

Human/Environment interaction concerning vicuña (*Vicugna vicugna*) populations in the Dry Puna (Jujuy Province, Argentina)

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Vicuña is an emblematic species of the Altiplano, (3400-4500 masl) of the Andean region in South America. This wild species is a low impact grazer with several adaptations to the harsh conditions of the high altitude semi desert which inhabits. Along its distribution vicuñas have a social organization consisting in family groups (a male, 3-4 females and calves) and bachelor groups that can be more flexible in habitat distribution and structure. Vicuñas is highly prized for its fine fibre since prehistoric times. A population that was probably in excess to 1.5 million after European colonization in the XVIth Century was killed to over-exploitation and nearly extinction s in the middle of the XXth Century. Effective protection laws have resulted in a recovery of some population and in some areas, vicuña are found at relatively high densities, which has led local communities to begin to view the species as a potentially significant source of income and several management plans have been initiated. These programs are environmental in nature, and include a different range of actors and interests. In this paper we present a review of the relationship between people and vicuñas through time, emphasizing present day bonds linking Puna's indigenous population, vicuñas, and environment.

Keywords: Altiplano, wild vicuñas, Andean communities, fauna wild management.