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En

PREVIOUS LETTERS

Wildcat Protection Group Works with Communities

Posted: Friday, September 24, 2010 - By Devin Chambers

Dear Tico Times:

I live on the Osa Peninsula and love to help with conservation efforts here. One lesser-known group that my family supports is Yaguará. Yaguará is a nonprofit organization that works to protect the wildcats of Costa Rica and their prey.

They are small at the moment, but have developed the most extensive camera trapping project in the world so far. They set these cameras up on private properties with permission from owners – there was actually one nearby our property – and in national parks. In fact, they have gotten the first jaguar photograph from within Piedras Blancas National Park. This photo can be seen on their website: <http://www.yaguara.org>.

Being local, Yaguará understands that wildcats do occasionally attack and kill livestock. If the organization's members are able to inspect the carcass and determine that it was indeed killed by a wildcat, they'll offer to pay for the killed animal as long as the farmer agrees to not hunt the wildcat. Similarly, the organization has also teamed up with poachers to find wildcats as long as the poachers don't harm the animals. To pay poachers, Yaguará sells T-shirts on their website and accepts donations.

The importance of the animals is taught at schools and to any locals who'll listen. Usually, the organization members' eagerness and love for what they do is infectious and many people offer to help by allowing the camera traps on their property, reporting any possible wildcats, or even helping put up the traps. The young students help out in their ways, too; sometimes they'll write about stopping hunting on the Osa or help by simply spreading the word.

Connecting to the locals to express the urgency of protecting these animals has been a priority for Yaguará since the beginning. This had led them to give more than 450 presentations in different communities around the Osa in hopes of involving everyone in the conservation effort.

I spoke to Aida Bustamante – the group's founder – about spreading the word to people outside the local communities and she told me that she'd tried to, but news stations wanted videos and something more graphic than any of the camera traps provided. Despite this, many of the pictures they've taken are wonderful and fascinating. Many of the best ones are up on the website for anyone who's curious. The photos help the team identify different cats by their personal markings and help the team track the animals through their territories.

They do, however, hope to put radio collars on the cats to track their territories and help in understanding their needs. This would lead to a better understanding of their habits and a better effort in helping their dwindling numbers.

In closing, I would urge readers at least to check out their website to find out what you can do to help.

Devin Chambers

Osa Peninsula

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