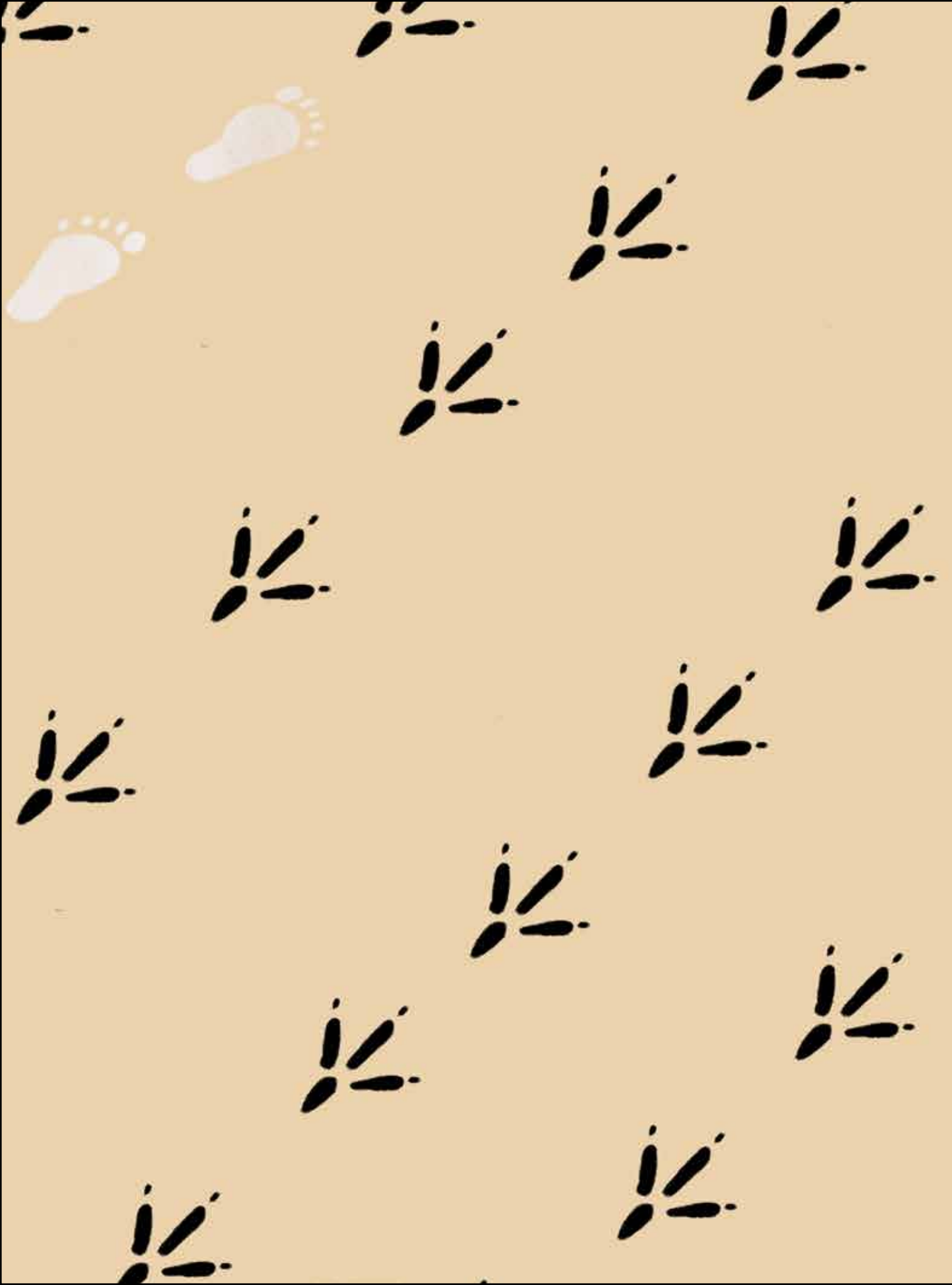
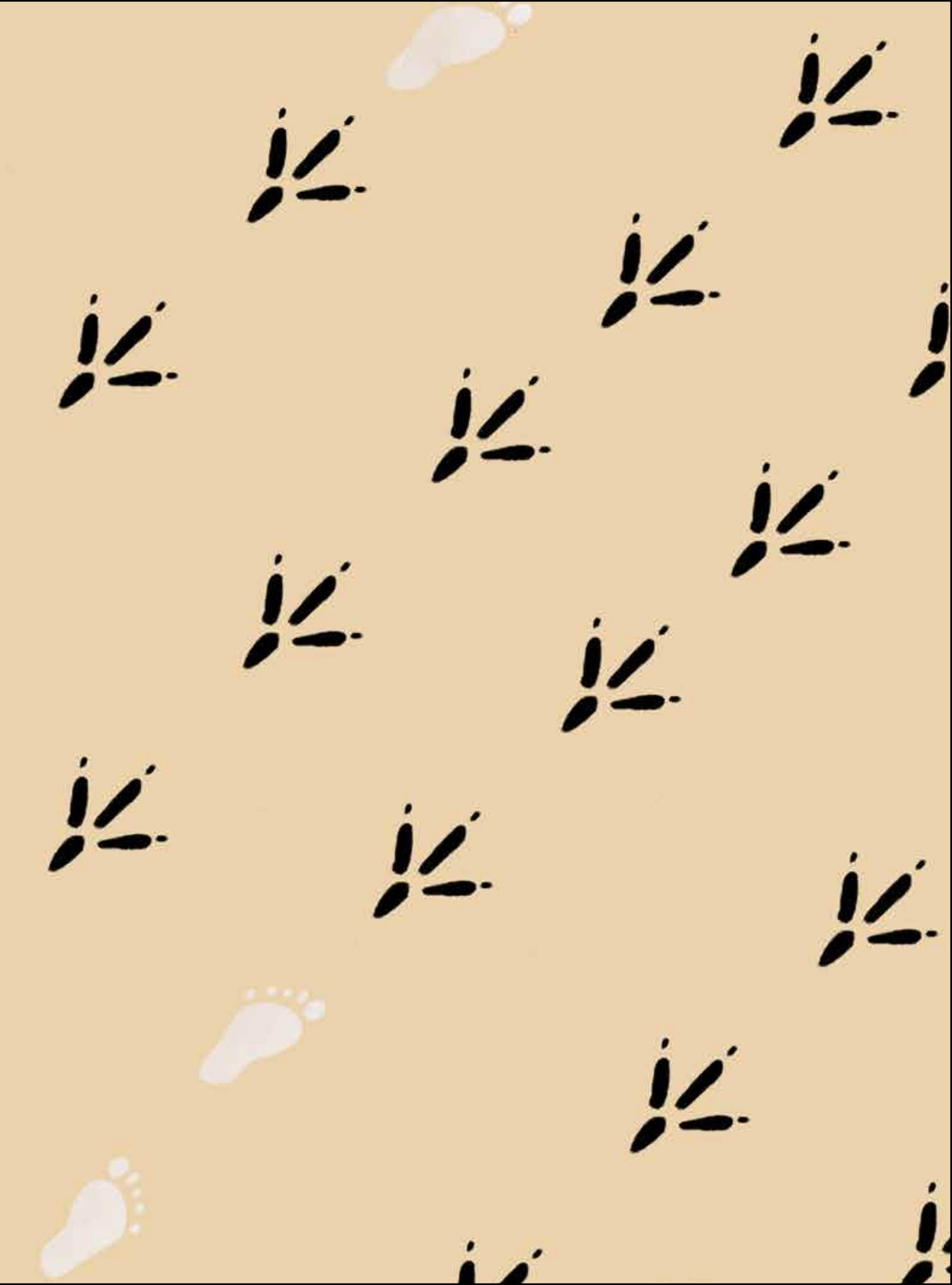


TALES FROM THE YUNGAS
THE CHUÑA



NADIA KHAN






TO NATURE, MY ROLE MODEL

THE CHUÑA

NADIA KHAN





The morning light flashes on the bright red legs of a bird zooming towards a house nestled deep in the jungle. Within the quiet house, Khalil is asleep, unaware.

“Keeooo, Keeooo, Keeooo!” laughs the bird, cocking his head back. Other birds join in and together they creep around the house searching for their morning meal.





Suddenly, the red legged bird spreads his wings and leaps. THUD!

He lands right above Khalil's bedroom. Khalil awakes startled by the RATTA-TAT-TAT coming from the roof above him. "Que es eso?" he shrieks.






“Mama, Mama!” He darts out of his room and dives under the blankets of his parent’s bed. “I hear something on the roof, it’s big and loud!” Feeling safe and warm under the blankets, his mind races wondering what it could be.



His curiosity gives him the courage to run to his sister's room. "Lhasa, there is something on the roof. Vamos! Let's go and see what it is." He grips her warm sleepy hand and together they sneak to his room to investigate.





They peek into the doorway and gaze up at the windows high above. Khalil recognizes the big bird right away. “It’s a chuña!”, he says with confidence. He has seen this bird before with blue eyes, a red beak, and red legs to match. “There is a chuña on the roof! Why? How?” he asks Lhasa.







“Hello! Hola! Tweet-Tweet”! Khalil and Lhasa say to him. Can he see us? wonders Khalil. The chuña pecks at the window. He appears to focus and then he pecks again.



The house rumbles as he stomps along the roof of the house flapping his wings. “Did we scare him?” asks Khalil. His scrawny legs running back and forth and spiky feathered crest bouncing up and down make Khalil giggle. “Hehehe”.

Lhasa joins in the giggles and together they buzz around the room flapping their arms and stomping their feet.



TOK! The chuña hits the window with his beak so hard it seems the glass will break. Khalil and his sister jump back. The bird vanishes.



The house grows silent.



Khalil slides on his boots.



He holds himself back from running so he doesn't scare away this bird he so eagerly wants to see.

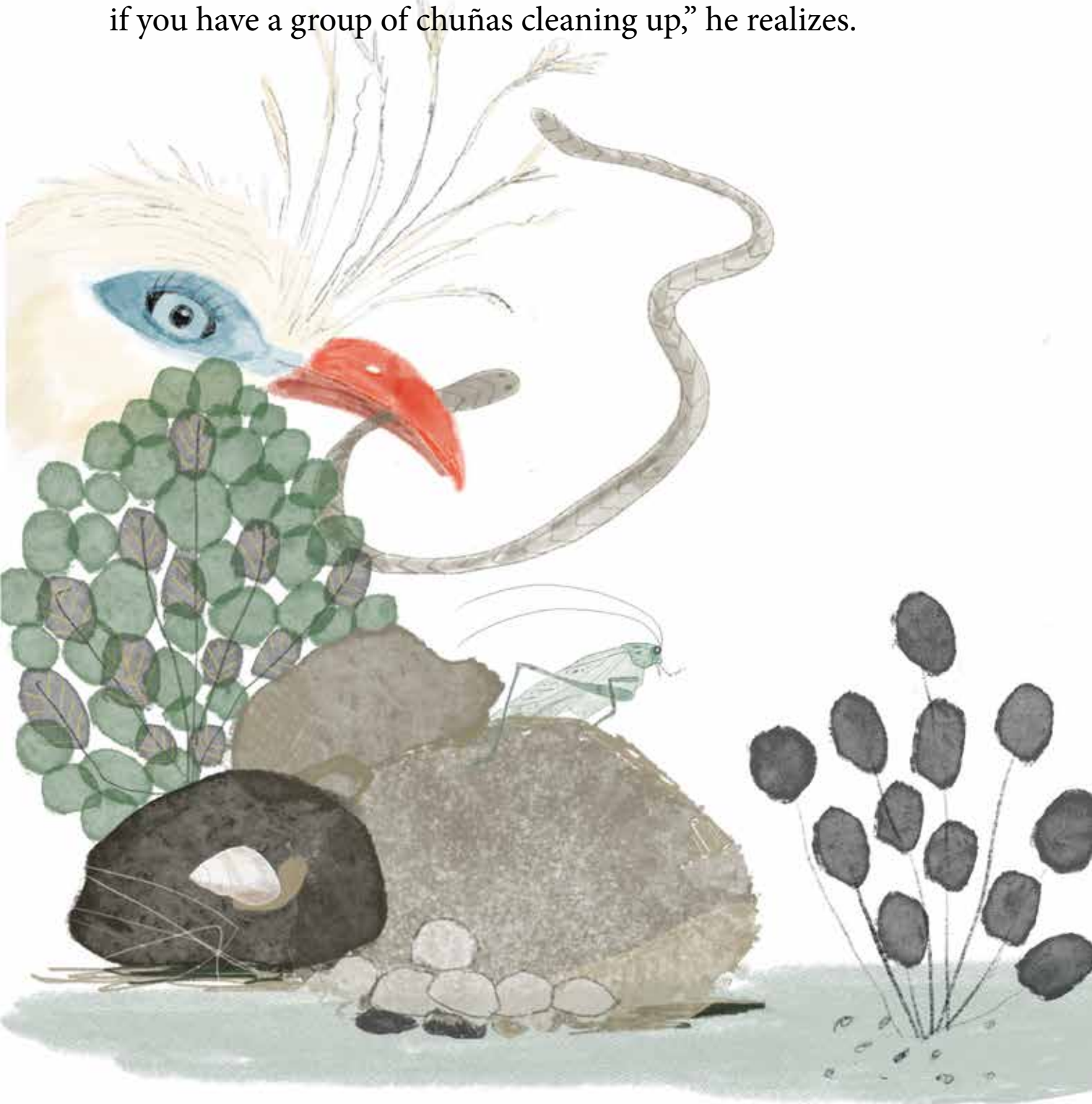


Slowly he tiptoes around the yard searching for any signs of the chuña. He listens carefully and hears a pecking sound. “The chuña is attacking the metal bumper of the truck,” he calls in a loud whisper.



The chuña flaps his wings and puffs up his feathers, making him look bigger. Khalil sees the chuña’s reflection in the bumper of the truck and wonders, is he pecking at himself?

Why don't the other chuñas in the group behave like this? Khalil asks himself. They just continue to creep along, feasting on nature. He watches as the chuñas nibble on, grasshoppers and other insects. One even grabs a snake! Chuñas eat lizards, snails, frogs, mice, and other creatures Khalil knows Mama doesn't want in or so close to the house. "You're lucky if you have a group of chuñas cleaning up," he realizes.



Suddenly, Khalil hears a rattling sound which wakes up his sleepy dog. The chuña that was on the roof, pecking at the window and the bumper of the truck, is now eating the dog food.

Khalil looks at the chuña then looks at the dog. “Easy girl,” he says calmly to the dog. “I’ll give you fresh food, let the chuña eat the leftovers.”




Jumping up on all fours, the dog lets out a growl and then dashes straight towards the chuña. “Oh nooooo!” Khalil stands frozen and frightened holding his breath.





“Fly chuña, fly!” he yells. The chuña sprints toward the forest without looking back and gracefully swoops into a tree. He balances his large body upon a thin branch and calls for the other chuñas in the group. “Trrh, Trrh, Trrh.”

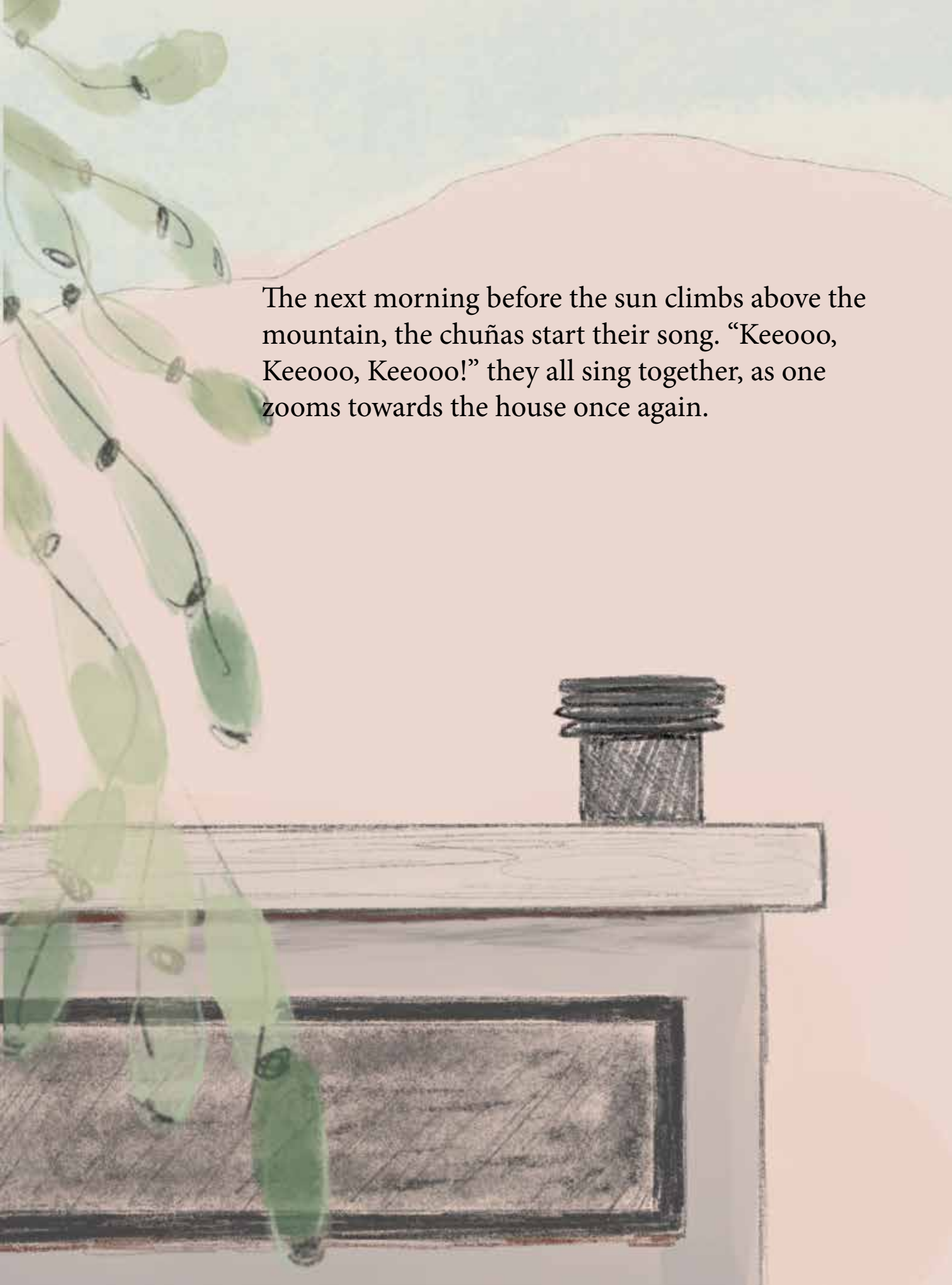




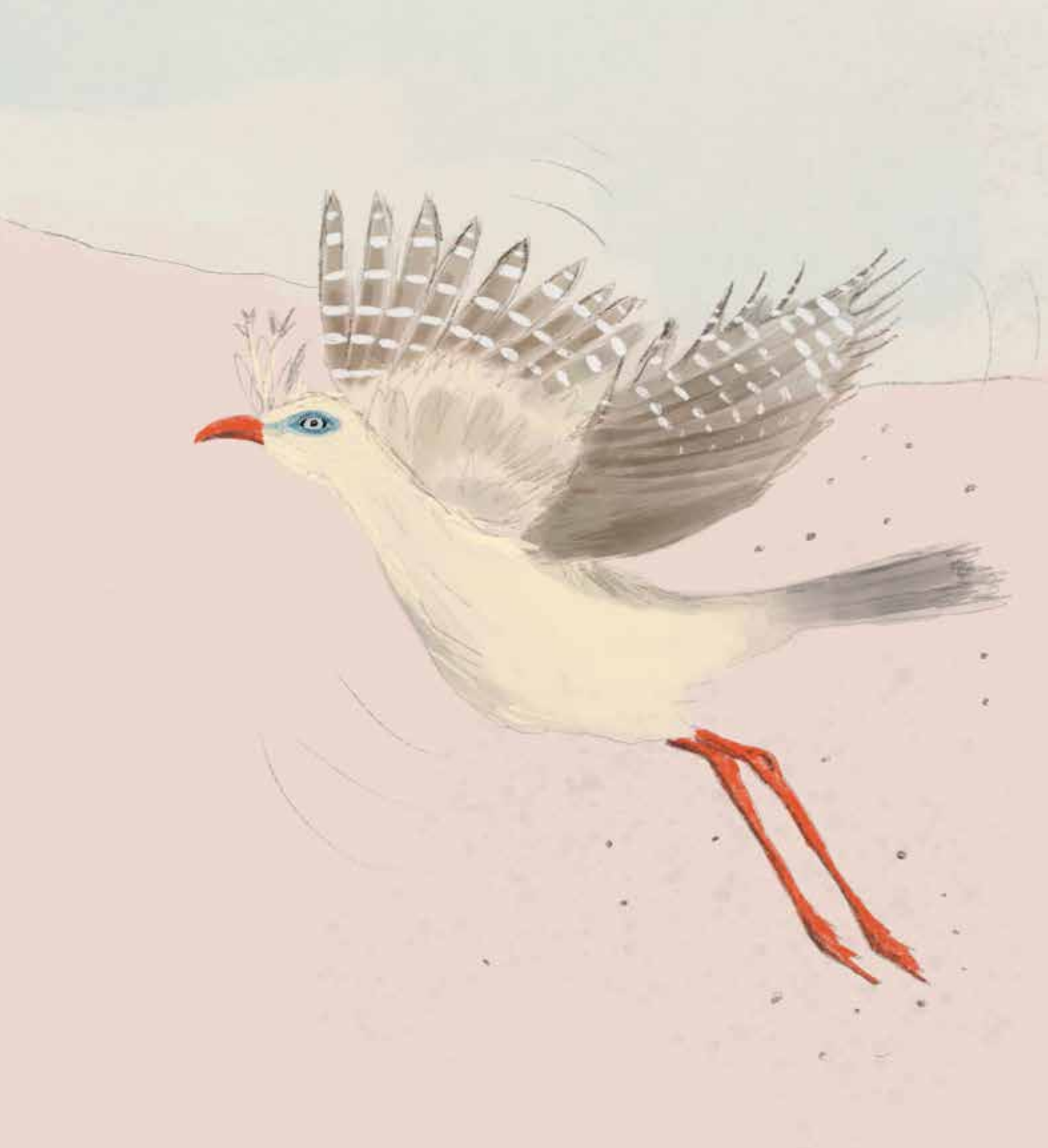
The other chuñas call back and they scurry up the mountain, occasionally gazing back at the dog. Phew!” Khalil calls out in relief.

He watches as the last chuña disappears into the forest. “Come back tomorrow, hasta mañana!” he hollers.



The illustration shows a simple house with a chimney on the right side. The house is drawn with dark outlines and some shading. In the background, there is a large, rounded mountain shape. The sky is a light, pale greenish-blue. On the left side, there are several green leaves on a branch, some of which are partially overlapping the text. The overall style is simple and illustrative.

The next morning before the sun climbs above the mountain, the chuñas start their song. “Keeooo, Keeooo, Keeooo!” they all sing together, as one zooms towards the house once again.



“RATTA-TAT-TAT-RATTA -TAT -TAT!” Mama, Mama, time to wake up!” yells Khalil with a satisfied smile on his face.

Author's Note

The chuña, called a red-legged seriema in English, is a mostly predatory terrestrial bird that lives in South America. You can easily identify chuñas by their blue eyes, red beak, long red legs, feathery crest, and size. An adult male or female can reach the height of a three-year-old child. Unlike most birds, chuñas have eyelashes. Their purpose, just like human eyelashes, is to protect the bird's eyes from sun and dust.

Chuñas are omnivores, which means they eat both plants and animals. You can find them foraging around open grassland or in lightly wooded areas and sometimes even on the roof of a house. They have three toes on each foot with talons, which are claws. A hook shaped talon on the middle toe is used for fighting or to hold down prey while eating them. When escaping predators, they prefer to run and swoop up to higher ground rather than fly. To mark their territory, chuñas let out a laugh-like song. Some say they also sing when the weather is about to change. The song is compared to the sound of a yelping puppy or chuckling turkeys. Often, one member of the group starts to sing and then the others join in.

This book is based on true events that occurred on our private natural reserve in Northwest region of Argentina, during a drought. The forest lacked the abundance necessary for the wildlife to thrive and it was observed that some birds were acting strange; like displaying strong territorial behavior that was considered more than normal, jumping on roofs, and eating dog food. It is possible the chuña saw his reflection in the window and the bumper of the truck as another chuña. As a result, he was running back and forth, flapping his wings and making himself look bigger to scare away a chuña that was not part of his group. The chuña jumped on our roof many more times that year and occasionally still wakes us up early in the morning with his beautiful song.

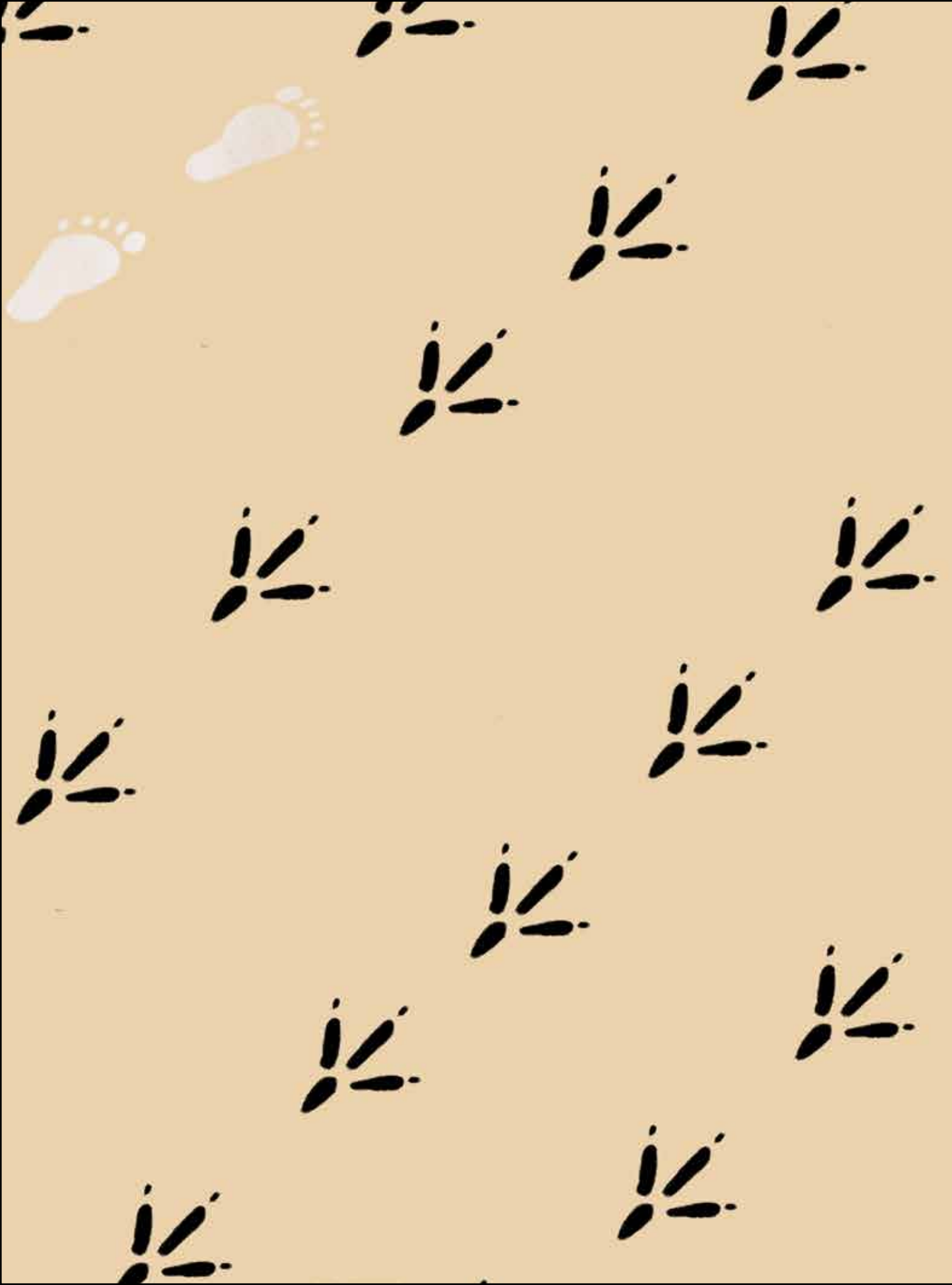


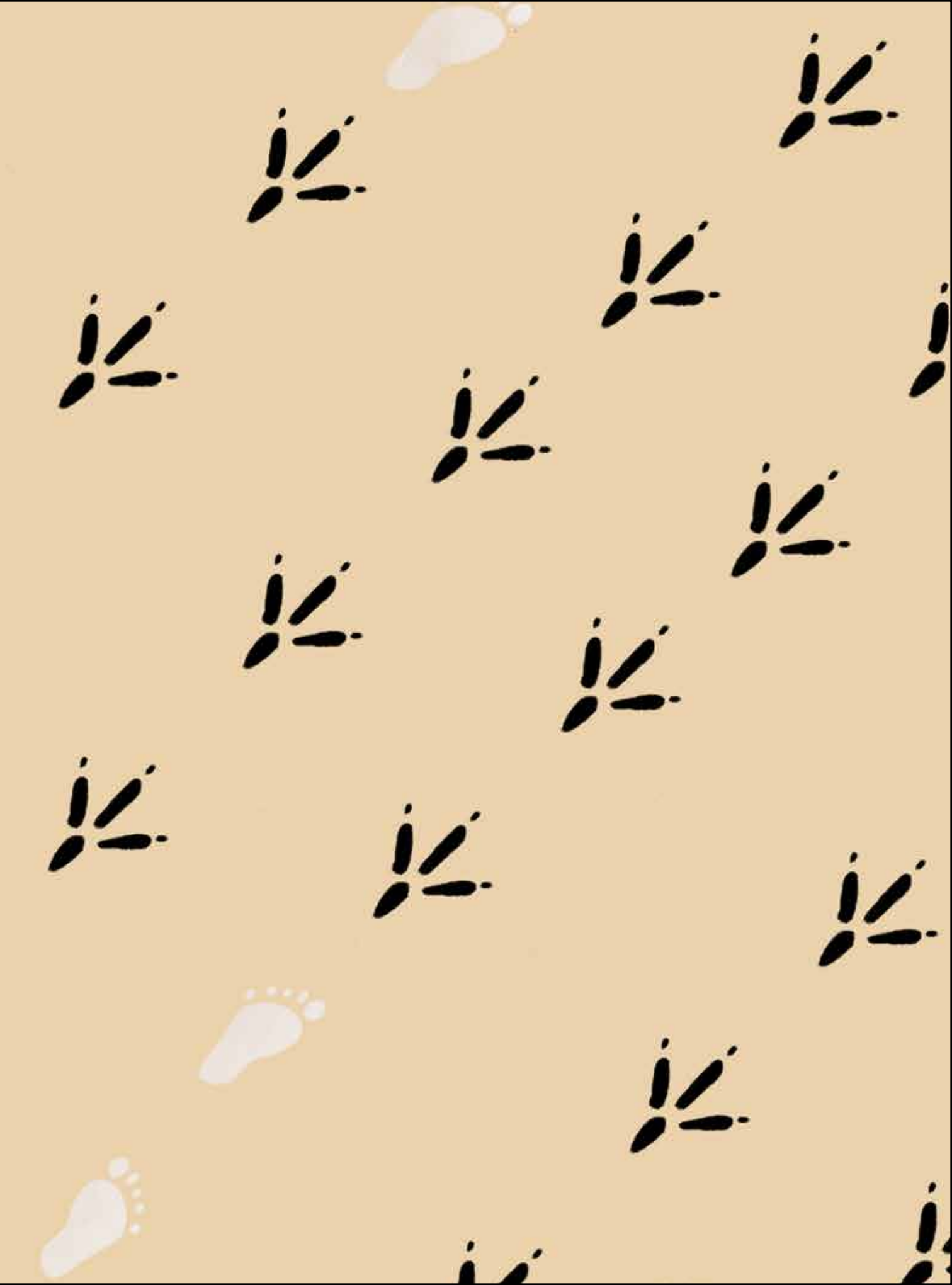
VILLA MONTE RESERVE, is a private natural reserve in the subtropical northwest region of Argentina known as the Yungas. It is situated in a transitional zone between two ecosystems and acts as a 'wildlife corridor' between three national parks. As a result, it harbors a unique flora and fauna; this, along with being the source of the water supply for the area, makes it an important expanse for conservation.

In the past, the area was used for cattle grazing and was heavily logged for wood. This resulted in a degraded forest, loss of biodiversity and soil erosion. Through reforestation with native species, closing it off to cattle and hunters, responsible use of natural resources, and applying a holistic management approach, the recuperation of this extraordinary habitat is being accelerated. The chuña is just one of the many animals that you can find in the area. Visit www.villamonte.com.ar to find out more.

NADIA KHAN, is a writer, and multi-disciplinary artist. She is passionate about writing books that portray animals in their natural habitat, and encouraging children through these stories to explore and observe nature. From a young age she has turned to nature for solace and healing. She co-founded Villa Monte Reserve where they contribute to the conservation of the native forest. Her books raise awareness about the area and its wildlife, which is pivotal in conservation work.

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