

Jaguar making a comeback



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I am generally not one who buys into all of that “trust science” jazz, especially when it comes to the outdoor world and the animals I love. When I was a kid in school, that same science had us kids preparing for an upcoming ice age, in between hiding under our desks for those air raid drills.

Don’t get me wrong, science has its place, and we would not be an advanced nation without it, especially in the area of medicine. The problem with science is when politics gets involved. Now don’t worry, I am not going to get political here because I hate politics more than an IRS audit.

According to science, there are 8.7 million species of animals on the earth. The scientists tout this estimate as the most accurate ever. This estimate claims there are 6.5 million animals living on land and 2.2 million living in the oceans.

Here is the catch; the vast majority of these animals have not yet been identified. If we were to undertake counting and cataloging all the different species on earth, it could take more than 1,000 years to complete.

Of the animal species, it is estimated that 15,000 are threatened with extinction or endangered at this time. Scientists claim that it is near impossible to identify all the endangered species because many of them have not yet been identified. I diligently tried to digest that, but I got a headache and went fishing instead.

These are the people who want to reintroduce the wolf into Colorado and other states. With that thought in mind, let us discuss the jaguar. The jaguar, or *Panthera onca* in case you were wondering, is the second-largest animal in the Americas, behind the great polar, coastal, brown and grizzly bears.

The great jaguar usually reaches over 6 feet in length between the pegs and weighs in at close to 250 pounds. Their weight varies greatly, depending on what region in which they live. I read of one male who was 465 pounds killed back in the 1960s. He once roamed freely in the United States, reaching well into the upper Midwest.

Like many other species, the jaguar was hunted to death in the states back in the 1900s and is no longer claiming U.S. residence. The jaguar, or the tigre as he is called in Spanish and Portuguese, lives mostly in Mexico, Central and South America. Until recently, that is.

Wildlife officials of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, back in 2016, announced that for



It’s possible the jaguar is making a comeback, and just might make his way into Colorado. (Courtesy photo/ Bernard Dupont/Wikimedia Commons)

the first time in six years, a jaguar had been caught slinking around by a video camera in the thick vegetation of the Santa Rita mountains. They named the male El Jefe and believed he was the sole jaguar in the United States.

He was the sole jag until a second one was picked up on a trail camera in Fort Huachuca, a U.S. Army installation not far from the same mountain range. The wildlife officials also believe this one is a male as well.

In recent decades, a few jaguars have been seen in the United States. Biologists believe the visiting cats are from the population of jaguars in the Sonora, Mexico, region. It is interesting that these animals naturally come and visit their old stomping grounds, similar to the wolf sightings in Colorado over recent years.

All of this has triggered several environmental groups, and scientists with at least 2 universities to call on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reintroduce jaguars into the American Southwest.

The groups have identified 31,800 square miles of suitable habitat in the mountains of central Arizona and New Mexico that could potentially support anywhere from 90 to 150 jaguars.

The current recovery plan for the jaguar does not include the United States, but these groups claim the U.S. is missing an opportunity for recovery north of the border. The U.S. represents one-tenth of 1% of the jaguar’s historic range.

The habitat area selected for the possible reintroduction is mostly under federal control. The land is very remote and rugged but has suitable vegetation, cover, prey and water. I might point out that jaguars are opportunistic hunters and will prey upon just about anything they come across. They have no problem taking down the

largest animals in South America, to include the tapir, caiman, and any of the deer species.

There is no doubt in my mind that the jaguar, if reintroduced, will spread far outside this proposed area. Given the range and sturdiness of these animals, there is no doubt they will once again reach Colorado.

As a predator and potential killer, the jaguar makes a mountain lion seem like child’s play. A jaguar is worse than a mountain lion that’s been living on a diet of chocolate bars and steroids. Since much of the potential range of this animal may include cattle rangeland, there is a tendency for jaguars to be highly unpopular with all of the cattleman’s associations.

The jaguar can rain complete terror on herds of livestock and the people who work them. As a potential man-killer, the jaguar has some very impressive credentials. Many vaqueros, the cowboys of South America, are maimed or killed each year while working the same herds of cattle the jaguar may consider his. Corner or mess around with an angry or injured jaguar and the hospital will need your original owner’s manual to reassemble your damaged carcass.

With the loss of habitat, the border wall and proposed extension thereof, access for the jaguar may be blocked and prevented from occurring naturally. I am not a fan of forced reintroduction of predator species into our areas. I like the natural flow of the animals making their way here as a normal course of business, and I think we should do all we can to encourage any natural introductions.

Mother Nature can be a fickle person, and generally she has it set how and what she is going to do. Mankind does not need to come and kick the old lady in the teeth every

time he thinks he knows better than her. If tigre finds his way here naturally, I will welcome him, but let’s not force his return.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County

Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of

adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the posse, call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org



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