



Cattle farm

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Argentina

Belize

Bolivia

Brazil

Costa Rica

Guatemala

Guyana

Honduras

Mexico/U.S.

Nicaragua

Panama

Peru

Venezuela

exploring human jaguar conflict in Belize

Bounded by the countries of Mexico and Guatemala, and the Caribbean Sea, Belize is a small country located on the eastern edge of the Yucatan Peninsula. Belize claims some of the largest contiguous blocks of forest in the region—critical components of the larger Maya Forest that stretches across Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. Given Belize’s relatively intact forests, the country may contain the healthiest population of jaguars in Central America. WCS’s activities in Belize include documenting the extent to which large cats—primarily jaguars and pumas—prey on domestic animals and come into conflict with ranchers. Discovering the extent of these conflicts, and crafting meaningful solutions, will go a long way towards securing the jaguar’s future in this region.

The Human Aspect

A small human population and a low population density have probably contributed to lower levels of deforestation and illegal hunting of wildlife than those experienced by other countries in the region. Yet even though 47% of the country’s territory is under protected status, increased land clearing for cattle ranching, agriculture, and shrimp farming is fragmenting Belize’s lush forests, and threatening the jaguar and other wildlife that call those forests home.

Threats

In addition to the pressures of land clearing, jaguars face increasing threats from conflicts with

Highlights

Total Area

- 22,960 km²
- 8,867mi²

Habitat Types

- lowland humid tropical forest

Wildlife Present

Birds

- Jabiru stork
- Scarlet macaw
- Yellow-headed parrot

Mammals

- Jaguar
- Puma
- Ocelot
- White-lipped peccary
- Red brocket deer
- Baird’s tapir
- Black howler monkey

Reptiles

- Morelet’s crocodile
- Boa constrictor

Plants

- Mahogany
- Mexican cedar
- Strangler fig

WCS involvement

- Since 1980





Jaguar pelt

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livestock owners. Whether community-level chicken and pig farmers or large-scale cattle ranch operators, livestock owners often retaliate in order to reduce economic losses.

WCS Activities

Belize's forests are recognized as critical to the long-term survival of the jaguar in the region. In 2002, WCS-supported research in two districts in Belize showed that official estimates of jaguar predation on livestock, and retaliatory killing of jaguars by livestock owners, were grossly underreported. This research was expanded in 2004 as the first nation-wide survey to document conflicts between livestock owners and jaguars.

Researchers conducted 80 interviews with ranchers, farmers, and community members to document instances of livestock predation. They recorded how livestock owners respond to these attacks, and under what conditions livestock management either encourages or prevents predation. Preliminary evidence shows that jaguar predation on livestock is increasing in many parts of Belize. While some owners do take preventative measures—including improved herd management and non-lethal approaches such as use of dogs, electric fences, increased patrols, etc.—there is little consensus on which techniques work best, and many owners feel that lethal control is the only option. However, there is evidence that improved management of livestock and aversive techniques do work, and that many livestock owners would be willing to participate in non-lethal activities designed to mitigate livestock predation.

Important Next Steps

- Disseminate findings to survey respondents, Belize government officials, non-governmental organizations, and private sector in an effort to solidify a network of concerned stakeholders.
- Conduct focus group meetings with ranchers/farmers to determine which prevention techniques work best.
- Increase the capacity of Belize government and local NGOs to provide outreach to individuals and communities who are experiencing problems with livestock predation.
- Create campaign to educate farmers, ranchers, and communities regarding jaguar behavior, wildlife policy, and predation mitigation techniques.

In addition to land clearing, jaguars face increasing threat from conflicts with livestock owners.

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Mission

The Wildlife Conservation Society's International Conservation program saves wildlife and wild lands by understanding and resolving critical problems that threaten key species and large, wild ecosystems around the world.

WCS Strategies

- Site-based conservation
- Research
- Training and capacity-building
- New model development
- Informing policy
- Linking zoo-based and field-based conservation

Support this Project!

Donations can be sent to:
The Jaguar Conservation Program at the Wildlife Conservation Society

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