

CAT news

N° 61 | AUTUMN 2014





CATnews is the newsletter of the Cat Specialist Group, a component of the Species Survival Commission SSC of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is published twice a year, and is available to members and the Friends of the Cat Group.

For joining the Friends of the Cat Group please contact Christine Breitenmoser at ch.breitenmoser@kora.ch

Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

Send contributions and observations to ch.breitenmoser@kora.ch.

Guidelines for authors are available at www.catsg.org/catnews

CATnews is produced with financial assistance from the Friends of the Cat Group.

Design: barbara surber, werk'sdesign gmbh

Layout: Christine Breitenmoser

Print: Stämpfli Publikationen AG, Bern, Switzerland

ISSN 1027-2992 © IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group

Editors: Christine & Urs Breitenmoser
Co-chairs IUCN/SSC
Cat Specialist Group
KORA, Thunstrasse 31, 3074 Muri,
Switzerland
Tel ++41(31) 951 90 20
Fax ++41(31) 951 90 40
<u.breitenmoser@vetsuisse.unibe.ch>
<ch.breitenmoser@kora.ch>

Associate Editors: Keith Richmond
Brian Bertram
Sultana Bashir
Javier Pereira

Cover Photo: Leopard cat in Rajaji National Park, India (Photo Akanksha Saxena), see article on p. 21 of this issue.

The designation of the geographical entities in this publication, and the representation of the material, do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the IUCN concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

IAN THOMSON¹, STEPHANNY ARROYO-ARCE¹ AND FRANK SPOONER¹

Record of two jaguar cubs suckling from their mother in the wild

A seven minute camera-trap video of two male jaguar cubs *Panthera onca* suckling from their mother was captured on 7 December 2013 in Tortuguero beach, Costa Rica. The video was obtained as part of the long-term monitoring program of this species conducted by Global Vision International in Tortuguero National Park since 2011.

Little is known regarding jaguar cubs in the wild. After a gestation period of approximately three months, a jaguar gives birth to a litter of usually two to four cubs (Seymour 1989). In the first ten to eleven weeks of life they are totally dependent on their mother's milk. After this period, weaning begins and cubs start to eat meat. Suckling typically ceases after six months (Sunquist & Sunquist 2002, Soares et al. 2006, Hunter 2011). Cubs begin to accompany their mother when they are about two months old becoming independent at 16-24 months (Seymour 1989, Sunquist & Sunquist 2002, Hunter 2011). Herein we documented

two male jaguar cubs, estimated to be 11 months old, still suckling from their mother in Tortuguero National Park, Costa Rica. On 3 December 2013, a green turtle *Chelonia mydas* predated by jaguar in the South end of Tortuguero beach (10°23'89"N/83°25'21"W) was discovered. This carcass had been dragged nearly 50 m into the vegetation to a trail running parallel between the beach and the forest. Within 24 h a camera-trap equipped with video (Bushnell HD) was installed around the carcass and checked daily for a period of six days (until 8 December 2013). On 7 December 2013, at 03:16 h, the adult female was

recorded using vocal calls to possibly attract the two male cubs. Several seconds later, one of the cubs (Cub 01) appeared in the frame and wrestles the female to the ground before locating the mammary area and beginning to feed (Fig. 1). Shortly after this the second cub (Cub 02) entered the frame and without displacing its sibling also begun to suckle. During this time the female groomed the cub located nearest to her head (Cub 02, Fig. 2), frequently interrupting his feeding process. At 3:23 h the female got up, and moved away from the site followed by her cubs.

The female seen in this video was first recorded in Tortuguero National Park on 17 November 2011, and the cubs were first photographed on 30 April 2013, when they were approximately three months old. These cubs could be the first litter for this female.

To our knowledge, this is the first video of jaguar cubs suckling in the wild and the first recording of jaguars suckling at such an advanced age. As so little is known about the species, this data represents an important contribution that will help to understand maternal behavior as well as behavioral development in the cubs.

Acknowledgements

Funding was provided by Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Jaguar Research Grant Program at Panthera, The Rufford Small Grants Foundation and Idea Wild. We gratefully acknowledge all the staff and volunteers of Global Vision International for their support throughout the execution of this investigation; especially Blaine Clarke, Mariliana Leotta, Katherine Cutler and Sateesh Venkatesh. We also thank the Área de Conservación Tortuguero/SINAC for giving us permission to work in Tortuguero National Park and for their logistical support.

References

- Hunter L. 2011. Carnivores of the World. Princeton University Press. Princeton 240 pp.
- Seymour K. L. 1989. *Panthera onca*. Mammalian Species 340, 1-9.
- Soares T. N., Telles M. P. C., Resende L. V., Silveira L., Jácomo A. T. A., Morato R. G., Diniz-Filho J. A. F., Eizirik E., Brondani R. P. V. & Brondani C. 2006. Paternity testing and behavioral ecology: a case study (*Panthera onca*) in Emas National Park, Central Brazil. Genetics and Molecular Biology 29, 735-740.
- Sunquist M. & Sunquist F. 2002. Wild Cats of the World. Chicago Press. Chicago 452 pp.

¹ Global Vision International, 230-60601 Quepos, Costa Rica *ianitthomson@hotmail.com



Fig. 1. (top) Jaguar cub (Cub 01) suckling from his mother. **Fig. 2.** (bottom) Female grooming her cubs (left: Cub 01, right: Cub 02) while they are feeding in Tortuguero National Park, Costa Rica (Photos Global Vision International).