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Kukol awarded replica of elusive cat

By MARK SMITH
PVT



Special to the PVT

Zuzana Kukol accepts her stuffed Andean Cat from Dr. Jim Sanderson, who is the first man to have photographed the rare creature in South America.

SALINAS, Calif. -- A rare likeness of the even rarer Andean Cat was presented to Pahrump resident Zuzana Kukol, of REXANO, in recognition of her generous support of research efforts sponsored by the Feline Conservation Federation.

The stuffed cat, a one-half-scale copy of the threatened South American cat, is one of a strictly limited supply. Designed by researcher Dr. Jim Sanderson, the replicas were created to help raise funds to build a research facility in the Andes.

The plush Andean Cats are available only to donors and cannot be found anywhere else in the world -- much like the real Andean Cat.

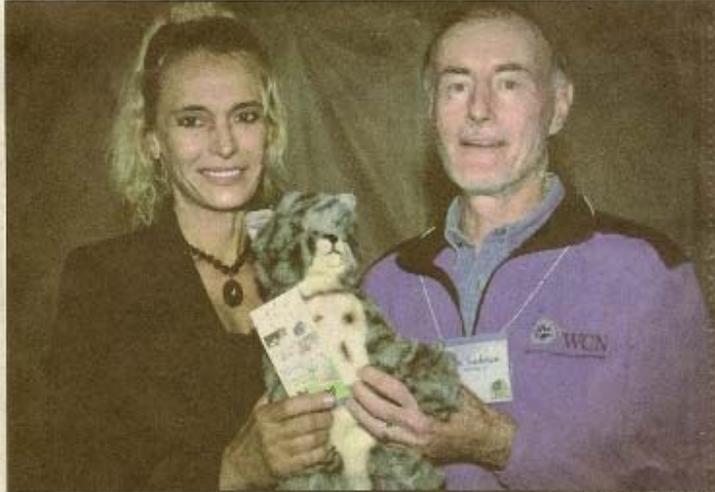
The 10-pound wild cats are so rare that few people outside their high-elevation habitat have even seen one. They are so elusive that no photos of them existed until 1998, when Sanderson captured the first documented image of one.

The cats are among the most endangered felines in the wild. They have no fear of humans and are killed and displayed as good luck symbols by the local people who also share their food source. Sanderson, who has studied rare wild cats all over the world, believes a conservation and monitoring station is needed to collect comprehensive data about the animal, focus international attention on the Andean Cat, teach preservation practices to the local community and give scientists a laboratory for study.

Federation members, like Kukol, who contributed to the fund, were presented with the half-size Andean cats by Sanderson at the group's 2009 convention, held July 23-26 in Salinas, Calif.

Kukol, who has a variety of cats for pets, operates REXANO, which stands for Responsible Exotic Cat Ownership. It is on the Web at www.REXANO.org.

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