

# The Need to Eliminate Illegal & Unsustainable Wildlife Trade in Latin America and the Caribbean



One of the significant global challenges of our time is how to end the illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade (IUWT). Achieving success is of critical importance because IUWT has serious negative implications for climate change, the preservation of biodiversity, security, and public health. It is directly and indirectly endangering species worldwide. It is empowering traffickers and threatening indigenous peoples and local communities that live in close proximity to wildlife. And by rapidly depleting natural resources around the world, it is resulting in economic losses for businesses and rural communities. In addition to this, Covid-19, a zoonotic disease, serves as a reminder that the international trade in wildlife poses serious risks for both animal and human health.

## Latin America – a Megadiverse Region

As one of the world’s most forested and biodiverse regions, Latin America plays an important role in the fight against IUWT. The region contains thousands of endemic and threatened species, including species that are global priorities for conservation, such as the jaguar.

It also hosts major transit and destination countries for wildlife and contains transnational criminal organizations. New rural development projects, particularly in the Amazon basin, higher levels of foreign investment and trade in the region, and increased demand for wildlife also threaten the region’s biodiversity.

## Challenges

There are many challenges that must be overcome to eliminate wildlife trafficking. One is its sheer scale.

Wildlife trafficking is the world’s fourth-largest illegal trade worldwide after arms, drugs, and human trafficking. Beyond this, the global marketplace for wildlife is changing rapidly. New trafficking techniques are constantly being developed and online platforms are increasing the quantity and diversity of trafficked wildlife. This is happening in a context where many national laws do not consider wildlife trafficking to be a serious crime and demand reduction efforts are often inadequate to substantially curb it.

To make matters worse, when countries and other actors decide to take greater action to combat wildlife trafficking, they find inter-institutional, regional, and international cooperation are lacking; there is insufficient scientific data on which to base policy; and strategies that adequately engage indigenous peoples and local communities are complex and time consuming.

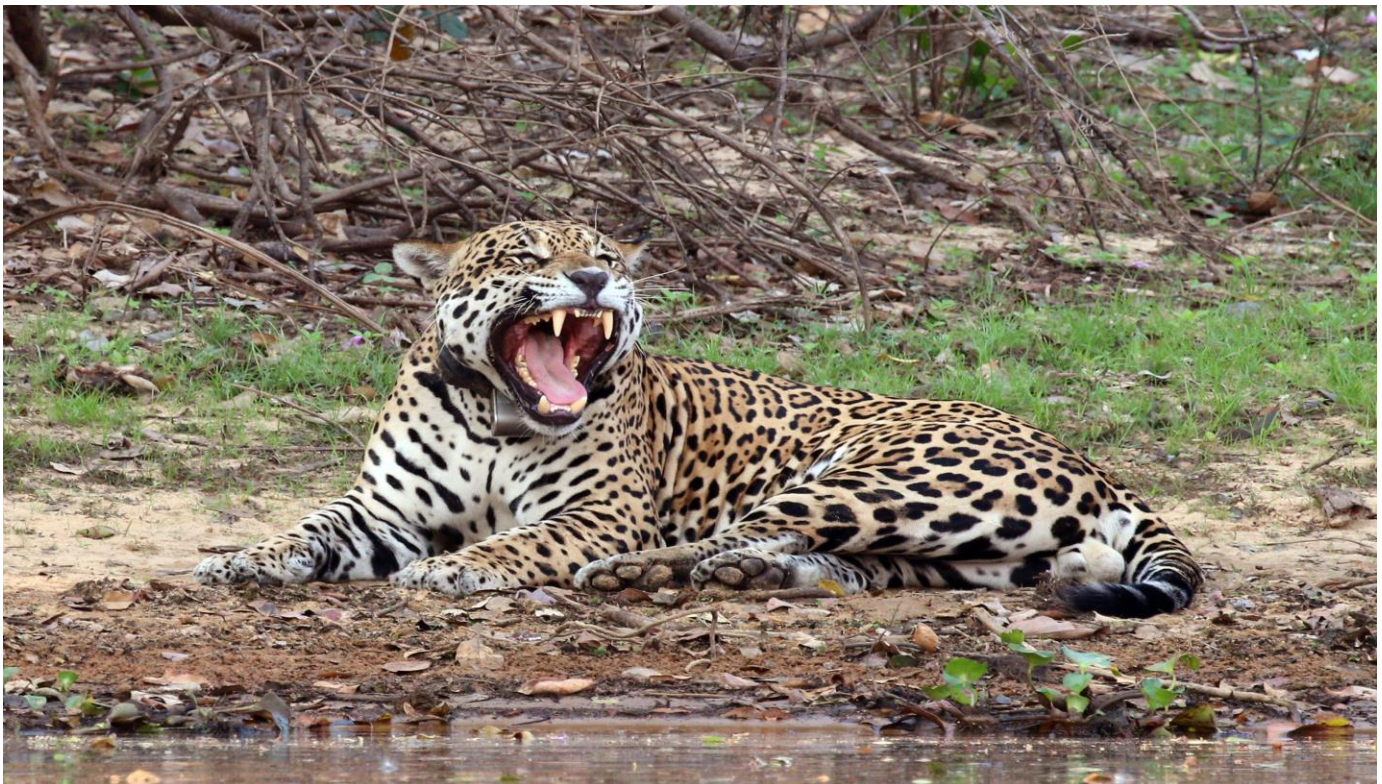


Precious Corals and Sea Turtle Shell Jewelry  
Items seized for Commercial Export Shipments

## Recommendations:

To overcome these challenges, Defenders of Wildlife is working with partners throughout Latin America to reduce IUWT. Every country has unique circumstances, but we believe wide implementation of the following policy recommendations would contribute significantly to the fight against IUWT:

- **Make combatting IUWT a national and regional priority.**
- **Expand and enhance demand reduction and awareness raising efforts.**
- **National legislation should prohibit trafficking of wildlife in violation of an applicable international agreement or any domestic or foreign law and make wildlife trafficking a serious crime.**
- **Support the adoption of a new protocol on the illicit trafficking of wildlife under the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (“UNTOC”).**
- **Work to strengthen the implementation of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) & the CMS (Convention on Migratory Species).**
- **Improve national monitoring and reporting of trade in wildlife.**
- **Foster collaboration and information sharing on a multi-institutional, national and international level.**
- **Improve the enforcement of existing wildlife laws.**
- **Combat corruption and organized crime, including by uncovering illicit flows of money and recovering illegal gains and assets.**



*Panthera onca palustris* male yawning with radio collar - Rio Negro, Pantanal, Brazil @Charles J. Sharp