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2015 Grasslands of the World - South America (selected by Brian Obermeyer)

The Nature Conservancy

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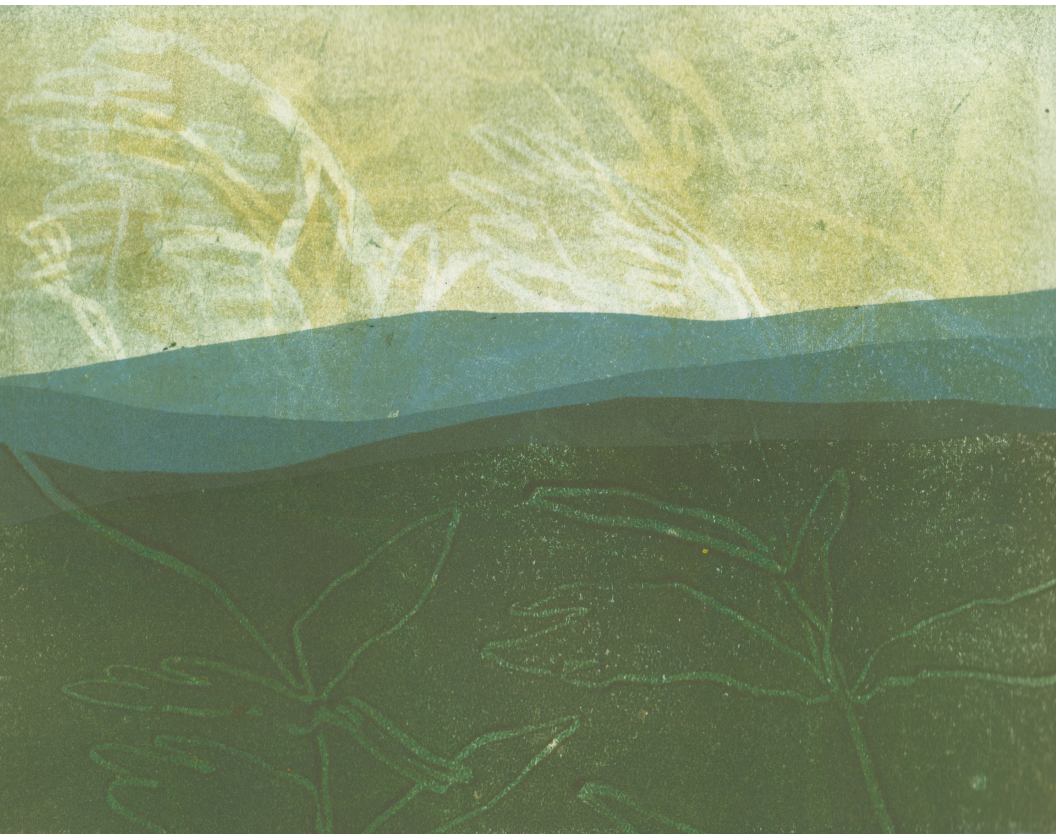
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Holding On
Mary Gordon McFall

SOUTH AMERICA: PATAGONIA (ARGENTINA & CHILE)

COURTESY OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

This short introduction was chosen as a representative of multiple essays related to grasslands of the world. The 2015 Field Journal article about Patagonia grasslands (in Argentina and Chile) reminds me of the commonality our landscape shares with other grasslands. Like the Flint Hills, these grasslands are threatened by subdivision, conversion and incompatible development. Patagonia is home to the legendary gaucho, who shares many similarities with our cowboy. One of my favorite Flint Hills birds, the upland sandpiper, overwinters in these southern grasslands, racking up thousands of miles during its annual trek. Estimated travel by an “Uppie” banded at Konza in 2006 and later documented 13 years later is comparable to circling the Earth five times!
— Brian Obermeyer

Stretching from the foothills of the Andes in Chile to the Atlantic coast of Argentina, the Patagonian grasslands are a reminder of untamed wilderness and wide-open plains.

The region is home to the legendary gauchos, Argentine cowboys known for their skill with horses and their penchant for mate, a brew of stimulating South American herbs served in hollowed-out gourds.

Across an expanse of 240 million acres, the region boasts a wealth of natural resources. Despite being arid and semi-arid, these temperate grasslands support many plant and animal species. Plant species have evolved to withstand droughts and

fierce, unrelenting winds that sweep down from the Andean peaks. The tough tussock grasses and low shrubs of the Patagonian steppe sustain a variety of animals, including the endangered guanaco, the puma, the gray fox and several species of armadillo. Birdlife is rich and varied, including the iconic Andean condor, a wide array of raptors, burrowing parrots and the ostrich-like rhea. They are also crucial for conserving healthy soils, controlling erosion,

cycling nutrients and maintaining clean water sources, all important for human well-being.

These grasslands are threatened by unsustainable grazing practices, increasing subdivision of the land, development of energy resources and a lack of standardized regulations for managing freshwater resources. Conservationists are working with partners throughout the region to protect and restore Patagonia's grasslands.

Reprint courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

Brian Obermeyer, grassland lead for The Nature Conservancy, has collaborated with Symphony in the Flint Hills staff at every Signature Event since its inception in 2006, including the 10th Anniversary celebration in 2015, held at Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. He has also been a speaker at the event and a long-time member of the Symphony in the Flint Hills Education Committee.



Maroon No. 2
Mary Gordon McFall