

DARWIN200 
CHANGE THE WORLD



The Colours That Paint The Landscape

**In partnership with: ECOFIVE; IPEEC-CONICET;
GLOBAL PENGUIN SOCIETY.**

**by Clara Borba de Cerqueira
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Report 2

The palette of challenges and solutions that paint the landscape

The same province, which previously had a much smaller number of inhabitants, currently has a population that is growing at a depressed rate. With the significant increase in people, at the same time we can observe the search for new spaces for housing, consumption of water, energy and other resources. This implies changes in the use and occupation of land that become increasingly pronounced over time.

Nowadays, native vegetation finds it more difficult to prove its ecological, economic, social and cultural value than in ancient times, generating multiple challenges for its conservation status. It is necessary to compete for space with the advancement of urbanization, the overt herbivory of sheep and the rampant use of wood to obtain fire.

When present, native vegetation has the power to act as a protective agent against erosive processes caused by water and wind, and can serve as food and protection for local fauna. In addition to having nutritional and medicinal value already demonstrated by native peoples and now endorsed by studies that rely on advanced technologies.

With regard to the last two factors involving the local fauna mentioned above, evidence of such uses was also found. In the ECOFIVE laboratory, together with Dr. Ana and her PhD student Candela González, it was possible to observe piquillín seeds in guanaco feces! Showing that fruits from native vegetation serve as a food resource. Together with Candela Tisera, a researcher at the Global Penguin Society, I had the opportunity to visit the natural wildlife refuge (El Pedral), where it was possible to observe the close relationship that the resident Magellanic penguin colony has with the native vegetation. For those who were present, it was clear that bushes are responsible for providing shelter, protection from hostile weather conditions and possible predators. This relationship was reinforced when we realized that the eggs and chicks are only found under the protection of these thorny bushes.

Personally and as a researcher, I felt happy to show two different lines of research (plant and animal) an ecological relationship that can help in the conservation of both species! Thus confirming the maxim that science must be plural.

Currently multiple efforts are being led by Dr. Ana and her PhD student Candela González in the ECOFIVE laboratory together with other researchers from IPEEC-CONICET. Some of them are more restricted to the laboratory bench, such as studies related to the germination success of piquillín seeds and other native plants, while others rely on field practices, searching for areas in different states of conservation and the predominance of species in these areas. There are also practices that involve environmental education with children of all ages. Furthermore, there is a cultural rescue project involving native plants developed by Candela González, and it was through this work that I had the opportunity to interview Lucas Antieco.

Despite all the efforts, I feel that there is still a long journey to be taken towards conserving native vegetation. But the first steps are being taken and this is a problem seen in time, we can still do something, as current efforts are not enough to solve the many challenges that arise.

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