



## CITES & LIVELIHOODS CASE STUDY 2022

# Yellow Anaconda Harvest and Trade in Argentina

## SPECIES, USE AND TRADE

The Yellow Anaconda (*Eunectes notaeus*) is sustainably harvested in northeastern Argentina, primarily to produce skins for the luxury leather trade. The formal harvest programme was started in 2002. The main local communities involved are members of the Pilaga and Wichi indigenous groups. Over 300 families are involved. Local economies are geographically isolated from mainstream markets and depend heavily on natural resources. Yellow anaconda skins are one of the

few local products linked to export markets. Hunters capture, process, and sell anaconda skins according to well-regulated government guidelines. A local NGO (Fundación Biodiversidad) leads on the technical aspects of the programme, helping to ensure responsible trade. Harvests are restricted to 3% of the species' range and fewer than 10,000 animals are harvested each year. Yellow anacondas remain common in northeastern Argentina despite the harvest.



### ARGENTINA



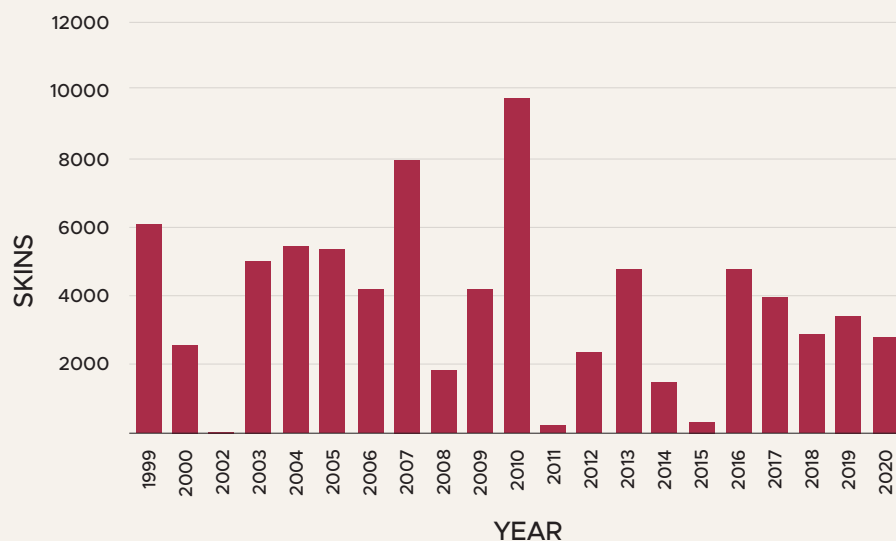
### YELLOW ANACONDA *Eunectes notaeus*



### APPENDIX II



### LEAST CONCERN



**Fig. 1.** Exports of *Eunectes notaeus* whole skins (exporter reported data, excluding manufactured goods and skin pieces) from Argentina (source: CITES Trade Database 2021). Numbers of skins typically vary according to prevailing environmental conditions (e.g., low vs high water levels).





## LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS

Indigenous communities have historically harvested yellow anacondas as a source of food, skins, and traditional medicine (e.g., fat). Hunters sell raw skins to local traders for between US\$7 and US\$15. Processed skins are worth approximately US\$50 each on the international market. The sale of skins is a seasonal windfall that complements earnings (e.g., farming) during the lean winter season. The programme is viewed as a source of cultural pride and identity for local communities, and as an opportunity for livelihood upliftment. Without the trade in anacondas, at least 300 families would be deprived of a seasonally important source of income, and a traditional livelihood which is both resilient and sustainable.



## CONSERVATION IMPACTS

A large-scale illegal trade in yellow anacondas was once widespread in South America. Empowering local communities as the primary benefactors of legal wild anaconda harvest and trade has helped to reduce illegal exploitation to the point where it is now considered negligible. Legal, traceable, and sustainably sourced skins fetch a premium on the international market and this has undermined the economic viability of the illegal trade. Harvests occur in a wetland ecosystem within the dry Chaco, a globally important ecotype threatened by land transformation. Since loss of wetland habitat due to anthropogenic land use change (e.g., industrial monocultures) is now the main threat facing the species, sustainable use of wild species provides economic incentives for the preservation of indigenous ecosystems within the Chaco. Without the trade in anaconda skins, local incentives would no longer exist to provide protection for the anacondas and their wetland habitats..

## LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The anaconda harvesting programme has been a success due to robust technical and financial support from the Argentine government, Fundación Biodiversidad, and international bodies such as the Swiss Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office. Sensitivities to local context (e.g., cultures, traditional land use systems) have been complemented by internationally recognized approaches to wildlife trade and management (e.g., science-based harvest monitoring).

Nevertheless, a key challenge is the lack of robust and consistent demand from international buyers, largely linked to negative

perceptions in the luxury fashion industry surrounding the use of animal-based raw materials. Communication about the positive social and environmental impacts of the program may help to mitigate these threats.

Going forward, CITES interventions need to consider a broad spectrum of interconnected social, cultural, economic, and environmental parameters when assessing the overall impacts of trade. Identifying and highlighting both direct and indirect benefits of trade will help to negate negative perceptions, will better safeguard the viability of the program, and help improve livelihood outcomes.



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IN COLLABORATION WITH:



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