

The impact of live capture on the welfare of wild vicuñas

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After decades of protection in Argentina the number of vicuñas has increased to the level that fibre can be shorn from live animals. The International Vicuña Convention (1994) states that the sustainable use of vicuñas should be conducted by local communities. The management of wild vicuñas includes a holistic approach taking into account the ecology of the species, culture of the local communities, and the application of strict animal welfare standards. The current system of capture and release is patterned after the Inca tradition of vicuña management, with the inclusion of methodologies to minimize injuries and mortalities. Time of capture, distance and herding time, capture facilities, restraint time, and handling procedures have been incorporated and improved. We evaluated stress caused by capture as indicated by changes in physiological parameters, biochemical blood constituents, and animal behaviour.

Several animal welfare recommendations resulted from this study: the duration of the herding and restrain times should be minimized, the blindfolding of vicuñas during handling, and the immediate transfer of young (crias) to a pre-release corral. The sustainability of wild vicuñas management is highly dependent upon the consistent application of these welfare techniques.