



In Peru's Andes, Quechua women turn human-wildcat conflict into coexistence

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- *In Peru's Andean highlands, Quechua women who once killed pumas in retaliation for livestock losses are now leading efforts to protect them.*
- *Through a women-led conservation group, communities used camera traps and monitoring to reframe pumas and other wildcats as part of a shared ecosystem.*
- *Practical measures such as improved security, non-lethal deterrents and forest protection have changed*

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AYACUCHO, Peru — High in the Peruvian Andes, a group of Indigenous Quechua women is [transforming long-standing conflict with wildcats into a model of coexistence, conservation and cultural revival.](#)

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A puma (*Puma concolor*) captured by a camera trap in the mountains of Ayacucho, Peru. Image courtesy of Mujeres Quechua por la Conservación.

A new film, *Women Secure a Future with Pumas in the Andes*, examines how the fear of predators like the puma (*Puma concolor*), pampas cat (*Leopardus garleppi*) and Andean cat (*Leopardus jacobita*) once shaped daily life in the high-altitude community of Ccarhuacc Licapa. For generations, community members hunted these wildcats in retaliation for livestock losses, particularly alpacas, the community's primary source of income.



Antonio Torres, a former vicuña guard, holds the skin of a puma killed in retaliation for livestock losses. He is now a member of the local conservation group. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara.



An alpaca herd grazes near the highland community of Licapa, where livestock is central to local livelihoods. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara.

The documentary follows shepherd Ida Auris Arango, whose life was marked by a traumatic encounter with a puma, and biologist Merinia Mendoza Almeida, founder of the local women-led conservation association [Mujeres Quechua por la Conservación](https://news.mongabay.com/2026/02/in-perus-andes-quechua-women-turn-human-wildcat-conflict-into-coexistence/). Together with dozens of Quechua women, they began

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Shepherd Ida Auris Arango, a member of Mujeres Quechua por la Conservación, in the highlands surrounding the Licapa community. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara.



Biologist Merinia Mendoza Almeida, far right, stands with members of Mujeres Quechua por la Conservación, a women-led conservation association in the Peruvian Andes. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara.

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Shepherd Ida Auris Arango installs a camera trap inside a Polylepis forest near the Licapa community, part of a women-led wildlife monitoring effort. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara.

Through interviews and verité footage, the film shows how this shift in perception led to concrete changes on the ground: protection of the native Polylepis forests, reduced use of fire to deter predators, improved pastures and livestock shelters, and nonlethal deterrents to prevent predation. Since the project began, conflicts with wildcats have dropped sharply, and retaliatory killings of pumas have stopped.



Alicia Ccaico, president of Mujeres Quechua por la Conservación, inspects her newly reinforced alpaca enclosure, built to reduce livestock losses to predators. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara.

Beyond conservation, the documentary highlights how women's economic empowerment is central to this transformation. Inspired by the wildcats they now protect, the association launched an alpaca wool textile cooperative, allowing women to support their families while leading environmental stewardship in a traditionally male-dominated context.

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A member of Mujeres Quechua por la Conservación weaves a wildcat design into a tablecloth using locally sourced alpaca wool. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara.



A handcrafted stuffed wildcat made by a member of Mujeres Quechua por la Conservación, inspired by the species the group works to protect. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara.



Feliberta Melissa Cahuana Jayo, a resident of Licapa and member of Mujeres Quechua por la Conservación, displays a handmade tote bag featuring a wildcat motif woven from alpaca wool. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara.

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offering a hopeful alternative to human–wildlife conflict across the Andes.

Banner image: Shepherd Ida Auris Arango at her home in the Peruvian Andes, near puma habitat. Image courtesy of Cristina Hara (@cristina.hara).

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Ida Auris Arango remembers the day in 2023 when she stumbled upon the Andean cat and its young on the mountainside. While shepherding her alpacas, she heard her dog barking and spotted the fog-gray feline cornered against a boulder, hackles raised and hissing as it shielded a pair of kittens. Grabbing the dog by the ... [Continue reading](#)

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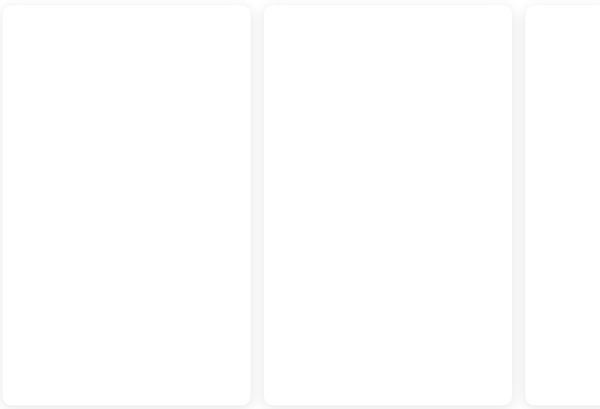
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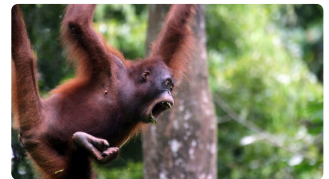
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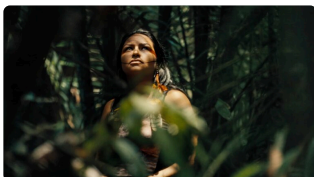
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