

OPERATION JAGUAR

FINAL REPORT

MARCH 2023



Photo: Carlos Navarro

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Photo: Patrick Meier



Photo: Britta Jaschinski

ACRONYMS

ACI - Airports Council International

ACT - Amazon Conservation Team

CCPCJ - UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

CIB - Confidential Intelligence Brief

CITES - Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

DEFRA - Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DGBAP - Directorate for Biodiversity and Protected Areas (Bolivia)

ELI - Earth League International

GWCMC - Guyana Wildlife Conservation and Management Commission

IFAW - International Fund for Animal Welfare

INTERPOL - International Criminal Police Organisation

IUCN - International Union for the Conservation of Nature

IWT - Illegal Wildlife Trade

NEOWILD - Institute for Neotropical Wildlife & Environmental Studies (Suriname)

NGO - Non- Governmental Organization

NICFI - Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative

NVWA - Nederlandse Voedsel en Waren Autoriteit / The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product

POFOMA - Policía Forestal de Preservación del Medio Ambiente / Forest Police (Bolivia)

SAVIA - Association for the Conservation of the Biodiversity and Sustainable Development (Bolivia)

TRAFFIC - Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network

UfW - United for Wildlife

UNODC - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

WWF - World Wildlife Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 2019 till 2022 IUCN NL implemented 'Operation Jaguar' with funding from the Dutch Postcode Lottery. The aim of the program was to tackle jaguar trafficking in Bolivia, Guyana and Suriname following 4 strategy lines:

- Generate a more systematic understanding of the extent, dynamics and structure of illegal jaguar trade.
- Improve the prevention of poaching and illegal wildlife trade in jaguar habitats.
- Professionalize the capacity to combat wildlife trafficking in key enforcement and judicial agencies.
- Elevate the priority given to wildlife trafficking by government and public.

We can proudly say that that we have been successful in achieving all the objectives of the strategy lines.

75 Persons of Interest, involved in jaguar trafficking, have been identified. They form sophisticated, well-organized networks that are part of or linked to Chinese mafia groups that are driving the procurement and the trafficking of jaguar parts.

We've shown key stakeholders the convergence between the trafficking of jaguar parts, the illegal trade in other commodities and illegal activities like money laundering, human trafficking or collaboration with drug traffickers.

The publication of our report on the criminal networks behind jaguar trade in Bolivia lead to media coverage all over the world, including in Chinese media, and it lead to the arrest of five jaguar traffickers in Bolivia. We presented the outcomes of our investigations to the Bolivian Government, INTERPOL, UNODC, the Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and the CITES Secretariat.

In Bolivia, the Bolivian Jaguar Alliance (Red Alianza Jaguar) was formed, with nine core organizations. The alliance is seen as a trusted partner by the government and it facilitates communication, coordination and information exchange processes between all parties working on jaguar conservation and -trafficking. Our partner SAVIA plays a leading role in this group.

Seven intensive trainings for capacity building and awareness raising were given for law enforcement and the judiciary in Peru, Guyana, Bolivia and Suriname.

The film 'Tigre Gente', which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York was acquired by National Geographic Channel film for distribution in Latin America, where it will premiere on April 22 2023 as part of the channel's Earth Day line-up.

Until a few years ago people automatically thought of Africa (elephants and rhinos) and Asia (tiger) when thinking about poaching and trafficking of wildlife. Latin America was always overlooked in discussions on Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT), despite the region being home to a number of species seriously threatened by illegal trafficking.

After 4 years of 'Operation Jaguar', **jaguar trafficking is now clearly on the agenda on a national -, regional – and global level.** It is taken much more seriously because of the damaging impact on jaguar populations but also because of the convergence with other crimes. This momentum needs to be taken advantage of to take the next steps.

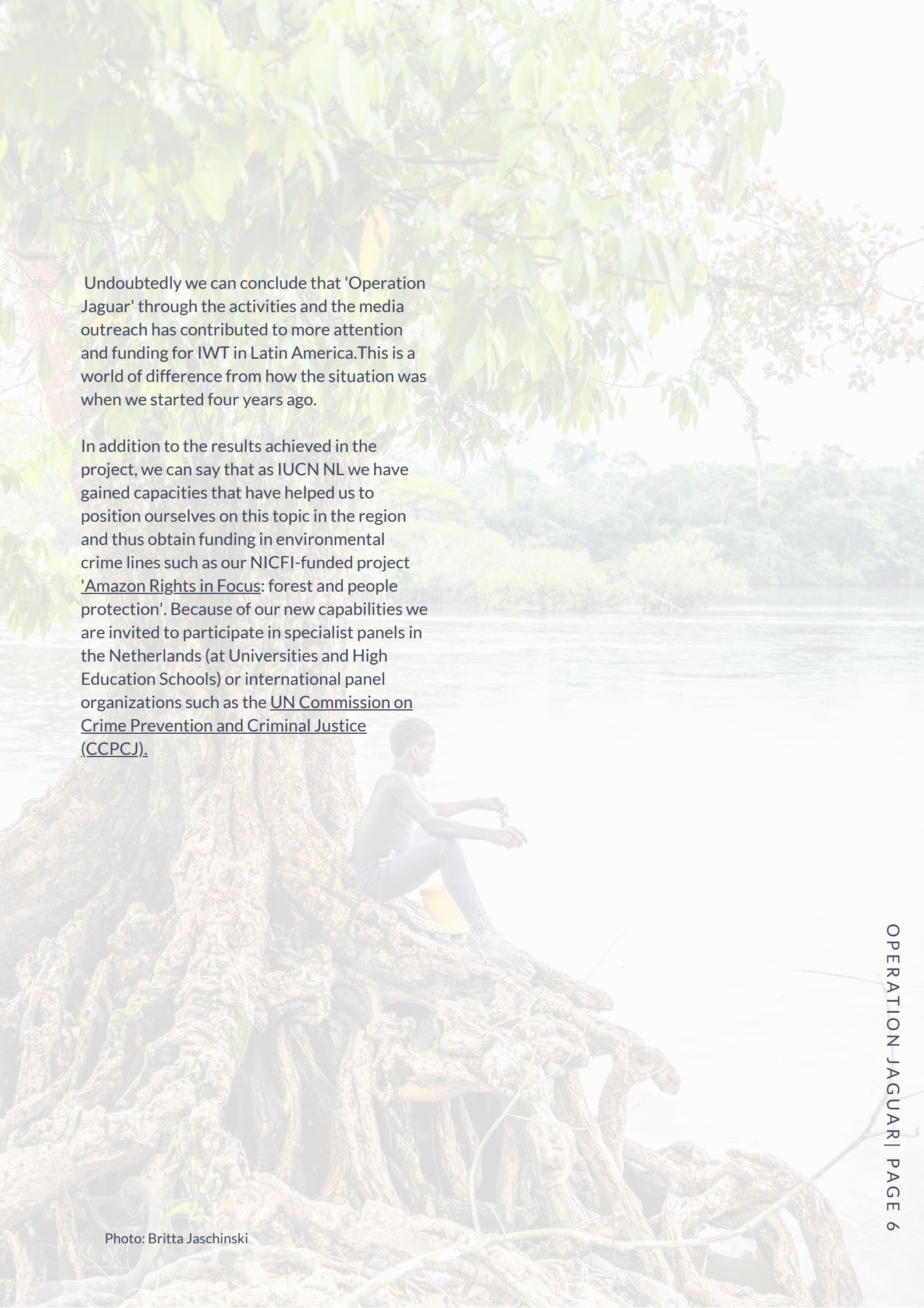
The investigations in the structures and modus operandi of the networks showed a strong convergence between the trafficking of jaguars and other serious crimes. Given the convergence between environmental crimes, we should **promote information sharing and collaboration with neighboring countries to improve coordination between governments and international bodies working on combating other illegal networks active in illegal mining, narcotics, human trafficking, document forgery, and money laundering among others.** This also requires bringing together multidisciplinary expertise.

More and better technical support should be provided to governments (through the training of law enforcement agencies and sensitization of prosecution and judiciary services) considering the rise of environmental crime and its convergence with other crimes.

To tackle the illegal wildlife trade, **we must realize the importance of engaging Chinese stakeholders in the countries we work,** like the embassies, corporates and Chinese migrant communities. Lack of understanding of these stakeholders is a huge challenge for NGOs wanting to influence them so to prevent ethnic tensions it is very important to **start talking with them instead of about them.**

Jaguars play a vital role in many indigenous cosmologies. Current efforts to protect the species are predominantly based on Western perceptions and scientifically rooted management approaches. Conservation organizations have often overlooked and failed to acknowledge the importance of local and indigenous views and knowledge of jaguars. This is hugely significant since 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity is in the territories of indigenous and local communities. **We are for this purpose engaging with other disciplines and hope so to help reconnect local people to the species to successfully protect it and enrich the conservation strategies of different conservation organizations.**

The development of Jaguar National Action Plans has been an important process in all the range countries, to **build consensus among the different stakeholders on the priorities and actions needed to protect the jaguar.** This ensures that the trafficking of these species is an integral part of national conservation plans and is not just the task of the police and the judiciary.

A young boy is sitting on a large, gnarled tree root that extends into a body of water. He is shirtless and wearing blue pants, and is holding a small object in his hands. The background shows a dense tropical forest with green foliage and a river or lake. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Undoubtedly we can conclude that 'Operation Jaguar' through the activities and the media outreach has contributed to more attention and funding for IWT in Latin America. This is a world of difference from how the situation was when we started four years ago.

In addition to the results achieved in the project, we can say that as IUCN NL we have gained capacities that have helped us to position ourselves on this topic in the region and thus obtain funding in environmental crime lines such as our NICFI-funded project 'Amazon Rights in Focus: forest and people protection'. Because of our new capabilities we are invited to participate in specialist panels in the Netherlands (at Universities and High Education Schools) or international panel organizations such as the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ).

INTRODUCTION

THE JAGUAR

The Jaguar, *Panthera onca*, is the largest feline in South America and the third in size and weight in the world. The jaguar has the strongest bite of any big cat relative to its size, equal to that of the largest felines in Africa and Asia. Its jaw is relatively large for the size of its skull. This makes its fangs easily tradeable as if they were from a tiger. This is one reason why in recent years people from Asian countries in particular, attribute power and vitality to its teeth, claws, bones, whiskers and testicles. These are either consumed or used as talismans and jewelry as a symbol of higher power. This has encouraged hunting, trafficking and trade of the species.

The jaguar is a charismatic, almost mystical animal for many indigenous cultures, having been deified by the great pre-Hispanic cultures of Mesoamerica and South America. It is an emblematic species; in conservation science, it is considered a "flagship" or "umbrella" species. Its role in tropical and subtropical ecosystems is fundamental, as a regulator controlling the densities of species, contributing to the dynamics and functional balance of ecosystems.

Economically, it has great value for ecotourism. For many, the mere fact of observing the majestic animal and photographing its enormous footprints is hugely rewarding.



Photo: Jamen Percy Getty Images



Photo: Tom Brakefield Photo Images



Photo: Michel Viard Getty Images

THREATS

In the 50s to 70s of the last century, the wildlife of South America was devastated by a systematic process of unrestricted hunting of wildlife for the fur - , skin - or live animal trade. This pressure, which lasted for many years, caused large depletions of wildlife and felines in particular, and the process of recovery of their populations was slow and difficult. Between 1975 and 1985, CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species) restrictions and international pressures slowly gained more strength in the world, resulting in a decrease in the global trade.

The South American continent is developing rapidly. In the next ten years, \$250 billion will enter the continent from (Asian) investors for infrastructure building, extractive projects, mining and dams.

This development causes changes in land use, the loss and/or fragmentation of jaguars' habitat and a reduction in prey species. For a top-level predator, requiring large expansions of natural ecosystems, these developments are putting the species at greater risk.

The new infrastructure also opens up natural areas that were previously isolated from the civilized world. As a result, jaguar habitat is exposed to poaching and the risk of conflicts between jaguars and rural communities and cattle ranchers living near or in the jaguars' habitat is increasing. In many of these areas, people have lived with jaguars over generations, but the knowledge of "how" to coexist without conflict is being lost generation after generation. As a result, their first impulse is often to take up arms for fear that the jaguars will kill their cattle or their dogs. In such conflicts, the jaguar always loses.



Photo: Jean-Pierre Veira



Photo: Britta Jaschinski

Since ancient times, people have believed that products derived from certain animal species have medicinal value. For example, in Asia tiger bones have always been a favorite to cure all sorts of illnesses, from malaria to arthritis. However, tigers are in danger of extinction and the situation is so serious that it is almost impossible to obtain products from this animal. The Asian black market has focused on an alternative: lion bones are used, but also body parts of the jaguar. The fangs of this animal, commonly called "American Tiger" in Asian countries, are difficult to differentiate from those of a tiger. In addition to that, the jaguar is also traded for its meat, bones, skin, penis and testicles.

Now, as a result of booming infrastructure projects, larger Asian communities are appearing in South America and the trade in jaguar teeth, paws and skulls are rising too. Traders use existing criminal networks and the same smuggling routes they use to trade drugs, gold, and timber. This phenomenon is called 'convergence' and is the latest new perspective on green crime. This implies that traditional law-enforcement approaches focused on isolated illegal networks or products are no longer appropriate for understanding and dealing with the increasing complexities of organized crime.

CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge in the Operation Jaguar program was the lack of priority that governments show for illegal wildlife crime in general and the jaguar trade specifically. This leads to allocating very limited resources for the protection of jaguars and their habitat.

Very often protection of the jaguar habitat happens only because of the tenacious work of the park ranger corps. Thanks to this dedication, the Madidi National Park rangers, for example, were able to carry out effective control actions and even seizures in the case of Chinese traffickers operating in the region. The testimony of a park guard is depressing:

"To guard 40,000 hectares between the Pilón Lajas Protected Area and Madidi, today we work with 12 park guards. IN 1997 there were 25 of us, but they have been deserting. We can't ask much from those who at best earn 1,800 Bolivianos per month (usd 300) and sporadically receive equipment and supplies."

~ Park guard Madidi National Park

HOW DID WE COMBAT JAGUAR TRAFFICKING WITH OPERATION JAGUAR?



1

We generated a more systematic understanding of the extent, dynamics and structure of illegal jaguar trade.



2

We improved the prevention of poaching and illegal wildlife trade in jaguar habitats.



3

We professionalized the capacity to combat wildlife trafficking in key enforcement and judicial agencies.



4

We elevated the priority given to wildlife trafficking by the government and the public.

[Read more in the chapter on interventions.](#)

With a value of between \$7 billion and \$23 billion each year, illegal wildlife trade is the fourth most lucrative global crime after drugs trade, human trafficking and arms trafficking. Most consider IWT a conservation issue, thus ignoring the fact that it is ruled by transnational criminal organizations, which use the proceeds to finance their criminal activities. Research has shown that there is clear convergence between IWT and other crimes such as drug trafficking[2]. In our reports the link between jaguar trafficking and other crimes, was clearly shown.

Many prosecutors and judges are not aware of - and are not sensitized to the basic aspects related to wildlife trafficking and the protection of endangered species. For many judges and prosecutors, the hunting of a jaguar or other wild animal does not constitute a crime per se or at least is not punishable by imprisonment.

"During the workshop, the Judiciary in attendance expressed that they were not familiar with the Guyana Wildlife Act of 2016. The Judiciary were honest and clear that they have never touched the new Wildlife Act (hard copy) before"
– IFAW report on capacity building workshops in Guyana

For the implementation of the project, COVID-19 was a huge obstacle. It seriously restricted movement and interaction in the field and forced the trainers to implement capacity-building activities online instead of face-to-face. In all virtual training, there was active participation from most of the participants; however, in hindsight, it became apparent that there are more benefits of holding training in person due to the immediate greater face-to-face interaction and more opportunities for hands-on experiences.

[2]
https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2017/FINAL_-_UNODC_APG_Wildlife_Crime_report.pdf

In addition, 2019 activities in Bolivia were paralyzed in most of the territory. Especially in the cities and departments of La Paz and Santa Cruz, due to two situations: 1) the large fires in the Chiquitania, which paralyzed the region between July and October 2019, 2) the serious social conflict after the general elections of 2019 (October), which culminated in the overthrow of the government of Evo Morales.

Similarly to Bolivia, in addition to the impacts of the COVID-19 situation in Guyana, the political situation (after the presidential elections that took place on 2 March 2020) contributed to a climate of uncertainty as the incumbents refused to accept a recount of the election that they lost. The political impasse directly affected the Guyana Wildlife Conservation and Management Commission (GWCMC) as they were operating without a budget throughout much of 2020.

The influence of China is very strong in many countries in Latin America and is said to obstruct efficient tackling of the involvement of Chinese citizens in the matter. In Bolivia, the General Directorate of Biodiversity and Protected Areas (DGBAP) has collaborated with prosecutors and judges to investigate cases of jaguar trafficking but has not made a public statement on the existence of an illegal trafficking network of Chinese origin. Activists, based on statements made by the DGBAP itself, have argued that the Bolivian Government is trying to prevent the issue from provoking diplomatic friction with China.


Despite all challenges, we are proud of our partners' achievements. This report is therefore both an overview of activities and outcomes over the past years and also tribute to all the committed teams active in Operation Jaguar, who have delivered impressive results under particularly difficult circumstances.

OPERATION JAGUAR IN A NUTSHELL



OUR PARTNERS



 [Watch the Operation Jaguar wrap-up video to see the project highlights](#)

OUR KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:



75 Persons of Interest, involved in jaguar trafficking, have been identified. They form sophisticated, well-organized networks that are part of or linked to Chinese mafia groups that are driving the procurement and the trafficking of jaguar parts. Standing orders are placed to supply jaguars and their parts to middlemen in for example Santa Cruz (Bolivia), Lima (Peru), and Paramaribo (Suriname).

We've shown key stakeholders the **convergence** between the trafficking of jaguar parts, the illegal trade in other commodities and illegal activities like money laundering, human trafficking or collaboration with drug traffickers.



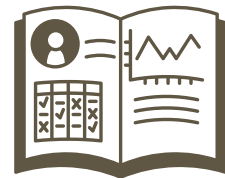
Jaguar trafficking is now clearly on the agenda on a national - , regional - and global level, Much **more attention** is now given to national species action plans and strategies to tackle wildlife trafficking.

The formation of the **Bolivian Jaguar Alliance** (Red Alianza Jaguar) with nine core organizations. The alliance is seen as a trusted partner by the government and it facilitates communication, coordination and information exchange processes between all parties working on jaguar conservation and - trafficking. Our partner SAVIA plays a leading role in this group.



Seven intensive trainings for capacity building and awareness raising for law enforcement and the judiciary in Peru, Guyana, Bolivia and Suriname.

The publication of our **report** on the criminal networks behind jaguar trade in Bolivia lead to **media coverage all over the world**, including in Chinese media, and it lead to the arrest of five jaguar traffickers in Bolivia. We presented the outcomes of our investigations to the Bolivian Government, INTERPOL, UNODC, the Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and the CITES Secretariat.



We found that **The Netherlands (Schiphol)** plays an important role as destination country and as a transit hub for illegally harvested animal products.

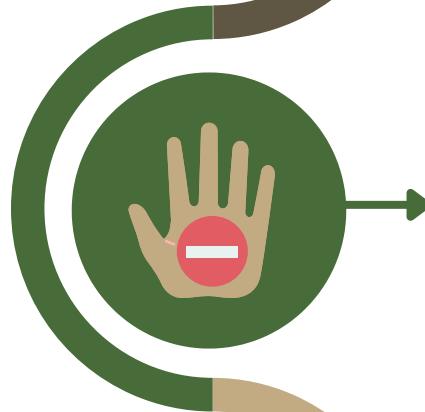
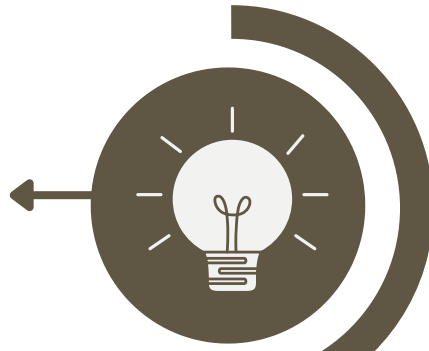
“THE CITES SECRETARIAT IS GRATEFUL FOR THE WORK OF THE IUCN NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE NETHERLANDS REGARDING ILLEGAL TRADE IN JAGUARS. IUCN NL’S REPORT ON JAGUAR TRAFFICKING IN BOLIVIA HAS INFORMED THE SECRETARIAT’S STUDY ON ILLEGAL TRADE IN JAGUARS, PURSUANT TO DECISION 18.251, AND THE INTELLIGENCE CONTAINED IN THE REPORT WILL BE FED INTO THE APPROPRIATE CHANNELS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT.”

**CITES SECRETARY-GENERAL,
MS. IVONNE HIGUERO**

HOW DID WE COMBAT JAGUAR TRAFFICKING WITH OPERATION JAGUAR?

INTERVENTION 1

1 We generated a more systematic understanding of the extent, dynamics and structure of illegal jaguar trade.



INTERVENTION 2

2 We improved the prevention of poaching and illegal wildlife trade in jaguar habitats.

INTERVENTION 3

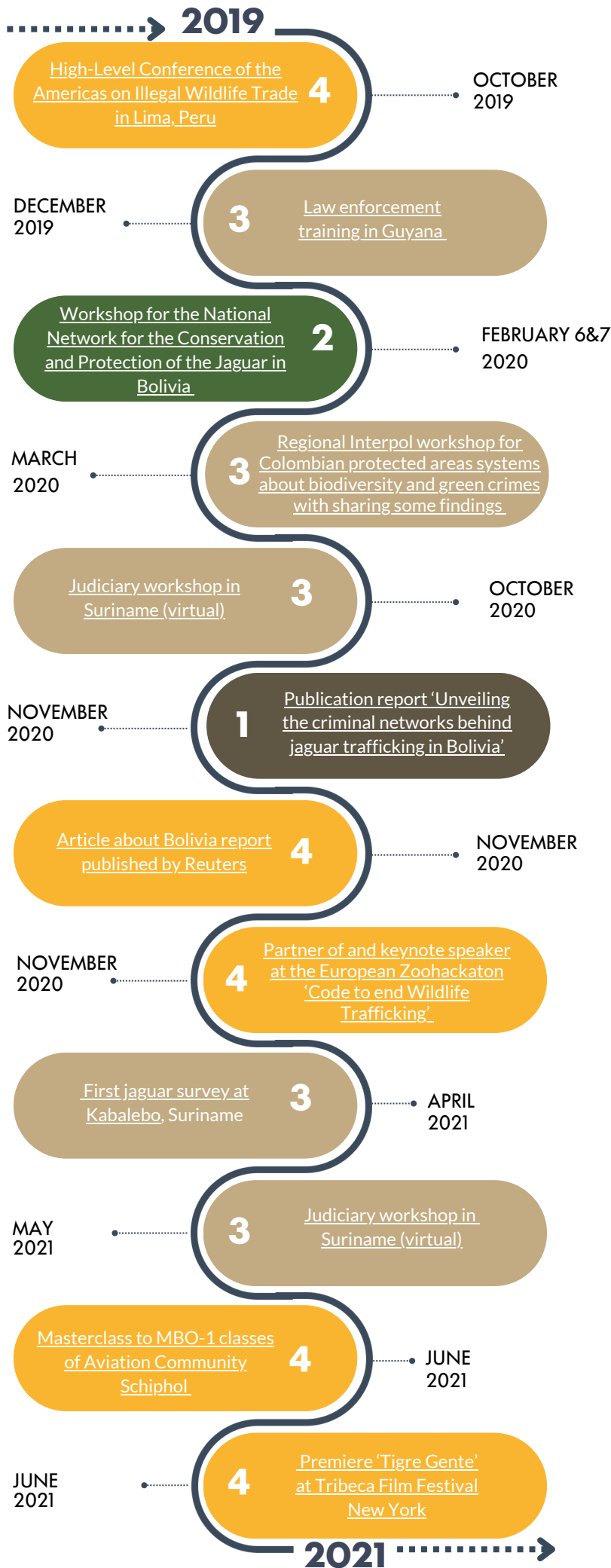
3 We professionalized the capacity to combat wildlife trafficking in key enforcement and judicial agencies.



INTERVENTION 4

4 We elevated the priority given to wildlife trafficking by government and public.

MILESTONES



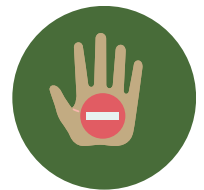
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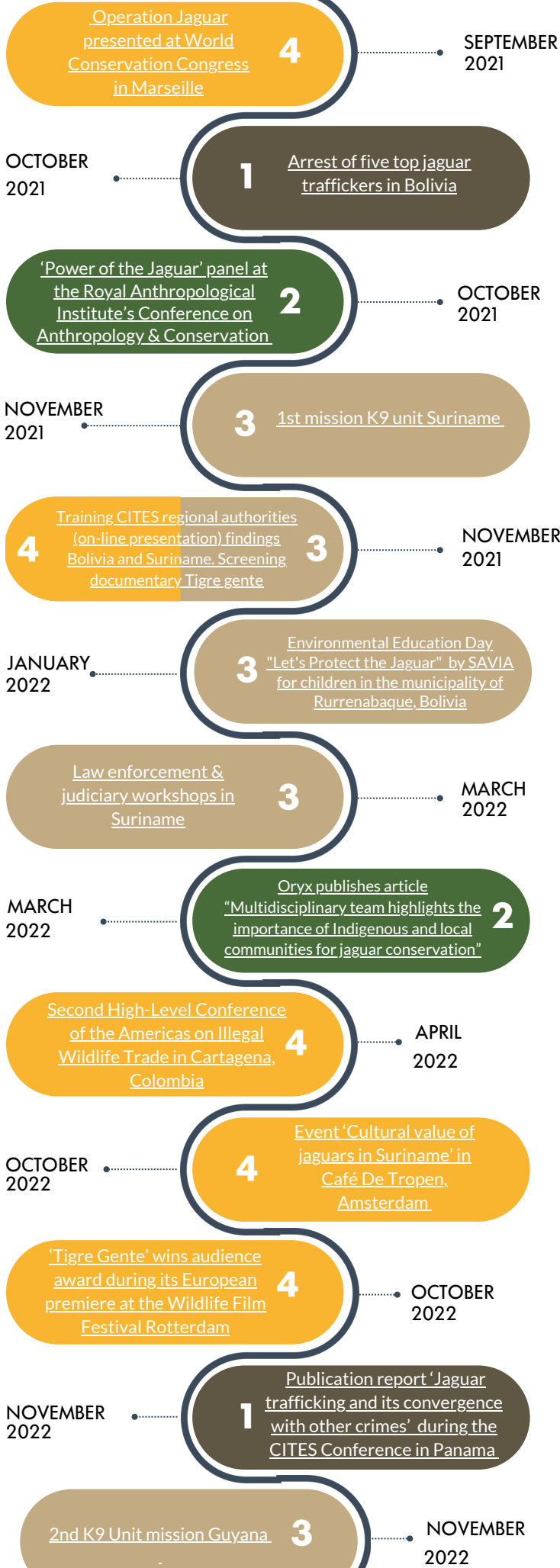


INTERVENTION 4

We elevated the priority given to wildlife trafficking by government and public.



.....>2021



2022

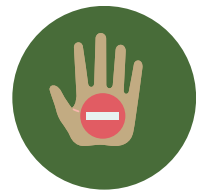
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THE INTERVENTIONS



1 GENERATE A MORE SYSTEMATIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE EXTENT, DYNAMICS AND STRUCTURE OF ILLEGAL TRADE

We can only do something about illegal wildlife trade and poaching if we know where, when, how and by whom illegal trade and poaching take place.

To tackle jaguar trafficking, more information on the trade's scale, nature and dynamics is needed. Therefore, as part of Operation Jaguar, Earth League International (ELI) conducted research investigations on jaguar trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean. Through its intelligence-gathering operations, ELI researched the illegal wildlife supply chain to help unveil the dynamics regarding jaguar trafficking in the region and identify the main players, trafficking routes, and destinations. Some of those destinations are national and regional markets in South America. Other destinations are international, such as Asia.

REPORT ON JAGUAR TRAFFICKING IN BOLIVIA

In 2020 we published [a report focusing on Bolivia that unveiled the traffickers' modus operandi and transport methods, routes and geographical hotspots](#). The traffickers identified have solid transnational networks that allow them to smuggle without major issues jaguar parts as well as every sort of illegal goods from South America to China. The goods are generally transported by plane, with individuals carrying them into pieces of luggage or on their bodies.

"The report offers valuable insights into the modus operandi of transnational criminal networks involved in jaguar trafficking in Bolivia, and how the illegal wildlife trade converges with other crimes such as drug trafficking and money laundering. It provides solid evidence on a phenomenon that is not yet fully understood and highlights the importance of prioritizing wildlife crime and treating it a serious transnational organized crime. Reports like this help inform us as to the pressing challenges and to guide UNODC's support to Member States".

~ Jorge Eduardo Rios. Chief, Regional Section for Latin America and the Caribbean

at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

We offered the report exclusively to Reuters, resulting in a [Reuters article](#) that was picked up by dozens of media outlets all over the world, including [South China Morning Post](#), [Breitbart](#), [ABC News Australia](#) and [Nieuwsblad \(BE\)](#). As a result of the publication of this report, in 2021, Bolivian authorities proceeded to [arrest five of South America's top jaguar traffickers](#).

REPORT ON JAGUAR TRAFFICKING IN SURINAME

Research in Suriname showed that jaguar parts are sourced mostly from south Suriname region, at border with Brazil and in proximity of gold mines. Some sources also reported sourcing happening in west Suriname. Jaguar bone wine is exported to Europe, as the demand from Chinese residing there is quite high. The Netherlands is one of the main destinations. Chinese Dutch living in the Netherlands are the buyers.

We found that transport of prohibited jaguar products from Suriname to China happens using loopholes of the system and through the Netherlands and, less often, the USA. Criminal networks operating in Suriname (and Guyana) also conduct other serious crimes such as human smuggling, money laundering and human trafficking.

The findings on convergence in Suriname were fed into a larger report published in 2022. This publication "[the criminal networks behind jaguar trafficking](#)" was shared during the 19th Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Panama in November 2022. The report includes regional case studies of top transnational jaguar trafficking networks identified through investigative work. It also highlights jaguar trafficking's convergence, or overlap, with other serious crimes, such as drug smuggling, human trafficking, gold trafficking or money laundering.

CITES invited IUCN NL to submit all relevant information as input to a CITES study on illegal trade in jaguars and asked us to present the Bolivia report to the CITES authorities of all jaguar range states. The Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission forwarded our report and an accompanying letter to the Chinese President of IUCN, Mr Zhang Xinsheng. He forwarded the report to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, responsible for tackling the issue in China.



Photo: Britta Jaschinski

Jaguars play vital cultural and ecological roles throughout Latin America, but have a price on their head due to a rising demand for their parts in Asia. This report shines a light on the fate of the jaguar that has been under the radar for too long. We have to act to prevent the disappearance of the majestic jaguar from our forests and wetlands.

~ **Jon Paul Rodríguez. Chair, IUCN Species Survival Commission Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Investigations and Provita Caracas, Venezuela**

IMPORTANT FINDINGS

- Sophisticated, well-organized networks are driving the procurement and trafficking of jaguar parts. The persons identified by ELI have solid transnational networks that allow them to smuggle without major issues jaguar parts as well as every sort of illegal goods from South America to China. The goods are generally transported by plane, with individuals carrying them into pieces of luggage or on their bodies.
- Schiphol airport is an important hub for shipping jaguar parts from Suriname to China. One Person of Interest stated *“Amsterdam airport is not like USA as all checked luggage for transfer passengers will go from one plane to the next directly in the airport without going through X-ray machines like in the USA. So, Amsterdam is lax as we can hide the illegal stuff like teeth in the checked luggage and they will surely pass as well in Amsterdam on our way to China.”*
- The domestic jaguar trade is an integrated feature of transnational organized crime, as transboundary criminal networks have diversified their activities to include wildlife crime. The persons identified by ELI have such networks, which they use for a variety of criminal activities, such as human trafficking, narcotics trafficking, and money laundering, as well as for the trafficking of wildlife products, including jaguar body parts, dried seahorses, shark fins and other illegal goods from South America to China.
- ELI’s team was shown hundreds of jaguar teeth for sale. Sellers do not carry a lot of goods with them, but invited team members to following meetings in which they would eventually bring some of the merchandise.

THE ILLEGAL SUPPLY CHAIN OF JAGUAR PARTS

ELI's crime maps shows the social networks of key jaguar traffickers

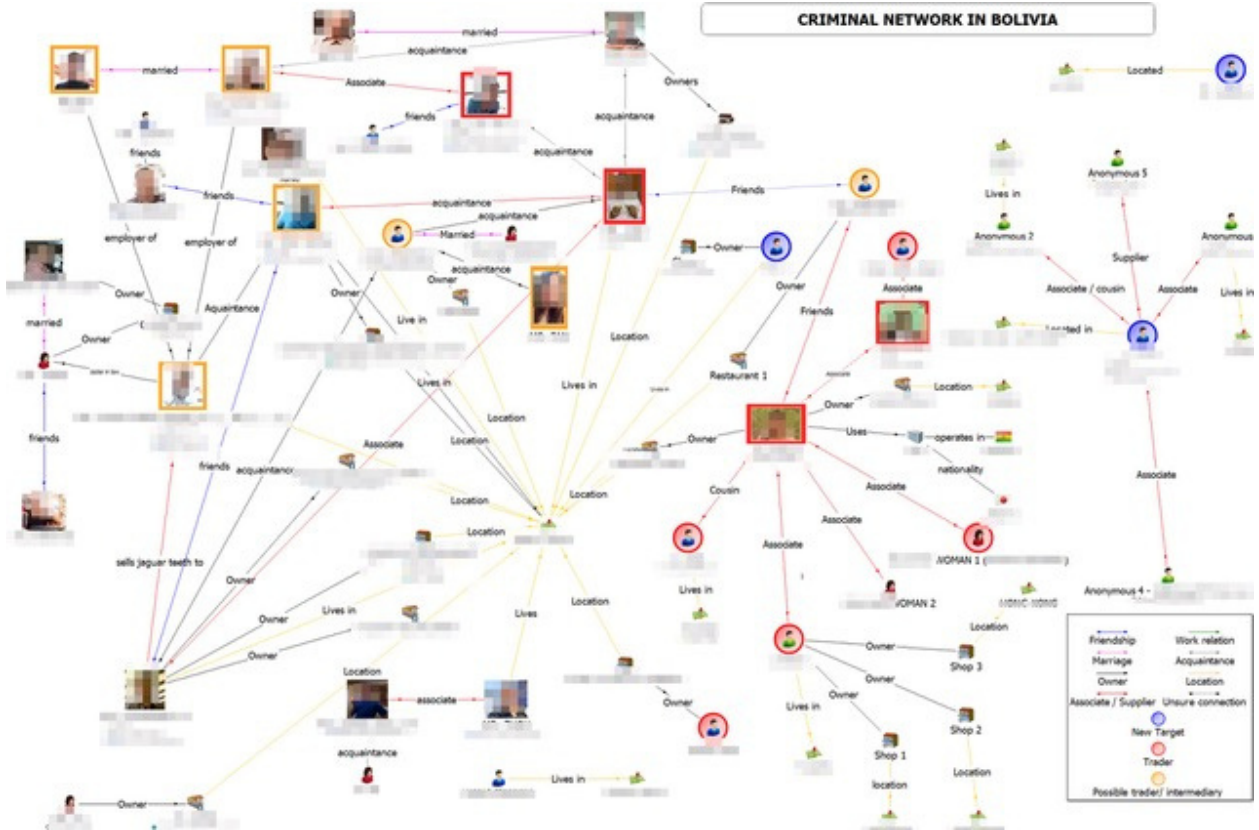


Photo: ELI



Photo: ELI



Photo: ELI



Photo: ELI



Photo: Britta Jaschinski



Photo: ELI



IMPROVE THE PREVENTION OF POACHING AND ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE IN JAGUAR HABITATS

IWT can only be tackled with the active participation of the local communities in or near the areas where the jaguar lives.

To achieve more peaceful coexistence we have to reduce conflicts and take away the triggers for jaguar killings. Managing this problem requires a combination of effectively addressing the concerns of cattle ranchers and meantime improve the perception of jaguars. Since more than half of world's biodiversity lies in indigenous territories, it is crucial to consult and integrate local Indigenous Peoples' narratives and ecological knowledge to successfully protect ecosystems and cultural diversity. Operation Jaguar acknowledges and understands the key role local communities and organizations play in combatting wildlife trafficking.

NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE JAGUAR (BOLIVIA)

SAVIA played a leading role in the workshop for the creation of the National Network for the Conservation and Protection of the Jaguar that was held on February 6 and 7, 2020, in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. The workshop was organized by the Ministry of the Environment and Water (MMAyA) through the DGBAP (Directorate for Biodiversity and Protected Areas), IUCN NL and SAVIA. 27 institutions participated in this event: national and departmental authorities, management authorities of 5 national protected areas, knowledge institutes, eight NGOs that work on jaguar conservation and five international institutions such as UNODC, the American Embassy and the World Bank.

One of the fundamental results of the workshop was the formation of the National Alliance for the Protection of the Jaguar (Red Alianza Jaguar) with nine core organizations. SAVIA plays a leading role as the chair of this platform.

WORKING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN BOLIVIA

SAVIA worked with local communities and the committees that manage protected areas to inform them about the role of the jaguar in ecosystems and culture, the threats it is facing and how to prevent poaching and trafficking of its parts.

A specialized training course on Jaguar Conservation for Park Rangers of the protected areas was held between 24 and 26 May 2021, in the city of Santa Cruz. Twenty-seven park rangers from four national protected areas participated in the course.

In August 2021, a training course was held for technical personnel from various regional institutions and park rangers from protected areas (a total of more than 70 officials).

SAVIA actively participated in the San Ignacio de Velasco Fair, in order to disseminate key information about the jaguar and raise awareness about the importance of its conservation among more than 500 people, including children, young people and adults from the region of influence of Noel Kempff Mercado NP.

An Environmental Education Day "Let's Protect the Jaguar" was organized on January 14 and 15 2022 at the Rurrenabaque City Hall. The main objective was to raise awareness among young people and children about the importance of conserving and protecting the jaguar and biodiversity in the municipality of Rurrenabaque. More than 40 children and young people between the ages of 5 and 13 from the municipality of Rurrenabaque were trained. A large number of young people (women and men) were trained in manual skills for making 3D masks of representative fauna.

SAVIA worked closely with the DGBAP to stimulate and revitalize the production of two very relevant products for Operation Jaguar: the 'Action Plan for the Conservation of the Jaguar 2020-2025' and the 'Plurinational Program against Illegal Trafficking of Wildlife'. Both documents provide leverage and guidance for the government to step up and act. Furthermore, SAVIA produced training and awareness-raising materials, including a book about jaguars for the Bolivian public with basic information about the habitat, diet and personality of this animal and booklets for rangers and communities living in jaguar habitats.

AWARENESS RAISING IN GUYANA

IFAW supported a pilot project to raise awareness for human-jaguar conflict in Guyana to help reduce the killing of jaguars associated with conflict situations during the first half of 2022.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES IN VENEZUELA

In Venezuela, we supported the work of Proyecto Sebraba, led by jaguar researcher and Future for Nature Award winner Maria Fernanda Puerto Carillo. She organized awareness-raising events on Jaguar day and worked with communities about their perception of jaguars to define ways to prevent conflicts.



RESEARCHING JAGUAR POPULATIONS IN SURINAME

In Suriname, IUCN NL worked with jaguar researcher Vanessa Kadosoe from Neowild (Institute for Neotropical Wildlife & Environmental Studies). In 2012, Neowild started its long-term study at Brownsberg Nature Park, an area with high human disturbance. Under Operation Jaguar they have implemented a study into the ecology of jaguars in an area that is almost pristine, Kabalebo, with no human disturbance. This will be the first study on jaguar ecology in a pristine area, and the results of this study are expected to prove the value of a pristine habitat with minimal human disturbance. Thanks to their talk at our event on the cultural value of jaguars in Suriname, Neowild received a 5-year funding for their trapcam research.

Furthermore, a camera trapping project in the Matawai area in Suriname was developed to study the influences of a new road that was opened in 2017 on large wildlife species. 24 camera traps were placed and 14 local collaborators were trained by Neowild in the aspects of data collection and species' monitoring systems. The newly gained knowledge will form the basis for the Amazon Conservation Team (ACT) Rangers program that will be duplicated to other work areas of ACT. Data will be shared with the National Jaguar Working Group Suriname and fed into the national jaguar monitoring database.

POWER OF THE JAGUAR

In October 2021, experts and partners of Operation Jaguar spoke about the importance of including local and indigenous views on jaguar conservation at a major interdisciplinary conference on anthropology and conservation hosted virtually by the Royal Anthropological Institute. The prestigious scientific magazine ORYX published this event in its March 2022 edition.

"The collaboration between Neowild and ACT in the field was outstanding. We learned a lot from each other and like to extend our collaboration in other parts of this country. During the project we noticed that there are still a lot of jaguars and puma's near the villages, this could be a positive sign that the wildlife in the ecosystems is stable and probably a significant part of the forest health is in place."

~ Carlo Koorndijk, ACT Suriname



Photo: Britta Jaschinski



Photo: Britta Jaschinski



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PROFESSIONALISE CAPACITY TO COMBAT WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING IN KEY ENFORCEMENT AND JUDICIAL AGENCIES

To tackle crime, we must invest in strengthening the Latin American law enforcement apparatus, from the ranger who finds the traces of poachers, to the customs officer who seizes the teeth and the judge who punishes the kingpin.

Operation Jaguar worked with law enforcement officers, customs agents, public prosecutors and judges across Bolivia, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname to improve their capacities to better detect, investigate and prosecute wildlife crime. Based on structured needs assessments, IFAW organized tailor-made training workshops in each country, where participants learned how to identify common species traded in the region, check if wildlife trading permits are legitimate, detect smuggled wildlife, and uphold protocols for the management and welfare of seized animals. The training also covered critical skills such as investigative strategies and evidence collection and interviewing and working with witnesses.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND JUDICIARY TRAININGS IN GUYANA

In December 2019, IFAW co-hosted its first law enforcement training in Guyana. Led by the GWCMC, the team held a five-day training in which 26 participants were taught a wide range of wildlife crime prevention techniques to help improve the baseline level of law enforcement capacity, raise awareness, and spark interest among law enforcement agencies to carry out efficient wildlife crimes investigations.

The training included information on how to identify common species traded in the region, check if wildlife trading permits are legitimate, detect smuggled wildlife, and uphold protocols for the management and welfare of seized animals. Participants also learned to collaborate and support each other across agencies and jurisdictions – a key component in disrupting wildlife crime.

Seven agencies participated in the training, including the Guyana Police Force (GPF), Guyana Defense Force (GDF), Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA), Corps of Wardens – Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), Cheddi Jagan International Airport – Training Personnel (CJIA), Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU), and GWCMC.

"I am very grateful for all the training received and will use this knowledge to better enforce the wildlife act thus making Guyana a better place for future generations."

~participant from GWCMC

In October 2020, a virtual judiciary workshop took place. In coordination with the GWCMC, the two-day virtual workshop provided 16 selected prosecutors and magistrates with the knowledge and training materials that investigators and legal professionals need to tackle crimes against jaguars and other wildlife. The trainer for this workshop was Kathleen O'Leary, an incredibly experienced prosecutor from the US Attorney's Office in New Jersey who has been involved in several high-profile wildlife-related cases in the US.

Most of the participants of the judiciary workshop in Guyana identified the shortage of resources (59%) and a lack of training (65%) as the greatest impediments to effectively enforcing wildlife crimes. .

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND JUDICIARY TRAINING IN BOLIVIA

Jointly with IFAW, SAVIA organized a Specialized Training course on Environmental and Wildlife Crime from June 16th to June 18th 2021. A total of 32 Prosecutors, 33 Judges and 63 police personnel from the specialized Police Unit, Forestry and Environmental Preservation Police (POFOMA) participated.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING IN SURINAME

IFAW's law enforcement training in Suriname took place over four days in March 2022 in Paramaribo, Suriname, in coordination with the Ministry of Land and Forest Management (GBB). Seventeen (17) participants from GBB, the Foundation for Forest Management and Production Control (SBB), the Ministry of Defense (KPS), the Police, the Fraud Department & Economic Crimes, the Military Police, INTERPOL and Immigration learned a wide variety of wildlife-crime prevention techniques. Including how to identify common species traded in the region, how to check CITES permits, how to detect smuggled wildlife and protocols for the management and welfare of seized animals. They also learned to collaborate and support each other across agencies and jurisdictions—a key step in disrupting wildlife crime. The training was intended to build law enforcement capacity, raise awareness and spark interest among law enforcement agencies to carry out efficient wildlife crime investigations. Participants gained significant knowledge about CITES, wildlife-smuggling techniques and profiling through the training.

Additionally, IFAW delivered two virtual sensitization judiciary workshops in Suriname in May 2021 and March 2022 with 19 and 17 participants respectively. These workshops aimed to provide selected prosecutors, judges, and magistrates with the knowledge and training materials to ensure that investigators and legal professionals are well-equipped to tackle crimes against jaguars and other wildlife. The participants represented the Suriname Public Prosecutors Office, the judiciary, Customs and GBB.



"The Operation Jaguar project fulfilled a much-needed gap and was well received by the Government of Suriname and the GBB in particular."
~ Participant of the training

NATIONAL STRATEGY TO COMBAT WILDLIFE CRIME IN GUYANA

During the law enforcement needs assessment exercise it became apparent that with a large and diverse group of agencies responsible for enforcing wildlife-related laws and regulations, a national framework or strategy document will be required to coordinate and guide an effective national response. IFAW has worked with relevant authorities on the development of a National Strategy to combat Wildlife Crime, to provide a framework for nationwide, well-coordinated action. The Task Force responsible for combatting wildlife crime received a two-week Basic and Advanced Investigation training from 16 – 27 May 2022.

"The participants themselves could not have been more enthusiastic throughout the two weeks, not only with the theory but they were extremely engaged with all the exercises and treating them as if they were dealing with a live case."

~ from IFAW report

DETECTION DOG DEMONSTRATIONS IN GUYANA AND SURINAME

To further aid law enforcement agencies, IFAW and IUCN NL ran a pilot with Scent Imprint Conservation Dogs to show authorities in Suriname and Guyana how detection dogs can help them detect wildlife specimens at seaports and airports. Wesley Visscher trained his dogs Bruce and Boris to use their superb sense of smell to detect jaguar parts in boxes, packages, cars and containers. The demonstrations were highly successful and motivates local authorities to consider expanding their resources with trained detection dogs specifically to help combat wildlife trafficking. IFAW is currently organizing a three months deployment of Boris to Suriname.



Photo: Scent Imprint Conservation Dogs



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ELEVATING THE PRIORITY GIVEN TO WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING BY THE GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC

To mobilize the public and politicians in relevant countries to take a stance for jaguar conservation, we must open their eyes to the tragedy that takes place under their noses.

In Operation Jaguar our networking efforts from the first year enabled us to play our 'typical IUCN' convener role with maximum impact. Our close contacts with key global players helped us to get full global attention for the output of the program, like the film 'Tigre Gente' and reports we published, providing huge leverage for the efforts to place jaguar conservation and tackling illegal wildlife trade higher on countries' agendas. By reaching out to political stakeholders and media, and through publications on our websites and social media channels we raised awareness for the illegal jaguar trade and its convergence with other crimes.

HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS ON ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

If people think about poaching and trafficking of wildlife (products) they often think of Africa and Asia, elephants, rhino, tiger and pangolins. Latin America is commonly overlooked in discussions on IWT, despite the region being home to a number of species threatened by illegal trafficking. As a consequence, most of the attention and funds towards preventing IWT are directed towards Africa and Asia, whilst IWT in Latin America remains somewhat of a blind spot. Consequently, law enforcement agencies and prosecutors in Latin America do not get the same attention and capacity building opportunities as their colleagues in Africa and Asia.

EUROPEAN VIRTUAL ZOOHACKATON 'CODING TO END WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING'

In November 2020 we were one of the partners to the Free Spirit Foundation for the organization of the European Virtual Zoonhackaton 'Coding to end Wildlife Trafficking'. We delivered a key note speaker and were mentors to the participants. In total 29 teams and 123 participants from 20 countries were part of the Zoonhackaton. It had a big social media coverage on Facebook 1,25 million followers, Instagram 185.000 followers and Twitter 673.000 followers. Through problem statements the teams were asked to come up with innovative ideas to address the issues around IWT.

IUCN WORLD CONSERVATION CONGRESS

During the IUCN World Conservation Congress from 3 to 10 September 2021, members of the Operation Jaguar team gave presentations to a global audience of conservationists and policy makers about the Operation Jaguar project and about the symbolic and traditional value of jaguars.

SAVIA played an important role in the submission and approval of IUCN Motion 106 for the protection of the Jaguar in the framework of the IUCN. This motion should be the first step towards changing the status of jaguars on the IUCN Red List to 'Endangered'.



Photo: IUCN NL



Photo: IUCN NL

FILM 'TIGRE GENTE'

In association with filmmaker Liz Unger, we produced a documentary, called 'Tigre Gente', which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York and had its European premiere at the Wildlife Film Festival Rotterdam in 2022. In Rotterdam, the film won two awards: the audience award and the Hugo van Lawick Award (former Conservation Award). In 2021 the film won the 'Best Film Award' in the category 'Mountain environment and natural history' at the Telluride festival. National Geographic Channel has acquired the film for distribution in Latin America, where it will premiere on April 22 as part of the channel's Earth Day lineup.

In 2021 and 2022 we provided legal support for one of the protagonists of the film, Madidi Park director Marcos Uzquiano, who got into trouble for being firm on illegal activities in Madidi. The Tigre Gente team will continue to support Marcos.

MEDIA OUTREACH

Our 12-month partnership with Mongabay resulted in an in-depth, yet widely accessible, series of publications on jaguar trafficking. Supportive of the core objective of Operation Jaguar, this effort elevated the priority given to wildlife trafficking by governments and the public with 12 original articles and nine short-form videos produced. This coverage has been read over 145,000 times on Mongabay's English and Spanish news sites and seen 1.9 million times on social media, which has generated over 172,000 direct engagements. The videos produced have furthered the series' reach and potential for impact with over 59,500 views. Beyond Mongabay's distribution channels, the articles have been republished by high-profile media outlets at least 56 times.

Additionally, all articles produced were published under an open Creative Commons license, allowing them to be used commercially or non-commercially. This strategy has led the information to go beyond Mongabay's own channels via at least 56 references and republications in notable media outlets throughout Latin America, including La Región, RPP, El Comercio, El Deber, Efe Verde, Diálogo Chino, La Mula, and El Espectador.



TIGRE GENTE



"Addressing wildlife trafficking, such as the jaguar, has been essential to put it on the public agenda, create citizen awareness and demand that the authorities comply with the law."
~ Nelfi Fernández, an investigative reporter at El Deber

Dutch media showed a huge interest in the program, especially around the work with detection dogs. RTL Nieuws, Jeugdjournaal in The Netherlands and in Surinam, Algemeen Dagblad, Hart van Nederland and HLF8 made items on this topic amongst others. Detection dogs Bruce and Boris were also elected animals of the year' by Dutch children's newspaper Kidsweek.

JAGUAR DAY

As part of the Operation Jaguar project, our Venezuelan partner Proyecto Sebraba organized an online event to promote the importance of jaguar conservation among a broad public. The event was organized on International Jaguar Day (November 29th), a day that celebrates America's largest wildcat as an umbrella species for biodiversity conservation. Part of the event was a special program in which children from all over the country were asked to make a drawing and to record a short [video](#) about the jaguar. Interesting was the high participation of children from areas that are identified as conflict areas between people and jaguars.

In Bolivia, SAVIA supported the realization of beautiful murals on a downtown walkway in the city of La Paz.

SCHIPHOL

Due to COVID-19 our plans to engage more with the relevant authorities at Schiphol Airport with respect to Schiphol's role as a destination airport and transit hub for illegal wildlife trade were delayed and needed to be adjusted. We have built up a good relationship with the compliance officer at Schiphol Airport. Since February 2021 she is also the chairperson of the Airports Council International (ACI World). We continue to have regular meetings with her to work on the prevention of IWT through Schiphol.

At the request of Schiphol, we gave joint Masterclasses with IFAW to MBO-1 classes of Aviation Community Schiphol. These students were trained to become cabin crew members. During the Masterclasses we raised awareness on illegal wildlife trafficking and the role that aviation plays in the distribution of illegally trafficked plant and animal products. As some of these products are also transported via hand luggage, we explained what to look for and how to act if they have the impression that a person is carrying illegal wildlife products. We also explained Schiphol's role as a destination airport and major transit hub.



Through our membership of United for Wildlife we became aware of the existence of 'Project SEEKER', developed by Microsoft. During one of our meetings with the compliance officer of Schiphol, we draw her attention to this tool and the benefit it would have for Schiphol. Project SEEKER is the first-of-its-kind multispecies artificial intelligence model and has been trained to identify animals or products such as bears, polar bears, leopards, lions, and illegal products used in medicines. Project SEEKER can be easily installed in luggage and cargo scanners at airports, ports, and borders, and will automatically alert enforcement agencies when it detects an illegal wildlife item. Officials can then seize the objects, which can be used as evidence in criminal proceedings against the smugglers. Currently the compliance officer is in contact with United for Wildlife and Microsoft to start a pilot of Project SEEKER at Schiphol.

UNITED FOR WILDLIFE

IUCN NL became a member of United for Wildlife in 2020. United for Wildlife works to tackle illegal wildlife trade by bringing together conservation organizations, governments, and global corporations and is led by The Duke of Cambridge and The Royal Foundation. Through our membership, we are extending our network and can now more easily contact companies active in the transportation sector to engage with them regarding the trafficking of i.e. jaguar parts via their business activities in South America.

LOBBY THE HAGUE AND BRUSSELS

In 2020 we have participated in the consultation of the EU Directive Environmental Crime to influence relevant laws and regulations dealing with IWT. By making environmental crime, such as IWT, a serious crime, law enforcement authorities will be better equipped to deal with the organized crime networks that are engaging in IWT. The proposal of the European Commission to revise this Directive was issued in December 2021. Since then the European Council has agreed on a negotiating mandate in December 2022 and unfortunately watered down the penalty and sanction levels applicable to environmental crimes, and stripped other crucial provisions from their substance, compared to what the European Commission originally proposed. It is now up to the European Parliament to take a progressive position during the negotiations with the European Council which will take place in the near future.

We have also participated in the consultation of the EU Action Plan to fight wildlife trafficking. The revised plan EU Action Plan was agreed upon in November 2022. The Dutch Government now needs to develop a Dutch Action Plan to fight wildlife trafficking in The Netherlands taking into account the priorities as set out in the revised EU action plan.

Furthermore, through our contacts with politicians from D'66 and Partij voor de Dieren amongst others, we raised awareness in Parliament for a stronger focus on combating illegal wildlife trade in and via the Netherlands and for the necessity of detection dogs at Schiphol.

Throughout the project we also developed good contacts as the NVWA. Through these contacts we will be able to proceed with our work in The Netherlands to follow up on leads we gained through Operation Jaguar.



Photo: Britta Jaschinski



Photo: Britta Jaschinski

CHINA HOUSE

There are several restaurants under a bridge, about a couple of hundred kilometers from Santa Teresa. The locals would hunt jaguars and sell them here, and the Chinese would also buy them here. Some people brought it back to Beijing at the time and got sentenced to four or five years."

~ Chinese restaurant owner living in Bolivia.

To gain insights into the role of the Chinese community in jaguar trafficking and how to engage them for wildlife conservation, we ran a pilot with the Chinese NGO China House in Bolivia. Through conversations with 45 Chinese nationals in Bolivia, China House found out that:

- There is a growing awareness among Chinese nationals in Bolivia that they should stay away from illegal wildlife trade, considering the consequence for individuals and the whole Chinese community.
- In general, the Chinese community in Bolivia have a low level of knowledge about wildlife conservation. The increase in such knowledge is likely to provoke behavioral change.
- The best strategy to engage Chinese in Bolivia for wildlife conservation is to launch an integrated communications campaign which has a specific approach for different kinds of Chinese community members, using diverse messages and types of communication for infrastructure company staff, shop owners, embassy staff and chamber of commerce directors.
- By engaging Chinese in Bolivia constructively, we believe there is high possibility that behavioral change would happen among them, which would significantly benefit local sustainable development in Bolivia.

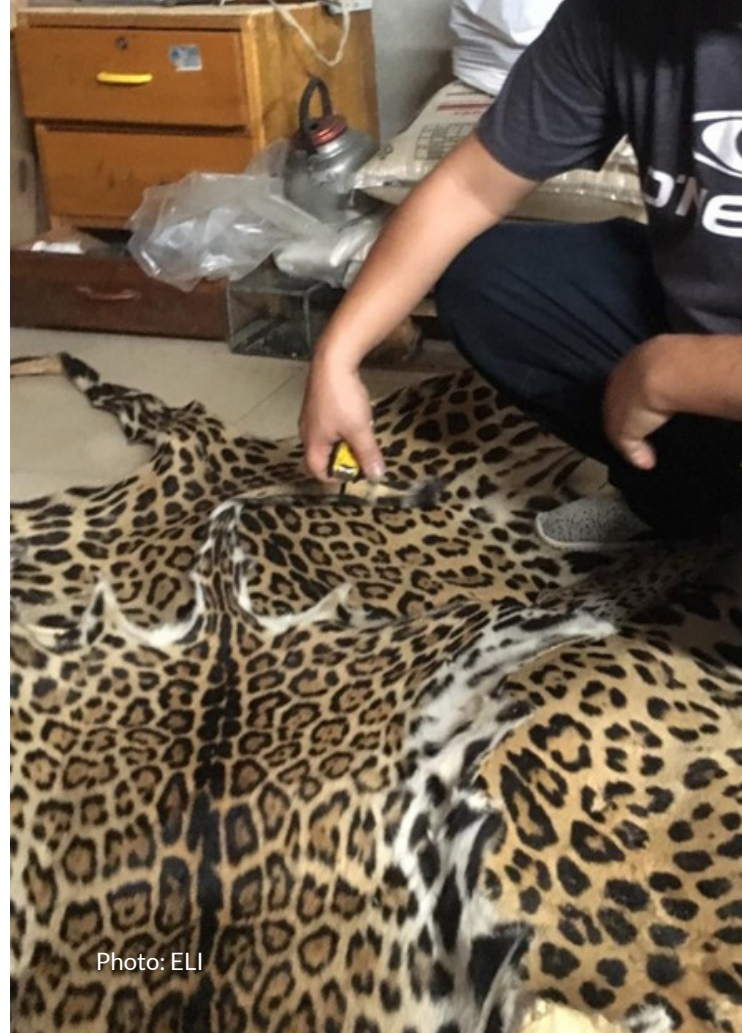


Photo: ELI



Photo: ELI

LESSONS LEARNED & WAY FORWARD

LESSONS LEARNED

Below the radar, the pandemic caused a massive shift in international power. Countries rich in natural resources like Bolivia, Guyana and Suriname have accumulated debts to keep their economies afloat. Many of these loans have been granted by China. **When these debts are settled, the price will be paid by natural resources, biodiversity and the people protecting them.**

The rising global scarcity of natural resources increasingly attracts transnational criminal organizations. Alongside their traditional activities, organized crime syndicates diversify into the lucrative business of tropical timber, illegal gold mining and other minerals, human trafficking, money laundering, and trade in (products of) endangered species. There is strong convergence between the trafficking of jaguars and other serious crimes. **This implies that traditional law-enforcement approaches focused on isolated illegal businesses are no longer appropriate for understanding and dealing with the increasing complexities of organized crime.**


Showing this strong convergence between the trafficking of jaguar parts, the illegal trade in other commodities and illegal activities like money laundering is very much needed to show governments the seriousness of the crimes. Governments are more eager to act when criminal networks also commit other serious crimes that impact the countries' economy and rule of law, including bribery, tax fraud and - evasion. For this reason, **it is very important to engage with large global players that have a focus on crimes considered more serious crimes.**

There is a missing link in the information gathering between the level of kingpins and the sourcing areas. The traders are not interested in the origin of the animal parts, they place what they call "standing orders". **It is a challenge how to identify the more vulnerable geographical areas from which the jaguar parts are sourced.** For this reason, we are exploring different instruments to create a **network of human intelligence** in vulnerable areas. In addition to that, a lot is to be gained in the use of DNA databases and technology to assess the origin of the parts.

In Bolivia, the Jaguar Alliance initiated by Operation Jaguar has proven vital for effective cooperation with all the players working on jaguar conservation and - trafficking. Strategies are shared and discussed openly to prevent overlap in activities and the most efficient use of resources. **Because of the broad representation of its members, the authorities take the Alliance very seriously, which is crucial for making joint steps.**

WAY FORWARD AND SUSTAINABILITY

We have to invest in further research to **better understand the scale, trade dynamics, and crime convergence** with other serious crimes to focus on dismantling networks more effectively, instead of targeting only those lower down in the hierarchy.



Given the convergence between environmental crimes, we should **promote information sharing and collaboration with neighboring countries to improve coordination between governments and international bodies working on combating other illegal networks** active in illegal mining, narcotics, human trafficking, document forgery, and money laundering among others. This also requires **bringing together multidisciplinary expertise**.

More and better technical support should be provided to governments (through the training of law enforcement agencies and sensitization of prosecution and judiciary services) considering the rise of environmental crime, its convergence with other crimes, and the illicit network development cycle that starts with opportunistic alliances and continuing through convergence and domination of the trade, as described by criminological science.

Enhance the detection and interdiction of poaching and trafficking of jaguars and other wildlife by allocating sufficient financial – and human resources to relevant law enforcement agencies. This can include using alternative instruments such as technology or scent dogs.

To tackle the illegal wildlife trade, we must realize the importance of **engaging Chinese stakeholders** in the countries we work, like the embassies, corporates and Chinese migrant communities. Lack of understanding of these stakeholders is a huge challenge for NGOs wanting to influence them so to prevent ethnic tensions it is very important to start talking with them instead of about them.

Jaguars play a vital role in many indigenous cosmologies. Current efforts to protect the species are predominantly informed and influenced by Western perceptions and scientifically rooted management approaches. Conservation organizations have often overlooked and failed to acknowledge the importance of local and indigenous views and knowledge of jaguars. This is despite the conclusions from IPBES [3] reports on the state of biodiversity and its global priorities that state that 'acknowledging indigenous views is the way forward to protect the remaining biodiversity'. This is hugely significant since 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity is in the territories of indigenous and local communities. **We are for this purpose engaging with other disciplines and hope so to help reconnect local people to the species to successfully protect it and enrich the conservation strategies of different conservation organizations.** This is a line of work that nature conservation organizations need to be more aware of. We have a small pilot to explore this work and hope to get more support from private funders.

Implementation of the Jaguar National Action Plans. **The development of Jaguar National Action Plans has been an important process in all the range countries, to build consensus among the different stakeholders on the priorities and actions needed to protect the jaguar.** This ensures that the trafficking of these species is an integral part of national conservation plans and is not just the task of the police and the judiciary.

[3] <https://ipbes.net/>