
July 2026 — Project Update

Argentina: Rincón de Santa María Natural Reserve

Field Partner: Team led by Nestor Fariña

Background: This project has mobilized volunteers, friends, biologists, and park rangers at the Rincón de Santa María Natural Reserve, located in the Province of Corrientes, Argentina. The reserve protects 2,500 hectares of natural flooded grasslands and savannas, and forest remnants in the process of restoration. It is one of the most important protected areas in the Southern Cone Mesopotamian savanna ecoregion, due to its rich biodiversity. To date, 330 species of birds, 39 species of amphibians, 61 species of reptiles, 25 species of large and medium-sized mammals, and 800 species of plants have been recorded in the reserve. Conservation work is needed to counter invasive exotic tree species (especially pine and eucalyptus). Invasive trees affect native wildlife in two ways: 1) they displace native trees in forest stands, which affects species using the native forests; 2) they cause the conversion of native grasslands to exotic forest stands, which interrupts the natural quantity and flow of water in the flooded grassland ecosystem. This results in reduced food and habitat, which leads to increased pressure for all grassland species that inhabit the reserve. This project focuses on restoring the natural flooded grassland ecosystem by regenerating forest fragments and removing exotic tree species within the reserve.

In the first half of 2026, control of exotic tree species (*Pinus elliottii*) was carried out on 800 hectares of invaded grasslands. Project staff and volunteers also participated in a 20-day campaign of nursery production activities, including: sourcing organic substrate, potting soil, collecting seeds, and seed sowing. In addition, they planted seedlings in permanent restoration sites and carried out related weeding, irrigation, and pest control.

Two environmental awareness campaigns were held to promote the value of native plants. Around 200 people from the town of Ituzaingó and surrounding areas participated in these events, and a total of 140 seedlings were donated to local community members. Project staff also welcomed 50 students from the town's secondary school to the reserve. The visit commemorated Environment Week, and students participated in discussions on protected areas, the reserve's plant nursery, and the reserve's native plants and wildlife. Additionally, project staff held environmental awareness events in two schools on Isla Apipe Grande. The first involved about 50 pre-schoolers aged 4-5, who watched wildlife videos, learned about native fauna, and then planted a few saplings on their playground. The second event was for about 100 secondary school students, showing images followed by a participatory discussion covering topics such as protected areas, native wildlife, legal and illegal hunting, and how to safely deal with potential encounters with large felines in the region.

In summary, the work at Rincón de Santa María Natural Reserve is progressing well this year!

with my best wishes,
Carlos R. García

carlos@biomeconservation.org



Figure 1. Photographs of environmental education and awareness activities: A) Plant distribution in the town square; B) Plant distribution and environmental games on the city's waterfront; C) Visit of students from the EFA School to the Reserve to commemorate Environment Week; D) Kindergarten children planting trees at the school after environmental activities (credit Olga Villalba).