

Reports of Andean Bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*) attacks on bovine livestock in Ecuador

Armando Castellanos
Fundación Espíritu del Bosque
Andean Bear Foundation
e-mail:iznachi@yahoo.com.mx
Barcelona 311 y Tolosa
Quito-Ecuador

The Spanish chronicler Antonio Herrera y Tordesillas reported the first attacks by Andean Bears (*Tremarctos ornatus*) on livestock in South America in the middle of the 16th Century. Similarly, Juan de Velasco narrated accounts of bear hunting during the 18th Century but did not offer an explanation for the practice. In the 19th and 20th Century, the Andean Bear was accused of attacking livestock in its distribution zone and, as a result, was hunted.

Petroleum exploration in Ecuador began during the 1970's, and was soon followed by the expansion of farming and cattle ranching into previously undeveloped areas. This expansion, combined with the reduction in habitat led to an increase in human – bear conflicts.

In 1995, a juvenile male bear reintroduced into the Maquipucuna Reserve (Pichincha Province) was confirmed to have attacked and killed three calves. This was the first confirmed attack of livestock by an Andean Bear. This situation was resolved by relocating the bear to a more remote area. In 1999 reports arose of livestock attacks in the valleys of the Cosanga and Oyacachi Rivers. These rivers are located in the foothills of the north eastern Cordillera, Ecuador. Between April 2000 and 2001, thirty-one attacks on livestock were attributed to Andean Bears in the valley of the Cosanga River (Napo Province). Twenty-six of these attacks were fatal and four led to long-term injury. One of these attacks was later shown to have been incorrectly attributed to bears. In response to this “problem”, local cattle farmers were reported to have killed eleven bears (seven of these bears were shot and four were poisoned (none of these cases were confirmed by the author)). Twenty - five attacks were registered in the same area between May 2001 and March 2002. These left fifteen cows, one bull, three young bulls and three calves dead whilst two cows and one calf were injured. Three bears were implicated in these attacks and subsequently killed. However, only one of these bears was the actual predator. In early 2003, five attacks on calves were confirmed in the *páramos* (high grasslands) of Julio Andrade (Carchi Province), whilst in Mazar (Azua Province), six cows were attacked and eaten.

Not all Andean Bears attack livestock. It is not known at present why some bears attack livestock and others do not. Various methods to decrease and prevent human-bear conflict exist. As such, the current management strategy of hunting and killing Andean Bears as a response to livestock attacks must be carefully analysed as “innocent” bears have been killed in some areas to eliminate the “bear problem”.