

Tapir Conservation National Action Plan in Ecuador

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Background

The process to make a successful National Action Plan for tapir conservation in Ecuador began after our participation in the Mountain Tapir Population and Habitat Viability Assessment, held in Pereira, Colombia in 2004. During this meeting, the members of the TSG-Ecuador, realized the importance of developing a conservation plan to guide the main conservation actions for the three tapir species in Ecuador. Some years later, as a result of the Lowland Tapir PHVA and the Third and Fourth International Tapir Symposiums, the idea to formulate a National Tapir Conservation Action Plan had matured. Following this, many meetings and national workshops have been held in Ecuador, to enable us to develop our national action plan for Ecuador.

The Process to produce the National Action Plan

The idea to develop a national tapir conservation action plan was concretized in 2005 through a study undertaken by Natalia Torres and Ana Correa, two of our TSG members and students of the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL). The study was targeted researchers, park rangers, decision makers, environmental authorities, zoos and breeding and rescue centers as well as other actors involved in tapir conservation in Ecuador. These study design was based on previous methodologies used to develop the Argentinean and Colombian National Action Plans and, we enjoyed extensive technical support from Silvia Chalukian and Olga Montenegro. Furthermore, we had solid institutional support from the Environmental Ministry of Ecuador (MAE) with the help of Gabriela Montoya.

During the preliminary process we compiled existing information regarding the status of tapirs from all people involved in conservation of the three tapir species in Ecuador. By the end of 2007 we produced the first draft of the national tapir conservation action plan. Simultaneously, we continued to discuss tapir conservation with environmental authorities of MAE, IUCN representatives and members of the TSG in order to plan immediate and future activities, consolidate the process and engage more institutions, potential donors and sponsors and decision makers.

The final draft was sent to national and international researchers and tapir specialists in order to get feedback and suggestions of how it could possibly be improved? Ensuring that contributions followed participative and consensus driven approach we formulated five strategic guidelines for tapir conservation: i) *Ex-situ* conservation, ii) *In-situ* conservation, iii) Environmental education and communication, iv) Policy and legislation and v) Institutional enforcement.

Workshops for Validation of the National Tapir Conservation Action Plan

A National Workshop for the Validation of the National Tapir Conservation Action Plan was held on the 8th and 9th of May, 2009, in Baños de Agua Santa, Tungurahua-Ecuador.

The meeting gathered 45 participants from a wide variety of sectors i.e. researchers, local communities, TSG members, veterinarians, zoos and rescue centers representatives, environmental authorities and park rangers. The main task during the workshop was to review each one of the five strategic guidelines, review and discuss the IUCN-listing of Ecuador's three tapir species and strengthen inter-institutional partnerships between all stakeholders of tapir conservation in the

country. We applied a participative methodology with working groups and plenary, and then prioritized conservation actions, resulting in seven specific goals and 32 priority conservation actions necessary to ensure the existence and survival of viable population of the three tapir species in Ecuador in perpetuity.

More recently, the draft National Tapir Conservation Action Plan was sent for a final revision to ensure that it had captured all the development processes and conservation priorities. The final version of the National Tapir Conservation Action Plan is expected to be printed at the end of March 2010, and officially presented at Government Level during the next few months. It is important to remark that the action plan is supported by the Environmental Ministry of Ecuador and will be recognized in the Official Register of the National Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador. This will allow conservationists, land-use planners and researchers to be guided by a plan that is statutory and, consequently, a huge boost for tapir conservation in the country.

Lessons Learned

An effective process to build a national conservation strategy should involve decision making bodies like the Environmental Ministry and IUCN at an early stage in the process, because these entities are responsible for adjusting and/or amending the legislative framework to support the implementation of wildlife conservation in Ecuador, for example, the National Tapir Action Plan. Simultaneously, it is essential to maintain a continuous communication and exchanging of ideas and experience with all stakeholder involved in biodiversity conservation, in this case, particularly concerning tapirs.

It is important that the benefits and opportunities of a species national action plan are articulated clearly to sponsors and donors during the development process, which allows for the establishment of cross-sectoral strategic alliances and partnerships. An early inclusion of these stakeholders allows them to share and appreciate the relevance of the objectives, goals and results of such plans in wildlife conservation and how it benefits overall sustainable development.

The foundation in producing the National Tapir Conservation Action Plan was the preliminary study that compiled the existing knowledge about tapirs, synthesized tapir conservation experiences and allowed us to undertake technical surveys and interviews with specialists, facilitating the next steps needed to formulate the action plan. Thus, students and researchers are key actors in driving the entire process.

A participative process that engages key stakeholders concerned with tapir conservation is one of the main tasks of action planning. Here, discussions

and analyses can take place in a collective forum that allows participants to get familiar with the initial idea of a national action plan, as well as how to develop and implement it. It will encourage all stakeholders to engage more in tapir conservation, which the priority action steps more realistic and, consequently, the plan easier to implement.

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Figure 1. Fernando Nogales (TSG country coordinator) presenting the National Action Plan.



Figure 2. Defining threat categories for tapir species during the workshop (Arturo Mora, UICN).



Figure 3. Working groups analyzing the strategic guidelines of the plan.



Figure 4. Delegates from different countries in consultation.



Figure 5. Poster of Tapir Conservation Workshop held in Ecuador 2009, designed by Finding Species Inc.



Figure 6. Workshop's participants. Baños de Agua Santa, Tungurahua-Ecuador 2009 (in the middle: Felipe, the mountain tapir).