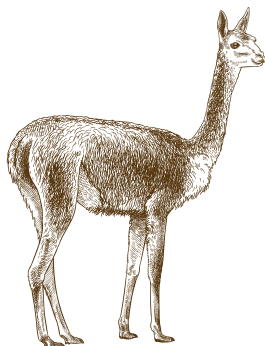


Wilfredo Perez Ruiz describes Felipe Benavides Barreda as “an idealistic man, temperamental, a fighter, firm in his determinations, with a genuine vocation of service towards the noble causes with which he identified himself and, especially, a human being committed to the common good.”

# Felipe Benavides Barreda and Vicuñas’ Intertwined Legacy

By Meyla Bianco Johnston



While it may sound like a reach to credit one man with single-handedly saving an endangered species, it is clear that Felipe Benavides Barreda did as much as one man can throughout his life to save vicuñas, **the living wild ancestors of domestic alpacas**. It is no coincidence that the events of his distinguished life meld with the vicuñas’ fate.

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## Ancient Times

Vicuña wool is harvested sustainably in annual roundups (chaccus) by pre-Columbian peoples, including the Incas. Products made from this revered fiber are only fit for royalty.



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## End of the 15th Century

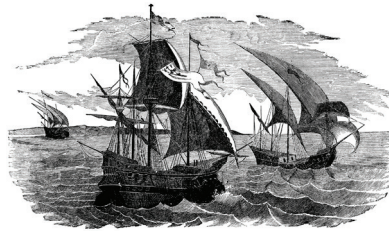
More than a million vicuñas live and thrive in South America.



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## Conquest

During the Conquest, European colonizers short-sightedly kill vicuñas in great numbers for their extremely fine cinnamon-colored wool.



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## After the 15th Century

By about 1600, only a few hundred thousand vicuñas remain, due in large part to decimation of the herds by Spanish Conquistadores.

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## 1825

Simon Bolivar, the Governor of Peru, issues two decrees to protect vicuñas, which unfortunately have little positive effect for the vicuñas.



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## Dawn of the 20th Century



An increased number of firearms becomes available, which in turn directly increases the number of vicuñas poached.

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## 1917

Felipe Benavides Barreda is born in 1917 in Lima, Peru to a family of diplomats and high-ranking officials including two presidents of Peru.



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## 1940s

Barreda is appointed Peruvian consul general in London and holds this position throughout World War II. In 1946, he is appointed Charge D' Affaires [a diplomat who leads an embassy in the absence of the ambassador] in Sweden and Norway.

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## 1954

Felipe Benavides Barreda leaves diplomacy because of differences in philosophy with the Peruvian government, an early indicator of his absolute faith in his convictions.



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## 1960

Just half of the pre-Columbian population of vicuñas survive and are under profound threat from poaching. The number of wild vicuñas at this time is estimated to be just 5,000 or 6,000 individuals.

Felipe Benavides Barreda devotes himself to environmental conservation in Peru with a focus on animals.

"In the United States," lamented Felipe Benavides to the *New York Times*, "many people know the buffalo only through its likeness on the nickel. I wonder whether we will know the vicuña only through our 1-sol piece."

**Right:** Felipe Benavides on a visit to the Manú National Park, an important protected natural area created by the initiative of Celestino Kalinowski, Ian Grimwood and Felipe Benavides in 1973.



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## 1967

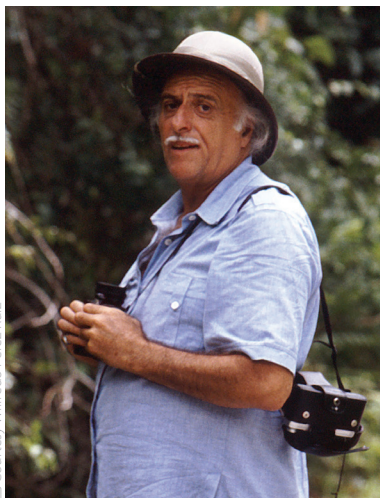
The National Reserve of "Pampa Galeras" (Ayacucho) is established, located at 13,400 feet (4,100 meters) altitude.

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## 1974

Vicuñas gain endangered status when their populations are at risk of disappearing altogether.

Felipe Benavides Barreda wins the first J. Paul Getty Prize for Wildlife Conservation "for his work rescuing the vicuña and other endangered species from Latin American wildlife."



© Courtesy Wilfredo Perez Ruiz

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## 1979

Felipe Benavides Barreda further underscores his devotion to ensuring vicuña survival by serving as Main Manager of the Convention for the Conservation of the vicuña. Bolivia, Argentina, Peru, Chile and Ecuador all cooperate in this initiative.

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## 1980s

The Pampa Galeras is controlled by members of the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) communist revolutionary organization. Throughout the '80s and into the mid-'90s, the Shining Path terrorizes Peru and many people lose their lives.



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## 1987

Peru successfully requests that The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) earmark several vicuña populations for the international fabric trade, using fiber only from live animals.

Many Andean communities receive an income from the legal shearing operations using traditional methods.



© Courtesy Wilfredo Perez Ruiz

Felipe Benavides visiting the Pampa Galeras National Reserve in Lucanas, Ayacucho, Peru in the 1970s where Wilfredo Perez Ruiz says he is “assuming the defense of the vicuña that he contributed decisively to save from extinction in Peru.”

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## 1988

In 1988, the Shining Path and their armed forces are a direct threat to Pampa Galeras, the vicuñas and the workers there. Shining Path guerrillas drive wildlife managers from Pampa Galeras and poach vicuñas. The vicuña is seen as a symbol of a decadent capitalist state. The base and checkpoints at Pampa Galeras close and the staff evacuates.

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## 1989

Peruvian *El Comercio* Journalist Barbara d’Achille is killed by Shining Path Guerrillas while she visits a vicuña project in Huancavelica in the Andes near Pampa Galeras.

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## 1990

Barreda is named President of the National Council of the Vicuña.

The President of the Chamber of Deputies, Luis Alvarado Contreras honors Barreda by awarding him the “Juan Antonio Távara Andrade” medal in the Gran Cruz degree “for his outstanding work as a researcher of ecology,” the final honor of his decorated life.

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## February 21, 1991

Benavides Barreda dies at age 73 at Saint Mary’s Hospital in London.

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## 1993

The National Reserve is re-named Pampa Galeras-Bárbara d’Achille National Reserve (RNPGBA) in honor of the slain journalist.

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## 1994

The workers who have been entrusted to care for the vicuñas return to Pampa Galeras and begin to tally the number of animals. It is clear only about half the animals that had previously lived at Pampa Galeras survive.

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## Early 1990s

Peru, home to about two-thirds of the world’s vicuña population, has less than 50,000 vicuñas total.



© Jared Johnston

important vicuñas are culturally, Barreda will be remembered as elemental to not just saving vicuñas but helping them thrive. ●



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## 1995 – 2001

The world vicuña population rises from 98,000 in 1995 to 121,000 in 2001. Exact population figures become available with the official census, which begins again in the late 1990s.

## 2008

CITES changes status of vicuñas to "of least concern."

## 2019

Today, thanks to Barreda's efforts, vicuñas continue to be classified as "of least concern" on the Red List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Endangered species of Extinction and their numbers are increasing.

The RNPGBA, which Barreda helped make a reality, is now home to the largest population of vicuñas in the world. About 5,000 individuals live in an area measuring just 16,000 acres (6,500 hectares) or 25 square miles (65 square kilometers).

Taking vicuñas outside of Peru is prohibited and shooting them is punishable by law. Groups must have special governmental permission to shear vicuña wool and to produce products from their fiber. A special logo must be displayed to ensure all regulations concerning the humane treatment of vicuñas have been followed.

The animals are sheared every two years in controlled chaccus after veterinary exams. The process of shearing is carefully regulated and takes place under armed guard, and not all vicuñas are shorn every year.

The wool is still sorted manually and most of the clip is spoken for before shearing, purchased by luxury Italian clothiers such as Loro Piano and Dormeuil.

A champion who would not relent until his audience understood how

