

AN OVERVIEW OF FELID RESEARCH IN SOUTH AMERICA

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North American researchers are unquestionably dedicated. And despite occasional disagreements and typically sluggish political timelines, so are the agencies that often back them. Investigators usually have most of the resources they need to initiate, maintain, and complete their research. From a research perspective, things are dramatically different for much of South America. Funding to do good research is often limited, despite the fact that there are more South American nationals conducting research on carnivore species than ever before. A lot of these young, emerging scientists have received specialized training and education at U.S. institutions. Others have attended their own nationally-recognized universities, which are consistently improving and developing more specialized programs in biology, field ecology, and conservation. Many know how to ask the right scientific questions, initiate and conduct good scientific studies, and overcome logistical difficulties in the field. Yet, they develop these self-reliant field and scientific skills only to find that the government commitment they seek for their projects rarely occurs. This is often not for lack of will, but inevitably is tied to lack of available funding, personnel, department qualifications, and scientific understanding and sense of urgency among political appointees.

Brazil is perhaps the lone exception to this scenario, although publications, while having substantially increased in recent years, still lag behind actual ongoing and completed research. The Brazilian government has backed many of their very qualified and passionate wildlife scientists, including many felid researchers. Take for example, Rogerio C. de Paula, a native Brazilian. Rogerio is both a biologist working for the federal Brazilian agency IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources), and a field researcher for the Brazilian non-governmental organization, Pro-Carnivoros. He works out of IBAMA's National Research Center for Predator Conservation (CENAP), and travels extensively throughout Brazil charged with the responsibility of investigating and mitigating, whenever possible, instances of human-carnivore conflict. The bulk of his work revolves around addressing jaguar livestock depredation and there is no one I can think of more qualified than Rogerio. He knows his country well, as he does his countryman and the plight of many landowners in rural regions. Then there's Tadeu

Gomes de Oliveira, a young professor (Maranhão State University (UEMA)) and nonprofit researcher (Pro-Carnivoros). Tadeu is one of the most productive cat biologists working in the neotropics, and has done a considerable amount to advance our knowledge of felids in South America. He is dedicated, passionate, and insightful, a superlative scientist.

There are others in Brazil, emerging and established, working hard to implement cat conservation strategies. Peter Crawshaw is a native Brazilian who achieved his Ph.D. from the University of Florida. He was a principal player in some of the earliest jaguar research ever conducted, the former director of Brazil's National Research Center for Predator

Conservation, and a founder of Pro-Carnivoros. Ronaldo Morato, also based at CENAP, was one of Peter's original field assistants in Iguacu National Park and is now involved with many different projects. And Marcelo Mazzolli, founder of Projecto PUMA, is researching puma

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livestock depredation issues in the country.

The rest of South America has its own dedicated felid biologists. In Argentina, for example, Mauro Lucherini has made a name for himself studying various small cats, like the Andean Mountain Cat, and is a member of the Andean Cat Conservation Committee. Mario di Bitetti is working hard on behalf of jaguar conservation in the northernmost Atlantic Forests of the country. In Bolivia, Fernando D. A.

Ayllon and Sephan Halloy are involved in cat conservation in the central Andes. Rafael Hoogesteijn, a long-time expert on jaguar biology, is integral to jaguar rancher outreach efforts in Venezuela. Gerardo Acosta-Jamett is examining the effects of fragmentation on the guinea in south-central Chile, while Esteban Payan is investigating jaguar and ocelot distribution in the Colombian Amazon.

This is only a sample of the research occurring in South America and those scientists responsible for it. With time, the amount and scope of research will no doubt continue to increase. But the problems remain: Funding for long-term research and funding to publish at all, but preferably in mainstream journals. Perhaps in the future, certain journals might be willing to partially-subsidize these costs with some of their advertising revenue? The potentially effective options will no doubt require contemplation. But unless we find a more effective means to facilitate communication of quality felid research in South America, the mainstream conservation

science community will be poorer for it. The good news is that until we do, there are researchers like those described here willing to make the sacrifices that often accompany international carnivore conservation efforts. §

