IUCN/SSC
Tapir Specialist Group

NUMBER 5 TAPIR CONSERVATION FEBRUARY 1995

The Newsletter of the IUCN/SSC TAPIR SPECIALIST GROUP

Issue #5 of the newsletter has been produced with assistance from Wildlife Preservation Trust, International

TAPIR CONSERVATION

The Newsletter of the IUCN/SSC Tapir Specialist Group

Editor: Sharon Matola, Chairperson
Tapir Specialist Group

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 materials to:

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

WORD FROM THE EDITOR

In issue #5 of Tapir Conservation, included are current reports from field research, matters arising from the Tapir Advisory Group (TAG), list of TSG members for the 1994-1996 Triennium, and reprint offers.

If you have any news about tapirs, in the wild, in captivity, historic, or any other information, please send to:

TAPIR SPECIALIST GROUP NEWSLETTER c/o
P.O. Box 1787
Belize City, Belize
Central America

TAPIR ADVISORY GROUP

Chair: Rick Barongi, Walt Disney Company

The first Tapir TAG mid-year meeting was hosted by the L.A. Zoo in 1994, and had a total of 15 Participants from 10 institutions. With the assistance of Bob Wiese and Kevin Willis from the AZA Conservation Center, the group developed breeding recommendations, goals and priorities for all four species of tapirids in North American zoological facilities. This workshop was the first step in developing a comprehensive master plan and five year action plan. Breeding recommendations were sent out to all zoos holding Malayan tapirs.

There are presently estimated to be 200 spaces for tapirs in North American zoos. Almost 50 percent of these spaces are taken up by T. terrestris (Brazilian tapir). As this is the only species that is not severely threatened throughout its wild range, it is the lowest priority for captive propagation. A key result of the mid year meeting was to recommend an immediate moratorium on the captive breeding of T. terrestris in North American collections. While this moratorium is not meant to eliminate the Brazilian tapir from the North American population, it is meant to free up space for the more endangered T. indicus (Malayan tapir) and T. bairdii (Central American tapir). The mountain or woolly tapir, T. pinchaque, is the most endangered tapirid in the wild. Unfortunately, the present captive population is so small and inbred, that it is not feasible to increase the breeding program, until new founders are available.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

The following is a summary of only those tapirs held in North American zoos:

Malayan tapir	26.30 = 56	19 institutions
Brazilian tapir	42.48 = 90	30 institutions
Baird's tapir	19.10 = 29	9 institutions
Mountain tapir	6.3 = 9	3 institutions

PRIMARY CONCERNS

1. Obtain a more accurate number for tapir holding space in North American facilities. A tapir survey committee was formed at the mid year meeting to deal with this issue.

2. Implement a workable program that encourages zoos to cooperate with the moratorium on breeding T. terrestris. Enlist the support of the AZA Contraception Advisory Group.

3. A husbandry standards/management committee was formed to begin work on a husbandry manual. This will consolidate and enhance the already existing AZA minimal standards and the 1993 International Zoo Yearbook article on tapirs.

4. Finalize application for tapir SSP and submit to WCMC for

approval.

5. Assist the IUCN/SSC Tapir Specialist Group with reviewing the first draft of the global action plan for tapirs.

6. Develop better lines of communication with other regional programs in Europe, Great Britain, Japan and S.E. Asia, so as to coordinate global strategies for captive breeding.

7. Assist in any way possible to prevent the extinction of T. pinchaque, a species in very serious trouble throughout its range (Andes Mountains of Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador and N. Peru).

RESEARCH

The Tapir Veterinary Advisory Group is coordinated by Dr. Don Janssen, San Diego Zoo, Fax: 619-557-3959. This group will develop a medical management survey and skin disease study for tapirs. Necropsy protocols and tissue/organ samples should be coordinated through Dr. Janssen or Dr. Janine Brown, National Zoo.

FIELD CONSERVATION

Contact Alejandro Grajal at Wildlife Conservation Society, New York, Fax: 718-364-4275, or Sharon Matola, Belize Zoo, Fax: 501-81-3004.

PROGRESS TOWARDS GOALS

1. The first mid year tapir TAG meeting was held in April 1994 and recommendations were made on breeding strategies for T. indicus and T. bairdii in North America.

2. The first draft of the IUCN/SSC global Action Plan was put out for review by Sharon Matola (Belize Zoo) and Dan Brooks (Houston Zoo).

3. A Tapir CAMP (Conservation Assessment and Management Plan) and GCAR (Global Captive Action Recommendations) was held in March 1994, and the first draft of this report is being circulated for review by IUCN/SSC Captive Breeding Specialist Group.

4. The first PHVA and tapir CAMP held in Panama in December 1994.

A. THE CENTRAL AMERICAN TAPIR, TAPIRUS BAIRDII

1. Field Research accomplished in Corcovado National Park.

Eduardo Naranjo while studying in Costa Rica at Universidad Nacional Programa Regional de Vida Silvestre para Mesoamerica y el Caribe carried out nine months of field work in the 41,789

hectare Corcovado National Park, looking at the ecology of T. bairdii there.

Naranjo found that tapir abundance and use was greater for lowland second growth forests and Raphia taedigera palm swamps than for other habitats. Habitat preference was attributed to more abundant and better quality food and water sources, as well as resting sites and gentler slopes.

2. Field Research Continues in Costa Rica.

While Eduardo Naranjo conducted a study of the abundance, habitat, use and diet of the tapir in Corcovado National Park, Costa Rica, another student in the Programa Regional de Vida Silvestre para Meso America y el Caribe Universidad Nacional, Charles Foerster is attempting to continue this field work by using radio telemetry to monitor movements of six adult tapirs.

In this study, Foerster hopes to:

- Determine temporal variations in home range, habitat use and movement patterns.

- Describe changes in T. bairdii foraging strategy in response to seasonal fruit production.

- Provide management guidelines for Corcovado National Park and other protected areas which support populations of T. bairdii.

The study will be undertaken for approximately one year.

3. Prime Habitat For Central America Tapir in Belize, Central America.

Sponsored by Wildlife Preservation Trust, International, another expedition to the remote Raspaculo River occurred in December 1994.

This region of Belize could become under serious threat by an up and coming hydro electric project. Documenting the presence of endangered species is an important annual activity.

The expedition was short and observations of wildlife activity were documented, reports given to local NGO's and the Forestry Department of the Government of Belize.

Tracks and faeces over a twenty km stretch of river were noted on a 1:50,000 topographical map. Nine tapir were observed over a six day period. A species of cane grass, abundant along the riverbanks and noted to have been visibly browsed upon wherever tapir tracks were present, was collected and sent to the Missouri Botanical Garden for positive identification. This resulted in a new plant species record for Belize, Tripsacum andersonii. While this is a common forage plant in tropical America, it had not been recorded from Belize until this December field investigation.

The Raspaculo River floods regularly , as well as receives frequent high winds. This results in a constant and prolific growth of secondary vegetation; food preferred by herbivores.

Both the remote location of the Raspaculo River, which reduces hunting pressures to zero, and the abundance of preferred food, provides a sanctuary for populations of T. bairdii. This area of Belize is ideally suited for a long term ecology study about the Central American tapir.

4. Population and Habitat Viability Assessment (PHVA) for T. bairdii in Panama.

Sponsored by the Wildlife Conservation Society, American Airlines, and Walt Disney World Company, a PHVA for T. bairdii was held in late 1994 in Panama.

Organized by Rick Barongi of Walt Disney World, the PHVA included local biologists and natural resources personnel, officials from the Species Survival Commission, the Captive Breeding Specialist Group and the Tapir Specialist Group. The meeting was hosted by the Panamanian NGO, ANCON.

The PHVA brought forward information about the distribution of T. bairdii in Panama. This valuable data will be incorporated into the upcoming Action Plan.

The captive populations of T. bairdii were the subject of long discussion. There are 2.3 T. bairdii at the Summit Zoo in Panama. On a private farm in El Dorado, 3.1. T. bairdii.

Rick Barongi is also the Chair of the Tapir Advisory Group which advises breeding recommendations, goals and priorities for all four species of tapir in North American zoos.

B. THE LOWLAND TAPIR, TAPIRUS TERRESTRIS

1. Field Research in Venezuela.

Leonardo Salas, a graduate student from Venezuela, studied T. terrestris at a Wildlife Conservation Society research station south of the Orinoco River. This area of lowland tropical forest had almost no human intervention. Diet, use of habitat, and effects of hunting by Ye'kwana Indians were documented.

Mr. Salas has a comprehensive list of the plant species eaten by tapirs in this area. He stresses the importance of reducing the access of people into protected areas for the maintenance of healthy tapir populations. For more information about this work contact: Leo Salas

C. MOUNTAIN TAPIR, TAPIRUS PINCHAQUE

Various reports from the field indicate that the Mt. tapir is in serious trouble within its remaining range in South America.

Near Quito, Ecuador, the Pasochoa Reserve has been considered as a site for a breeding program for T. pinchaque. Although the Pasochoa Reserve is small, it has a profile which reflects its commitment to spread environmental education into the surrounding communities.

Reports suggest that the local people feel proud about this area and Fundacion Natura sees the development of a well-planned breeding program as a strategy which could strengthen its long-term position as a protected area.

Unfortunately, as is the case in many tropical countries, no funds in Ecuador are available for such a project.

From previous field reports, mostly coming from Craig Downer, TSG member and certainly the person with most experience studying Mt. tapirs in the wild, the healthiest populations appear to be in Ecuador's Sangay National Park. However, Downer has repeatedly shown that encroachment from cattle invasion into Mt. tapir home range, hunting, and road development are posing serious threats to remaining populations of T. pinchaque.

Mt. tapir populations are fragmented. More field work needs to be undertaken. More education needs to be implemented. The Wildlife Conservation Society has been actively involved in assisting Craig Downer undertake his important field studies. Technical assistance to Ecuadoreans working with this critically endangered species has also been made available.

MORE VISIBILITY FOR MOUNTAIN TAPIRS?

Raising public awareness about the Mt. tapir would be a positive step to assist efforts aimed at protecting this species.

The BBC Natural History Unit has shown considerable interest in producing a documentary film about the natural history of T. pinchaque. Preliminary visits to Ecuador by the BBC have already happened, in order to assess the area for such a film project.

People, living both nearbly the remaining populations of Mt. tapir, and far away from these areas, need to know the vital ecological role this animal plays.

Field research has shown that Mt. tapirs are important for the continuance of high Andean cloud forest and paramo ecosystems. These animals act as a seed dispersor, both through its faeces and by seeds clinging to its woolly coat.

The rise of the high Andes over the last few million years, and the evolution of the Mt. tapir could have been intimately linked. Columbian ecologists are quetioning the link between the recent

disappearance of the country's national tree, the Quindean wax palm, Cevoxylon quindiense, and the disappearance of the Mt. tapir.

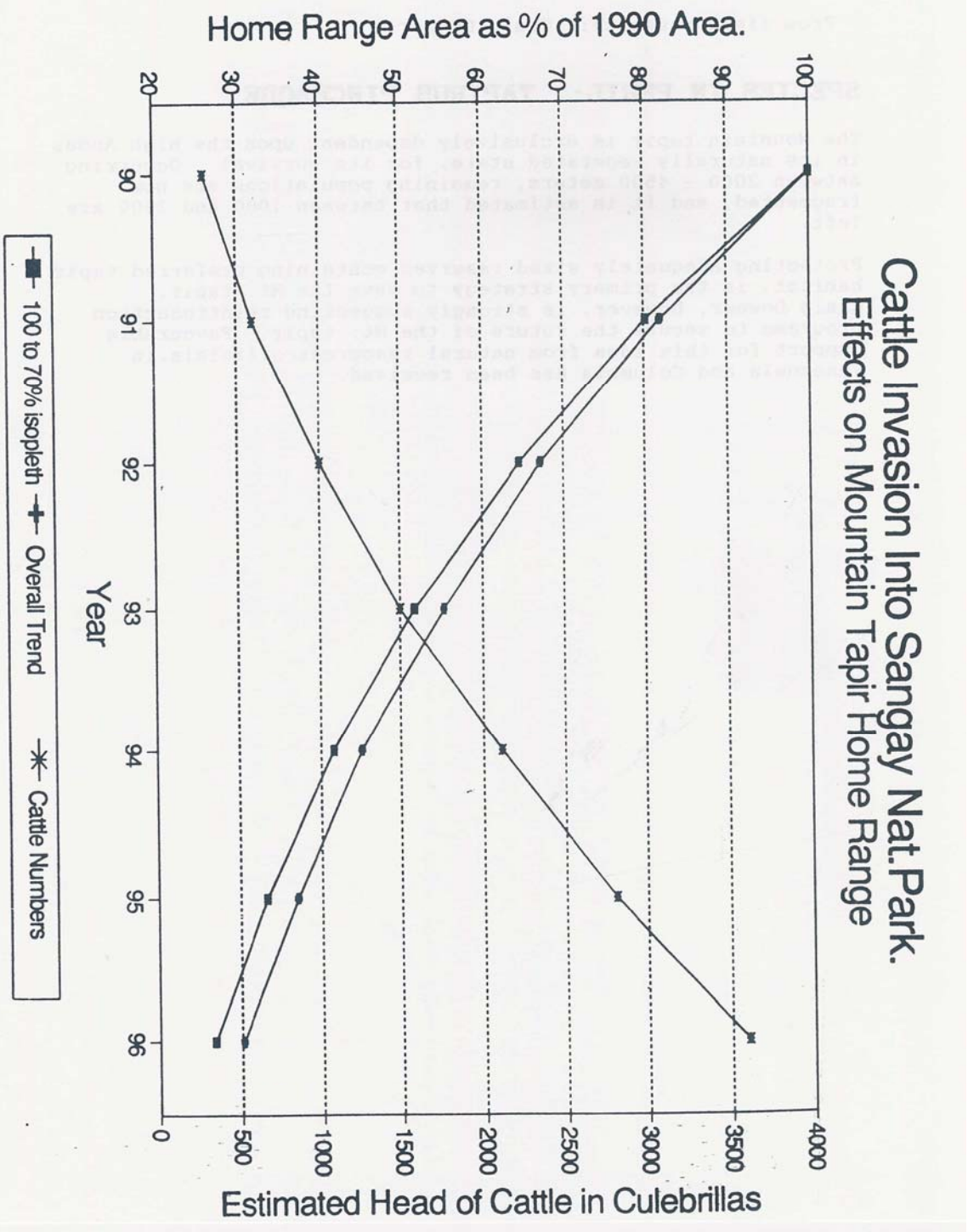
- From field research: Craig Downer

SPECIES IN PERIL: TAPIRUS PINCHAQUE

The Mountain tapir is exclusively dependent upon the high Andes in its naturally vegetated state, for its survival. Occurring between 2000 - 4500 meters, remaining populations are now fragmented, and it is estimated that between 1000 and 2500 are left.

Protecting adequately sized reserves containing preferred tapir habitat, is the primary strategy to save the Mt. tapir. Craig Downer, however, is strongly suggesting reintroduction programs to secure the future of the Mt. tapir. Favourable support for this idea from natural resources officials in Venezuela and Columbia has been received.

From: Craig Downer, Conservation Fellow
Wildlife Conservation Society



C. THE MALAYAN TAPIR, TAPIRUS INDICUS.

NO NEWS RECEIVED.

D. REPRINTS AVAILABLE.

The following reprints are available from Tapir Specialist Group Chairperson, Sharon Matola:

1. Husbandry and conservation of tapirs, Rick Barongi. The Zoological Society of London, Int. Zoo. YB 1993 32: 7-15.

2. Situacion Actual del Tapir en Mexico, Ignacio J. March Mifsut. Centro de Investigaciones Ecologicas del Sureste. Serie Monografica No. 1.

3. Bibliography for Tapiridae. Compiled by: Donald L. Janssen, DVM, and Sherri Michelet. San Diego Zoo. Nov. 1994.

4. Wildlife Survey of the Raspaculo River, Belize, Central America. Sharon Matola, December 1994. Report to the Forestry Dept., Government of Belize.

Please send US$5.00 to cover foreign postage and handlihg.

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