

Ashka llama.

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Santa Catalina

Santa Catalina ($21^{\circ}56'47.47''\text{S}$, $66^{\circ}3'7.32''\text{W}$) is a small locality founded in the 17th century, located in the Biosphere Reserve of Laguna de Los Pozuelos (MAB-UNESCO) at 3800 m a.s.l. in Jujuy province, Argentina, and is the northernmost town of Argentina, close to the border with the Plurinational State of Bolivia (**Figure 1**). In this area, the main species of camelids are wild vicuñas and llamas (there are no guanacos or alpacas).

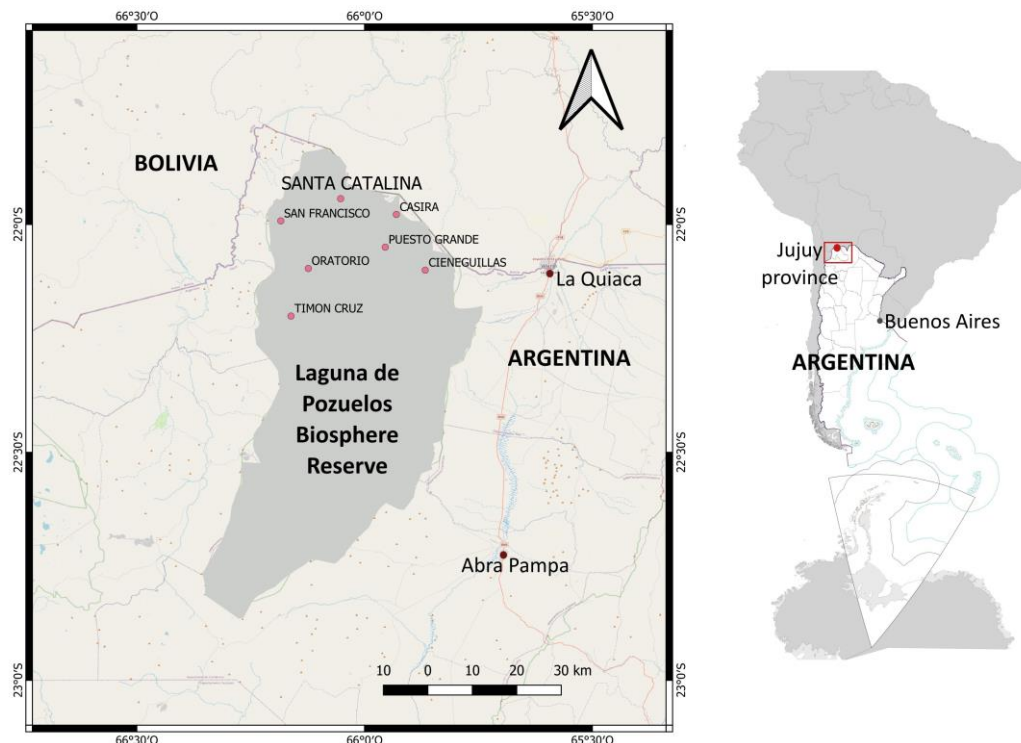


Figure 1: Map of northwestern Jujuy, Argentina showing the location of Santa Catalina (close to the border with Bolivia), the neighboring communities, and the Laguna de Los Pozuelos Biosphere Reserve (MAB-UNESCO).

The region was previously occupied by pre-Hispanic communities, as evidenced by petroglyphs depicting camelid iconography found in the area (Yacobaccio et al. 2021). Santa Catalina serves as the center for administration, politics, healthcare, commerce, religion, festivities, and education for the surrounding rural areas. The entire department of Santa Catalina, with an area of 2,937 km², is home to approximately 2,600 people, with a population density of 0.9 inhabitants per km², the third lowest in the province of Jujuy. Approximately 300 people live in the town of Santa Catalina. Nearly 24% of households have unmet basic needs, and many people (updated statistical data are unavailable) receive government subsidies, state

assistance through programs such as home-based food supplements and school meals for children. The primary sources of income in Santa Catalina include llama and sheep breeding for fiber, leather, and meat, and state employment.

The community of Santa Catalina includes three officially recognized Indigenous groups in their territory: Peña Colorada-Canchillas, Aucapiña Chambi, and Atu Saphis, which have joined together to form the Community Council of the Town of Santa Catalina.

Santa Catalina has two schools: an Elementary School (N°18 G. Rondeau) and a High School (Escuela Polimodal N° 7 "Santa Catalina").

The importance of llamas in the community: The Ashka Llama festival

An important celebration annually held in Santa Catalina is the Ashka Llama festival.

Description: Ashka Llama is a term in Quechua (an indigenous language widely distributed in the Andes, including, but not limited to, the Altiplano), which can be translated as "many llamas". The Ashka Llama festival is an expo-fair showcasing different types of llamas (the main domestic camelids in the area) annually held in Santa Catalina during the celebrations of the town's Patron Saint. It has been taking place since 2013 and is inclusive, participatory and with a strong cultural identity, involving actors and institutions committed to an Andean territorial development. The Ashka Llama fair not only allows the exhibition and sale of the llamas of the Argentine Puna, but is also an important celebratory event of llama herders and an Andean community gathering.

Institutions: The institutions involved in the Ashka Llama festival include the Municipal Commission of Santa Catalina (Department of Rural Development), the Corporation for the Development of the Pozuelos Basin (CO.DE.PO), and the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA), the latter of which is an institution that provides advice and support for sanitary and reproductive livestock management and plays a key role in transporting animals from the herders' fields to the fair and back, as well as in donating prizes and serving on the jury. In addition, Provincial authorities, local radios (Santa Catalina and La Quiaca), the Secretary of Production, the Secretary of Culture and the Secretary of Livestock Development of Jujuy Province, the National Service of Animal Health (SENASA), the National University of Jujuy, the Council of Aboriginal Organizations of Jujuy (COAJ), the VICAM ethnobiology research group, and the National Scientific and Technical Research Council of Argentina (CONICET) are also involved in this important local festival. The Community Council of Santa Catalina participates actively. In addition, some neighboring communities, such as El Angosto, La Ciénaga, Oratorio, Cabrería, San Juan y Oros, Timón Cruz, and San Francisco, are also involved. In 2017, Santa Catalina authorities and the VICAM research group applied for and received the declaration of "National Interest" for the Ashka Llama from three state institutions: the Ministry of Culture (017-1549-APN-MC), the Senate (S-2619/17), and the

Chamber of Deputies (3292-D-2017). All three declarations highlight the fair's multisectoral, scientific, intercultural, and educational significance.

Arrival and housing of the animals: Llamas that enter the fair must comply with the requirements established by the control agencies. The animals arrive at a site with corrals specially designed for their exhibition. The space is approximately 350 m² and includes 12 corrals of 3x4 m to house 10 llamas each.

Stand space close to the corrals: The INTA Abra Pampa Cooperation Association, the CO.DE.PO, the Association of Municipalities of the Puna, the Department of Rural Development, the Provincial Directorate of Livestock Development, and the Jujuy Camelids Program usually mount “institutional” stands in the area. There are also stands selling local products such as ropes made of llama wool, ceramics and fabrics.

Ashka Llama fair. Santa Catalina, November 24th 2024:
<https://www.fao.org/camelids-2024/events/event-detail/santa-catalina-international-year-of-camelids-celebration--ashka-llama/en>

In 2024, the Ashka Llama fair took place on November 24th. For the event, llama herders brought the llamas that they considered the most beautiful animals in their herds. Approximately 14 llama herders presented their llamas. The corrals and their management were in the hands of employees from the municipal commission's production area. Around 10 local, provincial, and Bolivian government authorities attended the event, as well as dozens of public and visitors. The event featured excellent specimens of both types of llamas: the Q'ara llamas, or “cargueras” (Spanish word for “transporters”), which are large, tall animals with short hair on their heads, and the Tampulli ones, characterized by their abundant fiber, alpaca-like faces, and bangs. In general, the Q'ara llamas are used for meat and cargo, while the Tampulli ones are used for fiber; however, this is not a strict rule.

The jury selected the best animals with objective criteria according to the type of llama such as: fiber quality, coloration (for example, the homogeneous black color is rare and highly prized), straight legs and back, symmetrical and curved ears, non-prognathous bite, strength and general aspects of body harmony (**Figure 9**). The jury was made up of four people belonging to national, provincial and scientific institutions (CODEPO, INTA, CONICET and Santa Catalina Community) that promote camelid livestock breeding, including one of the authors of this work.



Poster with the program of activities of the Ashka Llama fair held in Santa Catalina in November 2024.

Choosing the winners was a challenging task. This was because the quality of the animals was excellent, and because, in addition to selecting the best animals, awards are also given for certain aspects, such as unusual colorations or very gentle behavior (one prize was "Miss Simpatía" – Spanish term for friendliness). Each award-winning animal is brought to the front, walked in front of the public, and the jury explains in detail the criteria that led to its victory (**Figure 9**).

It is important to point out that the Ashka Llama fair is not only about selecting the best llamas but also a space for community meeting and sharing knowledge. The fair also showcases scientific and technological advances that allow the inclusion of llama products in the trade chain and certification of origin.



Ashka Llama fair. a) Corral with llamas and the rosettes for the winners. (b) Male Q'ara champion; (c) Male Tampulli champion (homogeneous black color). (d) Young female Tampulli champion.

After the selection of the winning animals, the award ceremony, which is an activity that included the presence of local and provincial political authorities, took place. Some authorities of the sister Plurinational Republic of Bolivia participated as well, denoting the importance of the Ashka Llama fair in a framework of regional integration. In addition, the National Radio broadcasted the central activities of the patronal festival, disseminating them in a wide area where the inhabitants lack internet or cell phone signal. The VICAM research group donated the rosettes for the prizes and participated as members of the jury panel (**Figure 9a**). A video about the Ashka Llama fair was edited with funding from the Satoyama Initiative. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obMX0UoJ0dA>

Most participants in the activities described here were women, a fact that, applying a gender perspective throughout our ethnobiological study, highlights the significant visibility of women in terms of food sovereignty, textile skills, and emotional knowledge (as that associated with the construction of a mural as a form of memory). This is a result that can also be found in Argentine Patagonia, where rural women are key in the transmission of knowledge of food and medicinal plants and are responsible for maintaining legacies of community knowledge (Ladio 2020). Regarding this issue, Llanque (2019) analyzed the relationship of Andean women with food and found that, in traditional communities, food routines in the kitchen link production and consumption not only with love and affection but also with the political management of the community. Women's efforts to ensure food security are an example of socio-ecological resilience, as they value the buffering capacity of

the food system, foster social self-organization, and enable a diversity of food options. However, it is also interesting to note that when we look at the pastoral livelihood in this region, we can realize that women suffer loneliness since pastoralism in the Puna has become a feminized activity due to the emigration of men and young people and shows components of old age (Vilá 2023). As proposed by Ladio (2025), it is significant for ethnobiologists to create bridges of understanding with local people, in this case motivated by a celebration that also has importance to us. Thus, we decided to work with the Andean people who raise and live off of camelids, especially women, in their territories, and put ourselves at their disposal to obtain funds so that they could achieve their plans for the celebration. In this sense, the flexibility of the funds from the Satoyama Initiative allowed conducting collaborative research, making purchases for community activity expenses, such as buying llama meat to make the sausages, paints and other materials for the mural wall, and prizes for the spinning contest. These were essential expenses to carry out a project of this type. The skills to revitalize traditional culture, like cooking, spinning, designing clay camelids, and preparing a mural, were significant to improve the communal collective resources. Also, the genetic selection practiced by local pastoral people to have beautiful and strong animals to present in the Ashka Llama contest