

Intag Andean Bear's Project Update

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From September 2001 through March 2004 we radio collared 8 wild Andean bears (4 females and 4 males) in the Intag region of Ecuador, to propose conservation and management alternatives for the population. This year we were expecting to capture two more bears, during corn season (April through July), but unfortunately, we did not succeed. To increase the effectiveness of capture, we set "Iznachi" traps in different cornfields, but only previously radio-collared bears approached these sites, staying far away so that we could not recapture them.

After corn season, the "Iznachi" traps were set on bear trails in the cloud forest away from radio-collared bear home ranges, where they are now waiting for "new" bears. If we do not succeed in more captures, in the next corn season will use trained dogs to chase bears up to the trees, where we can immobilize them with darts.

During the last corn season, the bears' movements showed an increase of home range size when looking for cornfields. Females (n=4) had an average of 28.95 km² and males (n=2) 108.6 km², estimated by a 100% minimum convex polygon. The last two males captured were not included in the analysis because the data collected was not enough.

For the next corn season, we identified a cornfield where it is possible to observe and easily film Andean bears raiding. Thus, we will start a study on Andean bear behavior in cornfields, aiming to estimate the real value of the damages, and generate a database for a compensation program in Intag.

At the end of May, "Panchito", an adult male bear removed his radio-collar 13 months after tagging, because the cotton-polyester spacer disintegrated prematurely; this is second time this problem is encountered. We are currently radio tracking five bears, three females and two males, the latter do not have spacers in the radio collars, and they are progressively harder to find and follow. Probably they came from very remote and inaccessible areas, because they have disappeared for as much as 20 days.

Although we thought of using an airplane for tracking, it was not possible due to the strong turbulence caused by the mountains. For future captures of males we

will consider the use of satellite or GPS collars, since they have proved to be very difficult to find on the ground.

We are preparing the first article on Andean Bear hematology and blood chemistry, analyzing samples collected from September 1995 to March 2004, from 30 free-ranging and captive bears. We hope that our results provide reference values to help in disease and malnutrition diagnosis for wild and captive animals. We expect feedback from experts on the manuscript prior to publication.

In the current year this project has been supported by the International Association for Bear Research and Management (IBA), Idea Wild, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and volunteers.