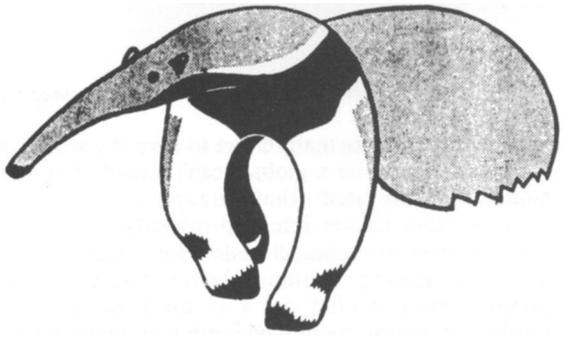


Protecting Argentina's Wildlife

Francisco Erize



In two years the new Wildlife Foundation in Argentina has created two reserves, one to protect a new species of grebe that was only discovered in 1974 in its only known habitat, the other to protect the endangered endemic race of the pampas deer.

In June 1977 a group of Argentinian conservationists set up the Wildlife Foundation of Argentina, *Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina*. The country, they felt, needed a dynamic and influential private conservation organisation able to guide, stimulate and complement official action in this field, and also to educate people to have respect for nature and inform them about major threats to wildlife. None of the existing conservation societies were organised to carry out these tasks. The new Foundation follows some of the guidelines that have made the WWF so successful.

For a symbol the FVSA chose the endangered giant anteater *Myrmecophaga tridactyla*, now very rare in Argentina, an animal of great appeal and instantly recognisable. It is a representative of the Edentata, the only order of mammals exclusive to South and Central America.

From the very beginning, the FVSA decided to make an all-out effort to start field projects, despite the strain of funding them, in order to show potential supporters its determination for action. Priority is given to projects to help the most critically endangered species. As a result the first wildlife reserve (private) was established on January 12 1979 to protect Lake Los Escharcados in the south-west corner of Argentina, where in 1974 an entirely new species of grebe was discovered — the hooded grebe *Podiceps gallardoi*. The only population known consists of some 150 birds breeding on this lake, and being very unsuccessful at rearing their chicks. FVSA has obtained legal protection for the species and now keeps a ranger, equipped with a vehicle, a boat and a caravan, to enforce the hunting ban and study the birds.

A second reserve, created in April 1979 with WWF support, the Campos del Tuyú Wildlife Reserve, now protects a remarkable collection of pampas habitats including Argentina's most endangered deer, the endemic race of the pampas deer *Ozotoceros bezoarticus celer*. This covers some 3500 hectares (9000 acres), and is surrounded by a slightly larger protection zone, where salt-marshes mingle with grasslands, mudflats, freshwater lakes and streams and narrow woodland thickets along low ridges. Probably a third of the 100 surviving deer in the Argentine pampas are within this reserve.

The rangers manning the FVSA's reserves have been trained at the national parks ranger school, where field biology and management techniques are taught. The Foundation is helping to support this important training centre.

Another project under way is the development of a captive breeding station for the pudu dwarf deer *Pudu pudu*, with the aim of reintroducing them in the national parks of the southern Andes. This is a joint effort with the National



HOODED GREBES *Podiceps gallardoi*, a new species discovered in 1974 on Lake Los Escharchados in south-west Argentina and now protected in a reserve created by the new Wildlife Foundation

Parks Service and assisted by the New York Zoological Society. New facilities, designed by the NYZS curator who is conducting the studies on the species, will permit proper management of the existing captive herd. The FVSA has developed close ties with similar institutions in other countries, and has received both valuable advice and contributions to its projects also from WWF and the International Council for Bird Preservation.

FVSA attaches considerable importance to identifying the areas that should be protected as national parks or equivalent reserves, and persuading both government and public of the necessity of preserving them. The Scientific Council is working out a plan for the preservation of the main biomes in Argentina not yet represented in the national parks system. A national park in the dry Chaco — where there is a vast government colonisation plan — and another to protect the breeding grounds of marine mammals and birds in the Valdes Peninsula and neighbouring areas are being actively promoted.

The Foundation is governed by an Administrative Council, comprised of 43 distinguished trustees, all with a marked interest in wildlife and prestige in many fields, including business, politics and science. A Scientific Council is responsible for the selection of conservation projects. A quarterly bulletin and other publications keep members of outside institutions informed on the Foundation's doings and events in the wildlife sphere, and an education campaign has been started with the commissioning of a field guide to the country's mammals and a poster to be distributed nationwide explaining the value of birds of prey and stressing their legal protection.

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Making Dams Safe for Manatees

Among the man-made dangers to manatees *Trichechus manatus* in Florida are dams with flood-control gates. Dead manatees have been found below such dams, having either drowned as they were drawn into the strong current or been killed as they passed through the narrow gates. A report in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* suggests that these deaths could be prevented by fitting the gates with mesh small enough to exclude calves (one cow was suspected of having died while trying to follow her calf through), and the US Fish and Wildlife Service is now supporting research into this solution.