

The Iberá Wetlands

Argentina's Preeminent Wildlife Reserve



PROJECT PROFILE

Project of the Conservation Land Trust (CLT)

Corrientes Province, Argentina

Private conservation lands acquired: 138,140 hectares (341,205 acres)

Conservation Objectives

- ▶ Creation of Iberá National Park
- ▶ Landscape rewilding



The Iberá is one of the planet's great freshwater wetlands, covering more than 1.3 million hectares (3.2 million acres) in Corrientes Province of northeastern Argentina. Shaped by water depth, soil origin, and elevation, the Iberá contains more than 10 distinct natural communities including open water, sedge- and reed-dominated marshlands, grassland savanna, and gallery forests. These habitats support exceptional wildlife abundance including more than 360 species of birds, approximately 1,600 plant species, 128 fish species, and 40 amphibian, 59 reptile, and 58 mammal species.

Kris and Doug Tompkins were introduced to the area's biodiversity and conservation potential in the late 1990s. Their nonprofit foundation, Conservation Land Trust–Argentina, has since acquired more than 340,000 acres in the Iberá watershed and implemented the most ambitious program of *rewilding* in South America: CLT biologists have successfully reintroduced giant anteaters (a native species that had been absent from the Iberá area for decades), have helped bolster populations of pampas deer and other imperiled wildlife, and are working to restore jaguars and other missing species to the Iberá. The CLT team has also pioneered local efforts to link nature protection with economic development.

Accomplishments

- ▶ Through painstaking research of land titles in the region, CLT determined what tracts were private and which remained in government ownership, then successfully campaigned for the designation of Iberá Provincial Park comprising roughly 500,000 hectares (1.2 million acres) of existing public lands.
- ▶ Developed a campaign to promote the region for ecotourism and worked with local governments on coordinated signage, marketing, and visitor-related infrastructure.
- ▶ Constructed a captive breeding facility and welcomed its first pair of jaguars.

Near-term Priorities

- ▶ Donate approximately 334,000 acres assembled by the Conservation Land Trust–Argentina for the creation of an Iberá National Park.
- ▶ Design and implement an innovative joint agreement governing the management of the future Iberá National Park, the current Iberá Provincial Park, and privately held conservation lands.
- ▶ Breed jaguars in captivity and complete the complex negotiations with provincial and federal wildlife agencies regarding eventual jaguar reintroduction into the Iberá marshlands.
- ▶ Continue and expand Iberá wildlife recovery projects for giant anteaters, maned wolves, green-winged macaws, pampas deer, and other species.
- ▶ Extend the highly successful “Corrientes Becoming Corrientes Again” marketing campaign which prepared the cultural landscape for species reintroduction efforts and which is raising the ecotourism profile of the province.

Funding Needs

\$10.7 million for 2016–2018

- ▶ **Operational Support: \$5 million.** For next two years of park operations: rewilding program (including jaguar captive breeding center and other species reintroduction efforts), administration, activism/public education, and visitor services.
- ▶ **Private-to-public Management Transition: \$400,000.** To negotiate and implement the park's transfer to public ownership, with cooperative management of private conservation programs with Iberá national and provincial parks.
- ▶ **Public Access Infrastructure: \$2.8 million.** To expand tourism-related and stewardship facilities including campgrounds and ranger housing at multiple sites.
- ▶ **Land Acquisition: \$2.5 million.** To acquire key parcels within the Iberá watershed.

1997 CLT makes first acquisition in the Iberá wetlands, eventually buying nearly 350,000 acres

2006 CLT's rewilding program begins to census pampas deer, supporting later translocation and population augmentation effort

2005 CLT biologists begin project to restore giant anteaters to Iberá

2009 Iberá Provincial Park established

2015 Jaguar captive breeding facility completed and welcomes its first couple