Felid TAG Times

A quarterly publication of the Felid Taxon Advisory Group of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums

In This Issue

August 2009

Felids of the Americas

ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS & AQUARIUMS

One year ago, the Felid TAG Times debuted with its first issue. Happy Anniversary! The feedback from readers has been very positive and it seems that the newsletter is achieving its goal of sharing relevant information between institutions and persons with an interest in felids and keeping us all connected. Please feel free to forward the newsletter on to colleagues who do not subscribe to the list serv. As always, your comments, suggestions, and submissions are welcome. Thanks for reading!

Calendar

September 13

- Felid TAG meeting, 8:00-10:00 AM, Portland (AZA Conference)

September 14

- Cheetah SSP meeting, 9:00—10:00 AM, Portland (AZA Conference)

April 19 to 25, 2010—TENTATIVE

- Felid TAG Annual Conference, Louisville

News

Conference Wrap-up

More than 80 people attended the annual Felid TAG Meeting in Tacoma in May, and nearly 40 students participated in the Small and Large Cat Husbandry Courses preceding the meeting. The meeting produced lively discussions and presented opportunities for collaboration centering on felid education and veterinary medicine. Mt. Rainier came out, Bill Swanson dressed up like a hawk, and a fabulous time was had by all. Thank you to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium for hosting such a wonderful meeting.

New Fishing Cat SSP Coordinator

The Felid TAG is pleased to announce that Dave Orndorff has been selected as the Fishing Cat SSP Coordinator.

David Orndorff
Director/General Curator, Mill Mountain Zoo, P.O. Box 13484, Roanoke, VA 24034; (540) 343-3241 ext 31; Fax (540) 3434-8111; dorndorff@mmzoo.org

Fishing Cats Found in New Site

Sign surveys and camera trapping by the Thailand Fishing Cat Research and Conservation Project has confirmed that fishing cats are indeed living in and around Sam Roi Yod National Park, which is about four hours down the Malay peninsula from Bangkok and is Thailand's newest Ramsar Site. To date, 14 individual cats have been identified on camera traps with six cats live-trapped and collared. Biological samples are undergoing genetic extraction and analysis and disease screening. Additional funding is needed to purchase more collars and a telemetry receiver (contact Bill Swanson at bill.swanson@cincinnatizoo.org). Keep up with the project at www.fishingcatproject.info where you can view a short documentary film about the project.

News (continued)

Regional Collection Plan Update

The Wildlife Conservation Management Committee approved the 2nd edition of the Regional Collection Plan (RCP). Recommendations were based on the results of a space survey conducted in 2008.

The full text of the RCP can be downloaded from the AZA web site (www.aza.org—members only section). Major revisions to the RCP include:

- Pallas' cat changed from an SSP to a PMP
- Amur leopard changed from a PMP to an SSP
- Bobcat added as a DERP to allow institutions to maintain bobcat-specific exhibits
- Jaguarundi added as a phase-in species

Cincinnati Zoo

Thailand Summit Report

If you are interested in reading the full report from the Clouded Leopard and Small Felid Conservation Summit held in Bangkok in January, it is now posted on the Clouded Leopard Project website: http://cloudedleopard.org/default.aspx?link=research_summit2009.

Wild Jaguar Reproduction

Most of what we know about jaguar reproduction comes from observations from zoos. A recent study of wild jaguars in Costa Rica has confirmed that the birth interval of jaguars is 22 to 24 months, and that juveniles strike out on their after 18 to 24 months.

- Carillo, E., Saenz, J. and Fuller, T. (2009) Interbirth interval of a free-ranging jaguar. *Mammalian Biology*, In Press.

Great Cats and Rare Canids Act Progress

On April 21, the Great Cats and Rare Canids Act of 2009 (H.R. 411) passed the House, and will be voted on by the Senate next. The Act would provide financial resources for conservation programs in nations within the range of rare felid and canid populations.

Rare Florida Panther Sighting

Volunteers at the Corkscrew Wildlife Sanctuary in Florida recently caught on film a rare sighting of a Florida panther—one of only 100 estimated panthers—strolling across a boardwalk in broad daylight. Check it out on You Tube. Search for "Florida Panther at Corkscrew".

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Considering Climate Change for Canada Lynx

On May 26, 2009, a group of environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club, filed suit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for failing to designate enough high-elevation, snowy areas as critical habitat for Canada lynx that will be necessary for the cat's survival as the climate changes.

S. David Jenike

Long Tail Wine

Purchase a Long Tail wine offered through Crushpad Winery in San Francisco to benefit the Snow Leopard Conservancy's in situ conservation efforts at http://wine.crushnet.com/snowleopard.

Bobcat Furs in Fashion

Luxurious bobcat fur coats are the latest fashion trend in Russia, China, and other countries overseas. A single bobcat pelt now sells for up to $550. Some wildlife advocates are worried about the impact of the increasing harvest on bobcat populations, which is difficult to predict since accurate populations sizes of bobcats are unavailable, Improved oversight of wild populations may be necessary if this trend continues.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Take Action!
Save U.S. Jaguars and Other Borderlands Wildlife

As declared in the 2005 Secure Fence Act, U.S. Customs and Border Protection is erecting a 670-mile long, 18-foot tall concrete and steel wall along the U.S.-Mexico border to deter illegal immigration. The wall will cut off breeding between U.S. and Mexico populations of jaguars, ocelots, jaguarundi, and other endangered borderland wildlife, threatening the survival of those species. More than 90% of the wall is already in place, and construction is expected to be completed by the end of 2009.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Rep. Raul Grijalva (AZ) has introduced The Border Security and Responsibility Act (HR 2076), which calls for the suspension of continued construction of the wall until environmental impacts have been assessed and alternatives to a physical barrier have been analyzed. It also calls for mitigation of the ecological impacts of the section of wall already in place.

Send a message to your Representative in support of this legislation at www.defenders.org/take_action.

Mule deer near the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area in Arizona unable to cross border fence. Photo: Dan Millis

Conservation Program Updates

Jaguarundi Phase-In

New Program

The jaguarundi is now classified as a phase-in species beginning with the 2009 Felid TAG Regional Collection Plan as approved by the AZA Wildlife Conservation and Management Committee. Ann Konopik, General Curator at Salisbury Zoological Park (akonopik@ci.salisbury.md.us) and Alan Shoemaker (sshoe@mindspring.com) are working to identify a founder source population in South America.

A Little Bit About the Jaguarundi

Known as the "otter cat", the jaguarundi, *Herpailurus yaguarondi*, is a small cat native to the Americas. It is genetically most closely related to the puma and jaguar. It is a cat of the lowlands and is generally found at altitudes below 2,000m. The jaguarundi occupies a broad range of habitat from dry scrub, swamp, and savanna woodland to primary forest. It is often found near running water and is an expert at catching fish. The jaguarundi is the most diurnal and terrestrial of all the New World felids, which, in addition to its unique appearance, makes it a good candidate for zoological exhibition.

The jaguarundi has a distinct weasel-like appearance, with an elongated slender body, short legs, and sleek unpatterned fur. Its head is small and elongated rather than rounded with short, round ears. Three color phases occur: black, brownish-grey, and red, which can be found within littermates. Adults can reach up to 30 inches in body length with a tail length of 20 inches. Adult weights average around 15 pounds. While considered solitary, the jaguarundi has been observed traveling or foraging in pairs.

The breeding season is from September to November, and parturition of 1 to 4 kittens occurs after a 70 day gestation. Spots apparent at birth are lost at 3 to 4 months. Kittens are dependent on the mother for about 2 years.

The jaguarundi is listed by CITES Appendix II; the Central and North American populations have been Appendix I since 1987. The largest threat comes from habitat loss. It is also a notorious predator of domestic poultry, making it susceptible to hunting pressure.

Meet a Member: Ken Kaemmerer

Ken Kaemmerer has been the Curator of Mammals at the Dallas Zoo since 1998. Early on in his career, Ken considered himself more of a primatologist, having conducted his Master's research on spider monkeys and working as the Supervisor of Primates at Louisiana Purchase Gardens and Zoo prior to coming to Dallas. He was also a Zoo Advisor at the Barranquilla Zoo in Colombia through the Peace Corps. In the 1990s, Ken visited the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge in southern Texas. Soon after, the Dallas Zoo initiated an ocelot research and conservation program to contribute original research, support field research, produce education materials and awareness, and contribute to ocelot conservation, all of which has been going on now for 20 years. Ken is a member of the USFWS Ocelot Recovery Team and Ocelot Translocation Committee. He started the Ocelot SSP and has attended every Felid TAG meeting except one since 1994. Devoted to saving the Texas ocelot, despite the estimate that fewer than 100 survive in the wild, Ken is hopeful and points out that, "The American alligator was at one time endangered and now they're as common as crud."

Puma PMP

Program Update

The current population consists of 122 specimens at 60 institutions.

Since the Felid TAG Mid Year Meeting report two orphans have been placed, one with the Houston Zoo and another with The NEW Zoo at NE Wisconsin. There have also been a number of deaths of geriatric cats. As a result of these deaths, two institutions are left temporarily with empty puma-dedicated exhibits. Also, the Topeka Zoo is opening a new puma exhibit in July 2009. These are our priority facilities for cub placement. In August, The Exotic Feline Breeding Center will be transferring an orphan of 2007 to the Oregon Zoo where there is currently an open space due to a 2008 death.

The regional studbook update was made available on the AZA website in April and the PMP update should take place this fall.

Please continue to pass on my contact information to your local game agents for orphan cub placement and let me know in advance if you have a new exhibit coming on line for pumas.

Presently I have seven homes waiting for cubs!

Thank you,
Michelle Schireman
AZA Puma Population Manager and
Regional Studbook Keeper
Oregon Zoo North America Section
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503-226-1561 x 5275

Ocelot SSP

Brazilian Ocelot Consortium
The renewal of the Brazilian Ocelot Consortium remains on hold pending permits for the importation of four founders from Brazil.

Ocelot Translocation
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ocelot Recovery Team has identified a need and started preliminary planning for an experimental translocation of ocelots from Tamaulipas, Mexico into the populations in south Texas. See p.5 for more details. Ocelot-holding institutions will be requested to donate funding to the captive portion of the project.

Impact of Live Ocelots Program on Conservation
Offering a live ocelot program as part of the annual Ocelot Conservation Festival in Harlingen, Texas, is boosting attendance, awareness, and support of ocelot conservation. See p.6 for more details.

Ocelot Conservation: Experimental Translocation of *Leopardus pardalis albescens* from Tamaulipas, Mexico to the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Texas, United States.

John Young, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (John.Young@tpwd.state.tx.us);
Brady McGee, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Brady_McGee@fws.gov);
Jody Mays, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Jody_Mays@fws.gov);
Ken Kaemmerer, Dallas Zoo-Ocelot SSP Chair (Kenneth.Kaemmerer@dallascityhall.com)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ocelot Recovery Team has identified a need and started preliminary planning for an experimental translocation of federally endangered ocelots, *Leopardus pardalis*, from Tamaulipas, Mexico into the populations in south Texas. The purpose of translocation would be to reduce the probability of extinction within the United States until other conservation measures, such as habitat restoration, can increase carrying capacities to such a level that these populations can be viable and self-sustaining.

The Tamaulipan ocelot, *Leopardus pardalis albescens,* is distributed from southern Texas through northeastern Mexico. Currently the known U.S. population includes fewer than 50 *L. p. albescens* found in two separated populations in southern Texas, at the northern limit of the species' distribution. One population is located in Cameron County on and near the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Camera and live trap surveys over the last two years on the refuge suggest a precipitous decline from an estimated 30 ocelots in the late 1980's to fewer than a dozen by 2008 with only one reproductive female. The other U.S. population is located in Willacy County on private property managed as permanent conservation easements by the Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR. A third and much larger population of *L. p. albescens* occurs in Tamaulipas, Mexico, but it is geographically isolated from ocelots in Texas.

Habitat conversion, fragmentation, and loss, mortality from vehicle collisions, population isolation, and loss of genetic diversity comprise the primary threats to the *L. p. albescens* in Texas and Tamaulipas. Human population growth and development continue throughout its range. In Texas, over 95% of the dense thornscrub habitat in the Lower Rio Grande Valley has been converted to agriculture, rangelands, or urban land uses. Small population sizes in Texas and isolation from conspecifics in Mexico threaten *L. p. albescens* in Texas with genetic impoverishment and increased susceptibility to stochastic events. Connectivity among populations or colonization of new habitats is discouraged by the proliferation of highways and increased road mortality among dispersing *L. p. albescens*. Issues associated with developing and patrolling the boundary between the United States and Mexico further exacerbates isolation issues between populations.

A preliminary population viability assessment (PVA) was conducted in 2004 for the *L. p. albescens* in south Texas and northern Tamaulipas by Philip Miller of the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group. Miller's PVA showed that the south Texas populations are at a very high risk of extinction. The Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute is currently working on models that show similar results. Miller's preliminary analyses indicated that just one to two females injected into the south Texas populations on a bi-annual basis may be enough to compensate for the destabilizing effect of stochastic demography. Miller's 2004 model suggested that translocation can improve the viability of the south Texas ocelot populations.

Arturo Caso, Field Biologist from the Caesar Kleburg Wildlife Research Institute of Texas A & M University at Kingsville, with a sedated Tamaulipan Ocelot

Since August 2008, members and advisors of the Ocelot Recovery Team have formed a subcommittee called the Translocation Team, which has met four times to begin discussion of potential, experimental translocation of ocelots. In the United States, representatives of the Translocation Team include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Dallas Zoo, Gladys Porter Zoo, Environmental Defense, and The Nature Conservancy. Representatives from Mexico include the Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas, the Tamatan Zoo, and Instituto Tecnológico de Ciudad Victoria; the Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad and Dirección General de Vida Silvestre will also participate.

The Translocation Team proposes to move four female *L. p. albescens* to Laguna Atascosa NWR from a source population in Tamaulipas, Mexico in the Spring or Fall of 2010. The source population in Tamaulipas is currently being evaluated by Arturo Caso, a Mexican field researcher working for Texas A&M University-Kingsville's Ceasar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, to determine the size and extent of the population. Careful consideration is being given to the effect of removal of *L. p. albescens* from the source population in Tamaulipas so that the demographic and genetic health of the source population in Tamaulipas is not put at risk.

Ocelot Conservation (continued)

Only young adult females will be considered for translocation. After capture they will be transported to the Tamatan Zoo in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas where they will be kept in quarantine. While there, they will receive physical exams and undergo testing for infectious diseases and parasites. After 30 days and if they are deemed suitable for translocation, they will be imported into the U.S. and transported to release pens on Laguna Atascosa NWR. The release pens will be set up in areas with good ocelot habitat, but which have been confirmed not to presently hold ocelots of the same sex; they will be adjacent to core areas which do hold resident ocelots. After another 30 days to become accustomed to the natural surroundings, they will be fitted with radio collars, released, and continuously monitored.

The first year, the translocation project is considered experimental. If everything goes well after this translocation, then the Translocation Team may propose to move four to six ocelots per year over a period of about 10 years to augment the two south Texas populations.

As of June 2009 the Translocation Team is providing protocols and details of the plan to the many government agencies and officials on both sides of the border in order to obtain approval and permits. The first year of the project is estimated to cost over $800,000 in resources and personnel. The goal is to start translocations in the Spring or Fall of 2010, however, the start date is not yet certain. Please consider this native ocelot conservation project when allocating your conservation resources. Stay tuned for further updates on this project later in the year or contact Ken Kaemmerer, Ocelot Species Survival Plan Coordinator

Arturo Caso releases the ocelot

The Impact of the Live Ocelot Program on Ocelot Conservation Efforts in Texas

Jody Mays, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (jody_mays@fws.gov)

The ocelot in the U.S. once occurred in southern Arizona, through much of Texas, and as far north as Arkansas and Louisiana. As a result of habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, road mortality, and population isolation, the ocelot in the U.S. has declined dramatically. Only two small and isolated breeding populations, and fewer than 50 individuals, are known to remain, all in southernmost Texas. The ocelot is at high risk of extinction in the U.S. Most of the current and historic range in Texas is comprised of private lands, and information in many areas is very limited. So the partnership and support of private landowners and other residents is absolutely vital to the continued existence of the ocelot in Texas. Yet the majority of residents in this area has never heard of an ocelot and is unaware of its precarious status and need for protection and support.

This species is rare, nocturnal, camouflaged, and occupies dense habitats, and consequently is almost never seen. This lack of visibility to and interaction with humans contributes significantly to a lack of awareness and support for ocelot conservation.

One of the two known remaining ocelot populations occurs in and around Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge in Cameron County, Texas. The Refuge and the Friends of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, a non-profit support group, created the annual Ocelot Conservation Festival in 2000.

The primary goals of this one-day event are to increase awareness of ocelots and their status, to build support for and involvement in ocelot conservation among local communities and residents, and to provide funding for ocelot conservation efforts. This event, held in the local community of Harlingen, also teaches residents and visitors about other wildlife native to the area and about conservation through various live animal programs, educational games, and other nature-related activities. Between 2000 and 2003, before the inclusion of the live ocelot program, this annual event drew an average of 413 people and provided an average of $2,350 in proceeds for ocelot conservation. The live ocelot program was incorporated into this event beginning in 2004. Between 2004 and 2009, after the inclusion of the live ocelot program, this annual event drew an average of 2,917 people and provided an average of $7,265 in proceeds for ocelot conservation. Up to 4,000 people now attend this event each year,

Impact of Live Ocelot Programs (continued)

representing up to 26 states and Canada and including 29-51 local and Texas communities. Laguna Atascosa has also documented up to a 50% increase in visitation to the Refuge in the 10 days immediately following this event compared to the 10 days prior to this event, indicating the Festival prompts attendants to not only learn about nature but to travel to the Refuge and experience nature.

During the 4 years prior to inclusion of the live ocelot program, the Ocelot Conservation Festival reached a total of about 1,650 people and raised a total of approximately $9,400 for ocelot conservation. During the 6 years since the inclusion of the live ocelot program, the Ocelot Conservation Festival has reached a total of about 17,500 people and raised a total of approximately $43,500 for ocelot conservation. Proceeds from this event have been used by the Friends of Laguna Atascosa to construct rainwater catchment systems that provide water for ocelots and other wildlife during drought conditions; acquire remotely triggered cameras that are used to monitor ocelots; purchase equipment for ocelot research; provide interns to assist with live capture and radio tracking of ocelots; pay for some costs associated with acquisition of ocelot habitat; and other on-the-ground ocelot conservation benefits. All proceeds from this event are used for ocelot conservation and education.

During the Ocelot Conservation Festival, the live ocelot program has been presented a total of 54 times over 6 years, giving over 7,500 people the opportunity to see and connect with a live ocelot. In addition to the Festival event itself, the live ocelot program has been effectively used to reach out to local schools and conservation partners. Since 2004, the live ocelot program has been presented at 15 local schools, including 79 programs. Nearly 4,000 students have had the opportunity to see and connect with a live ocelot at their school. Finally, since 2004, the live ocelot program has been presented to 6 different conservation partners, including the Texas Department of Transportation, area private landowners, the Valley Morning Star newspaper, Welder Wildlife Refuge, the Valley Land Fund, and the South Padre Island Golf Course. These programs are intended to build partnerships for cooperative ocelot conservation efforts, such as installing road crossings for ocelots and other wildlife; conducting habitat restoration on private lands; minimizing impacts to ocelots from development; and gaining support among landowners for ocelot conservation.

In total, the live ocelot programs presented by the Naples Zoo from 2004-2007 and by the Cincinnati Zoo since 2008 have included 139 programs given to over 12,100 people at 23 locations in the area. Audiences have included private landowners, state agencies, developers, school students, local residents, winter visitors, and others. The impact of the live ocelot program has been incredible. Average Festival attendance has increased nearly 700% and Friends proceeds for ocelot conservation have increased by about 300%. A total of nearly 24,000 people have attended the Festival event and all associated programs conducted in the area, including about 1,650 before the inclusion of the live ocelot program and over 22,000 after the inclusion of the live ocelot program. This program is an incredibly important and effective tool for raising awareness of the ocelot's status in the U.S., improving partnerships with agencies, individuals, and organizations that can impact ocelots in Texas, and increasing support for ocelot conservation directly in the area where ocelots still occur.

No other tool has had a comparable impact. It provides people with a direct experience with an animal they would otherwise likely never see and prompts an emotional connection that results in increased support for and involvement in conservation. In short, the live ocelot program has had a tremendous impact on environmental education efforts conducted in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and has become a vital component of ocelot conservation efforts in the very area where the last ocelots known in the U.S. occur.

Did You Know?

The ocelot's name comes from the Aztec word *tlalocelotl*, which means "field tiger". In Aztec mythology, it was thought that an ocelot's roar helped the sun rise into the sky.

Cincinnati Zoo

Canada Lynx PMP

The Canada lynx population in zoos is aging. With no current breeding occurring, the program is seeking founders. If you know of a source, please contact Program Coordinator Don Goff at dgoff@beardsleyzoo.org with the information. The studbook will soon be published and Don will send a notice out to those institutions when it is posted.

Meet Our Cats: Baby

The Central Florida Zoo's puma, Baby, has a special place in the hearts of those who work with her. Baby is extra special not only because she is 21 years old, but because she has adapted to living with a condition that our other felids don't have – she is deaf. Though she was born at the zoo with full hearing, she began to suffer from chronic ear infections later in life. When treatment options became limited, surgery was performed to remove her middle ear structures and stitch her ear canals closed, leaving her permanently deaf. This presented several new challenges for not only Baby, but her keepers as well. Prior to her ear surgery, she was trained using verbal commands. In order to maintain her trained behaviors after her loss of hearing, keepers introduced visual cues. Keepers now are able to use these hand signals to continue her daily training sessions, essentially using a special sign language just for her. In addition to maintaining her training, Baby receives a variety of enrichments daily to keep her challenged and engaged in her environment.

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Submissions

Felid TAG Times is edited by Shasta Bray, Felid TAG Education Co-Liaison. Please send comments, suggestions, and submissions to Shasta.bray@cincinnatizoo.org. Submission deadline for the November 2009 newsletter, highlighting Felids of Africa, is October 1.