NOTEWORTHY RECORD OF SUBSISTENCE HUNTING AND MEAT CONSUMPTION OF JAGUARUNDI
(Puma yagouaroundi) IN COLOMBIA

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ABSTRACT
Wild felids in the Americas are generally considered as cultural icons and are respected and revered by most of the cultures. However, they are considered threatened across their ranges, mostly by habitat loss and fragmentation, and both direct and prey hunting. Small felids are usually seriously affected by retaliation hunting caused by conflicts derived from wild cats’ predation on domestic animals; however, few records exist for subsistence hunting and consumption of these species by local communities. Here we report the hunting and consumption of and adult male jaguarundi in the Cordoba department of Colombia. The animal was hunted using dogs; the carcass was prepared and was saved for later consumption during religious holidays by the entire community. This represents the first direct record of jaguarundi consumption across its range, representing an important aspect for wild felids’ conservation among rural marginalized communities across Latin America.

Key Words: Carnivora, Colombia, Córdoba, felidae, poaching, Puma yagouaroundi, South America,

Palabras clave: Cacería, Carnívora, Colombia, Córdoba, Felidae, Puma yagouaroundi, Suramérica
Despite their importance, few information regarding multiple ecological and conservation aspects of Neotropical cats exists, especially for the small species, which makes conservation decision-making especially difficult (Nowell and Jackson, 1996; Escobar and Vásquez, 2007). Across Latin America, felid species have suffered population reductions and threats caused by several factors, and most species are considered threatened either at national and/or global levels (Nowell and Jackson, 1996; Sunquist and Sunquist, 2009). The usual threats include habitat loss and fragmentation (Crooks, 2002), but probably illegal hunting, both of the felid species and their prey by local communities, plays a bigger role than normally considered (González-Maya et al., 2013a).

For small felids, hunting as reprisal for conflicts caused by predation events on domestic animals could be considered among the top threats and population loss drivers (Laudré and Hernandez, 2010; Gonzalez-Maya et al., 2013a). Additionally, hunting of these species for human consumption or other uses so far is poorly described or reported on literature mainly due to the lack of reliable data (Balague-ra-Reina and González-Maya, 2008; Gonzalez-Mayar et al., 2010; Gonzalez-Mayar et al., 2013b). For rural and indigenous communities, wildlife exploitation has been characterized primarily by the selective use of species for subsistence consumption, economic, traditional and/or religious values (Racero-Casarrubia et al., 2008); for wild felids, these uses are and had been mainly associated with hunting for fur (Di Bitteti et al., 2008) and as mentioned before, by conflict retaliation (Gonzalez-Mayar et al., 2013a; 2013b).

The jaguarundi (Puma yagouroundi) is a Neotropical small felid species distributed from United States to Paraguay and Argentina (Sunquist and Sunquist, 2002; Caso et al., 2008). Listed as Least Concern by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Caso et al., 2008), it is however considered uncommon throughout its range. Main threats over this species are also fragmentation and hunting. Despite jaguarundi pelt is usually considered to have no significant commercial value like other small spotted cats (Nowell and Jackson, 1996; De Oliveira, 1998), it is still subject to low intensity hunting for been a conspicuous predator of domestic poultry (Caso et al., 2008) and by its use for medicinal or ornamental purposes (Monroy-Vilchis et al., 2008).

Here we report an event of jaguarundi hunting for consumption occurred in April 2012 by a local community inhabiting Tutifrutí locality (8°2’36”N, 76°6’1.1”W) located in Cerro Murrucucú, Tierralta municipality, Córdoba department (province), Colombia (Figure 1). The area is located in north-western Colombia, contiguous to Paramillo National Park (Figure 1), in the Caribbean region, and has a long history of intensive land-use change for cattle and agriculture, social conflicts, marginalization and violence (Romero, 2000; Carrascal et al. 2011).

The hunting event occurred in the surroundings of a rural settlement after a poultry predation event was detected by the locals. The animal was hunted using hunt-chasing dogs and was prepared as food by indigenous people of the Embera Katios ethnic group. The individual was an adult male with brown and black coloration. The skin was prepared with a mixture of common salt and ashes and was sun-dried (Figure 1). After this, the skull was removed from the body-carcass and flesh was torn from bones. The remaining bones, tendons and other parts were feed to domestic dogs of the community. The meat was not consumed immediately, and was saved refrigerated for later consumption during Holy Thursday and Good Friday (holy week celebrated in Colombia) before Easter, considered the most important religious celebration in the country. The meat was roasted and mixed with eggs, and was shared among all members of the community during the celebrations. In Córdoba, traditionally during this celebration, the common food consumed consists of fish and wild meat, replacing meat from cattle and chicken.

This hunting and consumption event follows the same pattern reported for most wild cats in Colombia; hunting is attributed as a defence or retaliation to wild felid attacks on domestic
animals, and afterwards meat is used for consumption and skin or fur is used as ornament (Balaguera-Reina and González-Maya, 2008; Gonzalez-Maya et al., 2010; 2013b). However, this represents the first direct report on jaguarundi consumption throughout its range. Felids are considered as respected icons in most Latin American cultures, been mainly associated with power and balance (Castaño-Uribe, 2013); however, subsistence hunting and meat consumption of felids seems to be more widespread than previously considered and the assessment of the magnitude of these practices is warranted (Racero-Casarrubia et al., 2008; Gonzalez-Maya et al., 2010; 2013b).

To our knowledge, this is the first confirmed record of human consumption on jaguarundi, been recorded only its use for ornament and medicinal purposes (Monroy-Vilchis et al., 2008; González-Maya et al., 2010). It is important to highlight that, although cats are often hunted, adding a new motive should be considered when developing conservation plans (Gonzalez-Maya et al., 2010; 2013b). This is particularly important considering that species-use by communities, and in general the relationship between wildlife and culture, is an important component of conservation, so these relationships must be carefully and thoroughly stated, analysed and understood (Gonzalez-Maya et al., 2010). Although most of Colombia had suffered long processes of violence, social conflict and isolation, the Caribbean region especially had suffered of a long history of unsustainable natural resource use, severe land-use change and resource overexploitation (Meisel-Roca and Pérez, 2006; Zárrate-Charry et al., 2013). Specifically, the Cordoba department is historically and currently one of the most conflictive regions in the country, suffering from severe marginalization processes, poverty and violence (Romeo, 2000; Carrascal et al., 2011). Unprecedented events or atypical wildlife uses, especially subsistence hunting, have been previously related with scarce human living conditions or marginalization processes (Balaguera-Reina and González-Maya, 2008; González-Maya et al. 2010). It is important to consider this a representative case of marginalization, pushing towards behaviors not usually considered among cultures’ vision or costumes. Little is known about P. yagouaroundi in general (Monroy-Vilchis et al., 2011), and its conservation status along with its ecology, abundance and distribution is still poorly understood. This new confirmed record of consumption should be taken into account.
when establishing the conservation status or for designing conservation strategies for the species, even more in light of been considered as uncommon and potentially threatened in the near future.

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**Literature cited**


