

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

Record of a mountain tapir attacked by an Andean bear on a camera trap

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Studies of carnivores have shown little support to the possibility of tigers *Panthera tigris* preying on Malayan tapirs (*Tapirus indicus*) (Linkie and Ridout 2011). Similarly, lowland tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*) and Baird's tapirs (*Tapirus bairdii*) are possibly part of the diet of jaguars (*Panthera onca*), nevertheless few records in scats exist (Weckel *et al.* 2006). In the high Andes, the potential predators of the mountain tapirs (*Tapirus pinchaque*) are pumas (*Puma concolor*) and Andean bears (*Tremarctos ornatus*). Some clues, such as mountain tapir hairs found in Andean bear feces and captured mountain tapirs carrying large scars presumably produced by Andean bears, have been reported (Castellanos 2011). However, hairs are not evidence of bears being able to attack tapirs, since they could also have been obtained from eating an already dead tapir. Direct evidence of mountain tapirs as preys of Andean bears has not been obtained yet.

In this note we report an Andean bear attack on a mountain tapir. The picture (Fig. 1) is part of an ongoing effort to study large mammals in Purace and "Los Guacharos" Cave National Parks on the Central Andes of Colombia. From 6 December 2013 to 31 January 2014, 12 camera traps (Bushnell) were located in the area known as "Salado Granadillos".



Figure 1. Mountain tapir attacked by an Andean bear. Picture from a camera trap in the Central Andes of Colombia.

Each camera trap was separated from the next by 50 meters in a linear transect. The camera traps recorded several mammals such as: mountain tapir, Andean bear, little coati (*Nasua olivácea*), South American coati (*Nasua nasua*), Colombian weasel (*Mustela felipei*), white tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), little red brocket (*Mazama rufina*) and northern pudu (*Pudu mephistophiles*). A total of 234 pictures of mountain tapirs have been collected across 10 cameras so far. One of the pictures, taken on 2 January 2014 at 16:22 hours in the location 1° 52' 19.9" N, -76° 27' 5" W, showed clearly an Andean bear on top of the back of an adult mountain tapir. The Andean bear hangs by its paws, his head is visible and is not biting the tapir. The attacked animal seems to be walking fast or running and its head is blurry, nevertheless a mountain tapir is easily recognized in the picture by the size, color, and shape of the legs. We do not have enough evidence to affirm that the mountain tapir was killed as result of the attack, so we do not report it as a predation event. However, we consider the event as a predation attempt of an Andean bear on a mountain tapir, an event never previously recorded.

It is interesting that in the picture, the attack is on an adult animal, despite young tapirs being expected to be more susceptible to predation. Tapirs have the ability to run through thick understory and dive into rivers. A running tapir is able to break through bushes with branches 2-3 inches (5-8 cm) thick (Schauenberg 1969). An Andean bear gripping the back of the tapir will have a hard time holding on to its prey while it runs through the thick understory.

Andean bears are omnivorous but mainly frugivorous/folivorous (García-Rangel 2012) displaying a strong preference for bromeliads (Goldstein 2004, Troya *et al.* 2004). Nevertheless, they also have been reported as predators of cattle (Goldstein *et al.* 2006).

If Andean bears are able to kill a cow or a horse, which are usually much heavier than mountain tapirs, it is likely that they are also able to prey on a mountain tapir. The picture recorded at Purace NP together with previous records of tapir hairs in bear fecal samples, confirm that Andean bears do attack mountain tapirs, and thus, lends support to the hypothesis that Andean bears prey on mountain tapirs.

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