Dear friends, it is once again the time for an update about what we are currently doing and how much is accomplished with your support.

**Ecosystem restoration**

Our goal is to restore essential habitat for endangered chinchillas while deterring habitat degradation in this ecosystem. Specifically, we are focusing on ecosystem restoration in Quebradas Cayano, Zapallar, Las Lioneras, and Curico utilizing native vegetal species. Many of these, like the fauna, are endemic and of grave conservation concern. Our purpose is to reinstate habitat not only for wild chinchillas but also for native insect, amphibian, reptile, bird, and mammalian species, with help from the local populace. In these areas we are creating exclusive livestock grazing areas, thus curbing grazing of native vegetal communities that support local fauna, including chinchillas. To date we have planted approximately 6500 seedlings and grass mats within the last 4 years. This year alone, we more than doubled our prior efforts planting 3,500 seedlings!

**Nursery**

Our nursery began growing plants of this project in 2000. The seeds are hand collected and sown in seedbeds. The seedlings are then transplanted into containers that promote a large root to shoot ratio. Having a large root to shoot ratio is important because we want to promote deep and rapid root growth once transplanted, ensuring their establishment before the dry hot desert summer. Also, we collect seedlings that germinate along dirt roads and transplant them either into the nursery or directly into restoration sites. These seedlings are killed when the roads are repaired at the end of the wet season. Also, these seedlings are cost efficient since we don’t have to spend time collecting and nurturing seeds that only have a slim chance of germination. This way we save scarce resources of time, space, soil and water. In 2004, we transplanted approximately 3500 seedlings and grass mats directly into habitat enhancement areas. And we are currently gathering tree seedlings for next years planting.
Labyrinth

We are still in the process of growing and planting the seedlings for the Labyrinth. However, we find that we end up using almost all the seedlings for habitat restoration. It now appears that this botanical garden will take much longer than we first thought but we continue to work on it and will eventually complete it.

Education

We continue answering email and helping people from around the world learn and educate others about chinchillas. This year, we joined Peter Riger, Chairperson of the Rodent Specialty Group of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association in making a presentation about our project at their annual meeting in New Orleans, and in writing a paper for their publication. The presentation was accompanied by photographs by Roland Seitre and compiled by Bharath (you can see the presentation on our website). Also, we will be uploading new CHILDREN’S STORIES and CHECK LISTS of the animals, a separate list for birds and some plants in the restoration area. The list, apart from having both scientific and common names, has conservation status, if known.

Fundraising and Grants

In 2004, we have raised about US$14643 in two grants of which we have received US$8643. We have other grants pending and continue to search for grants that we can submit to sustain our project. Membership donations continue to roll in and although this accounts for a minor portion of our income this year, these funds keep us going between grants. From paying Nora (the nursery worker) to purchasing gas to travel to the nursery, these funds keep us functioning!

Volunteers

Their input has been phenomenal. We are grateful to all the volunteers who have visited us and helped us in the chinchilla habitat restoration efforts. Some people come for just a couple of days while others have stayed for months. This year, volunteers helped revamp the nursery, plant seedlings, computer entry and even make improvements on the little field house.

We welcome visitors but for people wishing to volunteer, please realize that the conditions are very crude compared to modern living standards in the USA or Europe. Also, the only housing that we have available to volunteers is in the remote field house or a tent in the same location. If you would like to visit Chile and volunteer, please check the volunteer guide available on our website: www.wildchinchillas.org

If you are looking for some new information or more details about our project, check out the web site! Bharath has spent a great deal of time making it just fabulous! We have uploaded a presentation, field notes and other reports that explain in detail various aspects of our project.
Fenced area along river bed where riparian plant species are transplanted.

Planting in a section of the riparian corridor.

Until November 2005,

Wishing you happy holidays!

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