

# ILLEGAL TRADE THREATENS THE JAGUAR



**SINCE PRE-HISPANIC TIMES** the jaguar (*Panthera onca*) has been represented as one of the most important deities in the different cultures that inhabited the New World. The Mayans, Incas and Aztecs, three of the largest empires in America, worshiped the jaguar as a god. Across these cultures the jaguar served as a symbol of power and courage. With its mythological and spiritual representation, the jaguar is one of the most emblematic animals of Latin America.



## **Panthera Onca in the Americas**

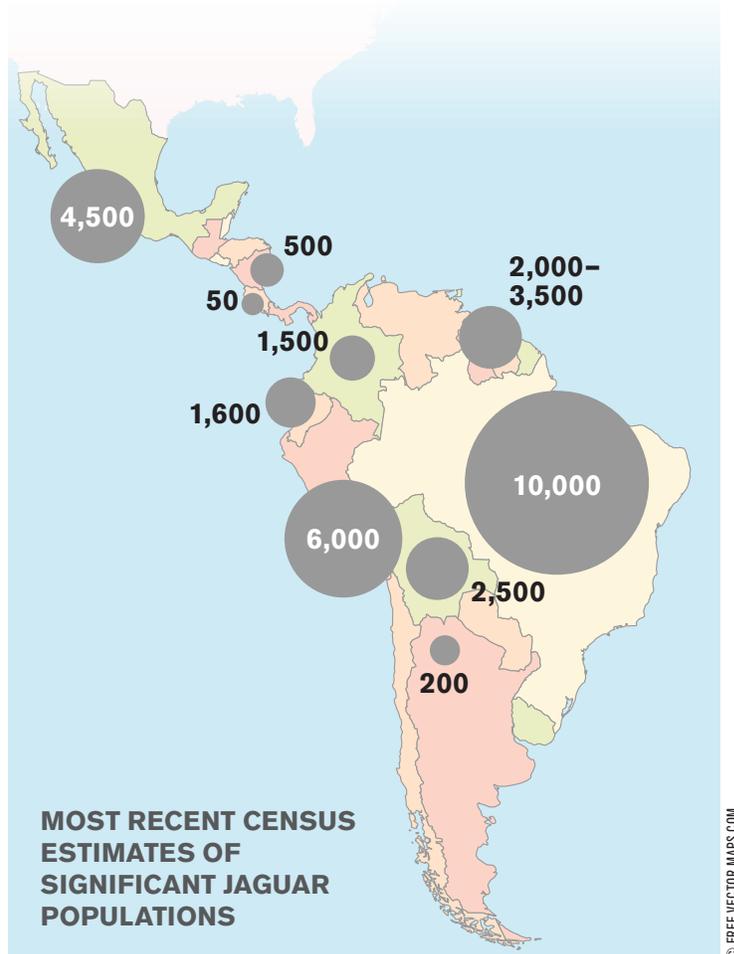
Today, about 90 percent of the jaguar population is found in the Amazon region, mostly in Brazil. The Pantanal region in Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay has one of the areas with the highest density of jaguars in the world—an estimated 6.7 jaguars per 100 square kilometers. Although this number is high, it is important to acknowledge that many of the healthy and stable jaguar populations are constrained to micro territories. Human development has restricted the range of the jaguar and the size of its territories.

## **Population status**

- The IUCN lists the jaguar population worldwide at 64,000—57,000 of which are in the Amazon.
- The Americas have 34 jaguar subpopulations, 25 are threatened, eight are in danger of extinction.

## **Recent jaguar population census:**

- Brazil: ≈ 10,000 (CITES)
- Southeastern Peru: ≈ 6,000 (WWF)
- Mexico: ≈ 4,500 (National Census)
- Guyana and Suriname: ≈ 2,000–3,500 (CITES)
- Bolivia: ≈ 2,500 (UN)
- Ecuador: ≈ 1,600 (CITES)
- Colombia: ≈ 1,500 (UNAM)
- Nicaragua: ≈ 500 (IUCN)



- Argentina: ≈ 200 (CITES)
- Costa Rica ≈ 50 (INOGO)

## The threat of illegal trade

During the 1960s, the jaguar skin trade dramatically increased due to international demand generated by the fashion industry. During that time, around 15,000 jaguars and 80,000 ocelots were killed every year in Brazil. In 1975, CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) added jaguars to Appendix I, ultimately banning international trade of jaguar products for commercial purposes.

## Chinese demand

The illegal trade in jaguars in the 1960s focused on shipping skins to Europe, but today it centers on fangs, most of which go to China. Other jaguar products traded illegally include skulls, claws and skins. In recent years, new trafficking routes to China have emerged, and the jaguar market may be increasing due to strict measures against tiger smuggling taken by the Chinese. Chinese citizens living in South America are supplying this market.

## Action needed

Jaguars are not only a symbol of culture and biodiversity in the Americas, they are also essential to the well-being of ecosystems. Traffickers are threatening South America's environmental wealth and putting its biodiversity in jeopardy. We must take the necessary measures to combat the trade of this emblematic species by increasing surveillance and law enforcement in ports and borders, raising awareness and reducing demand for jaguar parts through education, and engaging in diplomatic collaboration with counterparts in Asia.

## References

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## TRAFFICKING TO CHINA

In several South American countries, Chinese citizens have been found in possession of jaguar products:

- **Bolivia:** Between 2013 and 2018, Bolivian police officers seized more than **400 fangs** sent to China. This correlates to at least **98 jaguars**.
- **Bolivia:** February 23, 2018, Chinese citizens with Bolivian identity cards were caught in possession of **185 jaguar fangs** in their restaurant.
- **Brazil:** In 2017, Brazilian police intercepted **50 packages with jaguar products** sent to China.
- **Peru:** In 2015, airport authorities in Lima confiscated **38 fangs** sent to China.
- **Surinam:** In 2018, police arrested eight people of Chinese descent with **jaguar products including fangs**.

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