little about what goes on up there.

What we do know is that despite the thin air, frigid temperatures and treacherous terrain, this seemingly inhospitable area is home to three species of cats. Two of them, pampas cats and pumas, are fairly well-known. Little is known about the third—the Andean cat. The Andean cat is one of the top five most endangered cats in the world. It's also one of the hardest to find, thanks in large part to its small size, elusive nature and the inaccessibility of its habitat 10,000 feet above sea level.

Never Before Done

In the Peruvian Andes you'll find the Lake Sibilinacocha Watershed, a fragile place researchers say is suffering from the effects of pollution, climate change and ecotourism. Denver Zoo Researcher Preston Sowell has been working on ways to preserve this land.

Demonstrating the Andean cat is present in the watershed could play a key role in those efforts. That's why he reached out to Denver Zoo in 2017 for help documenting the cat's presence—something that had never been done before.

With DZ support Preston launched a new expedition to the lake last year, equipped with 14 trail cameras. A seasoned expedition leader and environmental consultant whose work has appeared in National Geographic, Preston knew how to manage a research

THE ANDEAN CAT IS ONE OF THE TOP FIVE MOST ENDANGERED CATS IN THE WORLD

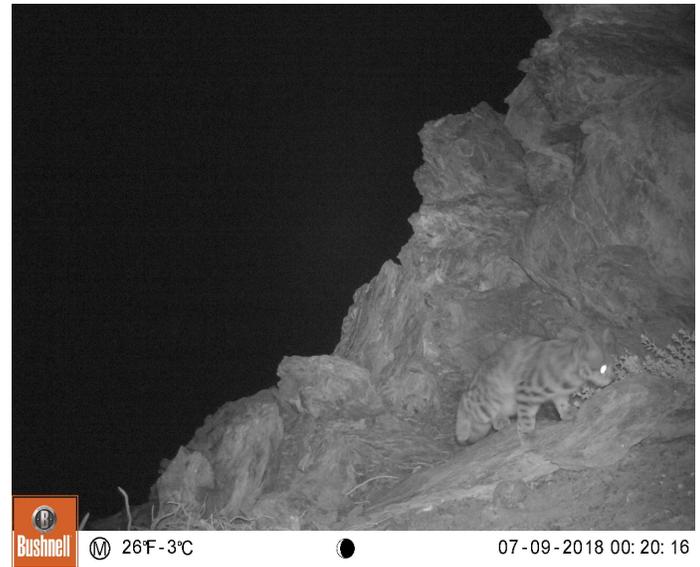


project at high elevations, and he got exactly what he wanted. In August 2018, Preston sent an exuberant field report - he'd captured the cat on not one, but three cameras!

Using these photos, reams of scientific data and evidence of ancient Incan ruins submerged in the lake (discovered by Preston on an exploratory dive!), Preston and his colleagues at the Sibinacocha Watershed Project are building an even stronger case for protecting and preserving this remote landscape.

With the right information, it's possible to reduce the impact of two of the three major threats here. By encouraging mining companies to improve clean up and getting mountaineers to adopt eco-friendly practices, Preston is hopeful the Peruvian government will see the value in creating stronger protections for this important watershed, its wildlife and its history.

In 2019, Denver Zoo will support Preston on another expedition to continue documenting the Andean cat. He will also work with a local organization that will help lead a community-based conservation initiative. You can read more about Preston's 2018 expedition in United Airlines' Hemispheres magazine, which includes some of his breathtaking photos.



Denver Zoo Conservation

Denver Zoo has been a leader in conservation for over 21 years beginning with a single project in Mongolia to protect cinereous vultures. Today, we are currently doing work in Botswana, Mongolia, Peru, Vietnam, and within the landscape of our own backyard in Colorado and New Mexico. To date we have participated in more than 600 projects on six continents. Everything we do here at Denver Zoo IS conservation – and directed toward saving wildlife.

Your support for our field conservation programs strengthens our research, community engagement, and capacity building efforts not only in Colorado, but around the world. Through field research and connecting with local communities we ensure residents are aware of, involved in, and benefiting from our work.

Sincerely,

Marianna DeVietro

Director of Major Gifts and Annual Fund

