

The utilization of vicuñas since human occupation of the Andes: A zooarchaeological and historical perspective

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The aim in this presentation is to analyze the relationship between people and vicuñas since the peopling of the Andes some 11,000 years ago. As with other human/animal interactions, understanding the historical background is not only useful for increasing our knowledge about the impact of humans on our wildlife resources, but also helpful in formulating guidelines for future management policies. Since prehistoric times, the use of the vicuña by people has been extensive not only by hunter-gatherers, but also by pastoralists and agriculturalists who killed vicuñas for meat and other by-products (fibre, skins, bones). During Inca-times vicuñas were exploited using chakus or royal hunts; it appears that this form of exploitation had insignificant impact on the vicuña population. However, the exploitation of vicuñas in historical times increased exponentially initiating a path towards near extinction. During the period 1663-1853 the skins of approximately 1.5 million vicuñas were supplied from Buenos Aires to the European markets. Spanish Colonial documents from mid-16th century onwards shows increased concern about declining vicuñas population in the Southern Andes.