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Tapir Specialist Group**

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TAPIR CONSERVATION

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The Newsletter of the IUCN/SSC TAPIR SPECIALIST GROUP.

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Editor: Sharon Matola

The views in Tapir Conservation do not necessarily reflect those of the IUCN nor the entire IUCN/SSC Tapir Specialist Group (TSG).

The objective of Tapir Conservation is to offer the members of the Tapir Specialist Group/IUCN/SSC and others concerned with the family Tapiridae, news brief papers, opinions, and general information about this threatened mammalian genus. Anyone wishing to contribute to Tapir Conservation please send material to:

Sharon Matola, Chairperson
Tapir Specialist Group/IUCN/SSC
P.O. Box 1787
Belize City, Belize
Central America

WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Tapir Specialist Group Update

Please remember that a Tapir Specialist Group newsletter cannot be written without your input. Send to me any news which may come to your attention about tapirs, in the wild, or in captivity. Thanks.

Coming soon thanks to energetic Tapir Specialist Group member Daniel Brooks, the Tapir Action Plan. This first ever report will include the most current information on all four species of tapir, photographs and maps with a foreword by John Eisenberg, Ph.D. Both Dan Brooks and I extend gratitude to all who contributed to this document, and our appreciation to the Sir Peter Scott Fund/IUCN for providing the funds for its publication.

NEWS

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY IN FRENCH GUIANA

It has been requested that the following notice be included in the Tapir Specialist Group newsletter:

Wildlife Rescue Petit Saut-French Guiana

90% of French Guiana is covered with neotropical rainforest. Its major part is presently intact due to low human density and lack of penetrating roads. In January 1994, as part of a hydroelectric project, 310km² of this forest will be flooded. A wildlife rescue operation is underway and will be financed by the public company building the dam. This kind of operation is controversial but we believe strongly that if it is well conducted and well documented, it will be very useful and worthwhile. A large amount of scientific information will be obtained.

Mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds... will be captured under surveillance of wildlife veterinarians. A suitable release area has been selected and will be prepared. Control animals will be followed (radio-tracking & visual check) for at least 2 to 3 years. This area is close to the capture area and has been overhunted, so the risk of disturbing population in balance and of importing diseases is minimal. The area will be protected by law.

An important objective of the operation is public awareness. Local actions are being planned and will be focused on schools. International education will be possible through the media which has shown much interest in the operation.

A scientific study based on analysis of biological samples is planned. A biological bank (serum, cells, parasites...) will be constituted and accessible to the international scientific community, but there will be no funding for shipment and research. Laboratories are invited to express their interest and submit their proposals. The possibility of adding new projects to the actual following plans will be considered if such propositions are formulated.

Several positions will be opened in January and February for staff veterinarians, biologists and volunteers with interest and experience in wildlife restraint, care and management. Candidates should be in a good physical condition in order to work under hard field conditions for seven months. Knowledge of French is highly desirable.

Send either scientific proposals or a letter of intent, a curriculum vitae and references to: Dr. J.-Christophe Vie, Operation de Sauvetage de Petit Saut, EDF/CNEH, Savoie Technolac, 73373 Le Bourget-du-lac cedex, France, Fax (33)-79-25-30-09.

A. THE CENTRAL AMERICAN TAPIR, Tapirus bairdii

1. ATTEMPTS TO INITIATE CAPTIVE BREEDING PROGRAM FOR T. bairdii IN MEXICO

Notice has been received that a Mexican organization, NATURALIA, A.C., under the leadership of zoologist Dr. Bernardo Villa and Dr. Jesus Estudillo, will be attempting to initiate a captive breeding program for the Central American tapir.

Project coordinators for this program are requesting the following information:

- size and design of enclosures
- nutritional needs in captivity
- medical care
- breeding in captivity
- behaviour in captivity
- general information on captive management

If any Tapir Specialist Group members wish to get in touch with this group NATURALIA, A.C., please note the following address:

APDO
Postal 21-541
Mexico, DF 04021

2. T. bairdii STUDY PROPOSED IN CORCOVADO NATIONAL PARK COSTA RICA

Eduardo Naranjo of the National University in Heredia, Costa Rica, is proposing to study the abundance, habitat use and diet of T. bairdii in 545 km² Corcovado National Park, Costa Rica.

This is the largest tract of rainforest that remains on the Central American Pacific slope, and the data obtained from this study would be used as a basis to design management and conservation strategies for T. bairdii.

As Eduardo Naranjo has noted, few field studies exist about the ecology of T. bairdii. None have ever been undertaken in Corcovado National Park.

Daniel Janzen (1983) has indicated that "between 100-300 individuals" are in Corcovado National Park, making this protected area ideal for the study of the ecology of T. bairdii.

B. THE MOUNTAIN TAPIR, Tapirus pinchaque

1. ECOLOGICAL STUDY OF T. pinchaque IN COLUMBIA

A project to study the ecology of the mountain tapir in the high Andes of Columbia has been proposed by Craig Downer, Jaime Cavelier, Carlos Mejia and Bernardo Ortiz.

The study sites chosen are the montane forests and paramo vegetation of the Ucumari National Park in the Central Cordillera of the Colombian Andes.

One of the target points of the study is to investigate the potential role of tapir feces on the fertility of montane forest soils. The investigators are also interested in the effect of the digestive systems on the percentage germination of seeds and growth rates of seedlings of plants eaten by the animals and returned to the soil in the feces.

Radio-tracking is the proposed method of gaining information on home range estimates, the size of the population in the study area, and to evaluate the viability of this population knowing the current extension of montane forests and paramo vegetation along with the trends in deforestation and habitat degradation.

This project is hoped to become part of an international research program between Ecuador and Columbia for the conservation of T. pinchaque.

2. EFFORTS BEING MADE TO RELEASE A FEMALE T. pinchaque INTO A PROTECTED AREA OF SANGAY NATIONAL PARK

A female mountain tapir, between the ages of one-two years old is showing successful adaptations having made frequent browsing excursions into this cloud forest, reports mountain tapir researcher, Craig Downer.

Downer also reports the possibility of taking four T. pinchaque from the Los Angeles Zoo and sending them to Ecuador for radio-collaring and release into the Sangay National Park.

According to Downer, this idea received support from L.A. zoo officials, Richard Kunard and Michael Dee.

Three of the four T. pinchaque were born in captivity, and the remaining one came from Ecuador; very likely from Sangay National Park.

C. TAPIR MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES TO BECOME AVAILABLE

Researched by Amanda R. Lee, and published with assistance from The Federation of Zoological Gardens of Great Britain and Ireland, The Tapir Management Guidelines are some of the most up-to-date and comprehensive reviews of all four species of tapir.

Historic data is mentioned, and information seldom in print has been made available in this important work.

Facts about tapirs which rarely surface in literature:

- T. terrestris and T. pinchaque are most closely related while T. bairdii is the most aberrant form.
- Feeding ecology and social behaviour is comparable to that of the middle Eocene Perissodactyls.
- Normal rectal temperature ranges 36.4°C - 37.2°C.
- Normal heart rate is 45 b.p.m.

The publication of the Tapir Management Guidelines and the Tapir Action Plan will fill current voids in the literature about all four species of tapir.

D. DISEASE BEING INVESTIGATED IN CAPTIVE TAPIR SPECIES

Mitch Finnegan DVM, a zoological medicine resident at the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary medicine, has been looking into an interesting disease that seems to occur in most captive tapir species.

These have been described by Dr. Finnegan as multiple coalescing vesicles over the dorsal cervical and lumbosacral regions. The vesicles would rupture and leak a serosanguinous exudate. A biopsy showed the lesion to be subepidermal with intravesicular neutrophils, eosinophils, and red blood cells and an etiological agent has not been identified.

Dr. Finnegan found that the lesions eventually resolved after being treated topically.

Curious about these lesions, thirty-three zoos were sent surveys requesting more information about other cases of skin disease in tapirs. Fifteen zoos responded and thirty-two animals; 18 T. indicus, 9 T. terrestris, and T. bairdii were identified having similar appearing skin lesions and many animals experienced multiple episodes of the disease.

Dr. Finnegan is very interested in obtaining more data about this curious disease. If any Tapir Specialist Group members can provide information relative to the above-mentioned data, please contact:

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College of Veterinary Medicine
Department of Environmental Practice
P.O. Box 1071
Knoxville, Tenn. 37901-1071
619-974-5576

E. PREPARATION OF THE SIXTH EDITION OF WALKER'S MAMMALS OF THE WORLD BEGINS

Ronald Nowak, author of the fifth edition of Walker's Mammals of the World, is beginning the sixth edition, to be published by the John Hopkins University Press.

The new edition will emphasize the problems, conservation, and current numerical and distributional status of mammals.

F. RESEARCH BEING UNDERTAKEN ON THE REPRODUCTIVE PHYSIOLOGY OF THE TAPIR

Dr. Janine L. Brown, a research physiologist at the Smithsonian Institution Conservation and Research Center, has been studying the reproductive physiology of the tapir since 1988.

Dr. Brown has been collaborating with the Miami MetroZoo to characterize reproductive hormones during the estrous cycle and pregnancy of two Central American tapirs.

The project has gone well, mainly due to the disposition of the animals who are very tractable and allow blood samples to be collected up to three times per week.

Dr. Brown has analyzed luteinizing hormone, follicle stimulating hormone, and has planned to examine several others such as prolactin, possible pregnancy associated proteins.

Future publications will result from Dr. Brown's extensive research.

G. CBSG HEADED FOR PANAMA

A conservation workshop is planned for early 1994, headed by Dr. Ullie Seal, in Panama.

Both a PHVA (Population Habitat Viability Assessment) for the Central American tapir is planned, as well as a CAMP (Conservation and Management Plan) for endemic and threatened species of Panama.

ANCON, Association Nacional para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza, is working with the San Diego Zoo and the New York Zoological Society to help conserve and protect the Central America tapir in Panama.

ANCON is interested in breeding T. bairdii in captivity for later reintroduction into protected areas in Panama.

The Zoological Society of San Diego has formally committed US \$30,000.00 for the initial phase of a tapir-howler monkey Rehabilitation Center in Panama.

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