

Tapirs in Mexico: researchers working together towards a common goal

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On March 20th 2013, several members of the IUCN/SSC Tapir Specialist Group of Mexico got together to present the most recent updates in terms of research on the Baird's tapir in Mexico. The meeting was organized by Eduardo Mendoza and was carried out at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco during the IV Congreso Mexicano de Ecología. The presentations covered themes from the species' distribution, movements, abundance, and new records, to a couple of studies on the Baird's tapir ecological function and various aspects of tapirs in captivity in Mexico. The main threats to tapir populations in the country were identified as habitat loss and fragmentation, hunting, fire and road-kill.

The participants set short and long-term goals to expand the knowledge of tapirs in Mexico and improve conservation practices. Among the goals, we identified the need to carry out more studies in Oaxaca, Veracruz, Tabasco and Yucatan to identify isolated populations. In particular in Oaxaca, more studies are necessary to evaluate the limits of tapir's distribution in this region of Mexico. Other goals included the development of an awareness program for communities living in close contact with the species, identification of movement patterns and dependency of tapirs on waterholes, assessment of the health status of tapirs in captivity and in the wild, and identification of potential disease transmission between domestic animals and tapirs. In addition, we identified the need to build stronger collaborations and increase communication among members and to organize future meetings to discuss advances and information gaps. This meeting served as the perfect venue to re-consolidate the group of tapir experts in Mexico and to further achieve some of the goals of the Baird's Tapir Action Plan (2005) at a country level. This re-organization of the group might set the basis to develop the Baird's Tapir Action Plan in Mexico, to identify main gaps of knowledge, goals and initiatives to further promote research and conservation of tapirs in Mexico.

As part of the new initiative to promote communication among Mexican scientists, researchers and conservationists interested in tapir populations; the coordinator of the group decided to create a web

page to better demonstrate the state of research in Mexico. For this webpage and to identify our group in Mexico, a contest was carried out to find the logo for our group. By the March 1st 2013 deadline we obtained 7 interesting and sophisticated logos and we are pleased to present the new logo for the Tapir Specialist Group Mexico. The winner Maria José Montiel Castañeda presented a logo that features an abstraction of the tapir's figure emphasizing the natural patterns of its fur through motifs that allude to indigenous Mexican art. This logo shows our commitment to the conservation of tapirs in partnership with the people most intimately involved with the species in our country.



Fostering International Cooperation for Baird's Tapir Conservation in a Northern Portion of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor

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In September 2012, TSG Honduras country coordinator Nereyda Estrada, Baird's tapir species coordinator Manolo Garcia, and Nicaragua country coordinator Christopher Jordan met in Tegucigalpa, Honduras to: i) conduct a joint MAXENT analysis to assess the potential of a northern portion of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor as Baird's tapir *Tapirus bairdii* habitat, and ii) conduct a workshop for Honduran Forestry, Protected Areas and Wildlife Conservation Institute (ICF), university

students, and NGO employees on the use of the MAXENT software. In their MAXENT analysis, the three members of the TSG used presence data from Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala to model potential Baird's tapir habitat across the three countries.

The results of the modeling process indicate that several regions within the three study countries appear integral to the long-term conservation of Baird's tapirs. The Selva Maya region of Guatemala and the swath of forest comprised of the Honduran Moskitia and Nicaragua's Bosawas Reserve are particularly large areas of highly suitable habitat. Additionally, the model highlighted Nicaragua's Caribbean coast as a potentially important tapir corridor connecting the Honduran Moskitia and the Nicaragua/Costa Rica border.

The activities opened with presentations on the status of tapirs in Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. This was followed by an exercise in which the facilitators guided the 20 participants through the process of using MAXENT to model a species' potential distribution. To conclude, the tri-national tapir distribution modeling results were presented to

participants, who were then prompted to discuss the important implications that international cooperation has for Baird's tapir conservation and ideas for encouraging international conservation efforts.

The workshop succeeded in capacitating participants in MAXENT, refining the general understanding of the Baird's tapir's potential distribution in northern Central America, increasing international tapir awareness, and underscoring the importance of international collaboration between both researchers and practitioners. The events were graciously funded by the ICF, Proyecto Moskitia, and Proyecto Ecosistemas of the United Nations Development Program Global Environment Facility.

Nereyda, Manolo, and Chris are currently seeking resources to implement research and conservation initiatives based on their MAXENT findings and to conduct a similar workshop in Nicaragua to inspire conservationists in a country in which tapir conservation activities have historically been lacking. In addition, they are preparing a manuscript on the habitat model which they intend to submit for peer review before the end of the year.



Figure 1: Nereyda, Manolo, and Chris take a photo with a number of workshop participants after the final day of activities.