

## ■ SOUTH AMERICA

### **French Guiana Status of Lowland Tapirs (*Tapirus terrestris*) in French Guiana: A Preliminary Assessment**

*By Benoit de Thoisy & I. Vogel*

French Guiana is the smallest country of the Guiana shield. It belongs to and is administered by France. The Guiana shield is considered to be one of the largest remaining blocks of rainforest and approximately 90% of an area of French Guiana is still covered by moist, upland forest. However, the country is now facing a dramatic increase in human activity. As part of a large-scale study aiming to assess the status of primates in the northern part of the country, some preliminary data have been collected on the status of lowland tapirs (*Tapirus terrestris*) in French Guiana.

The main threat to the tapir in French Guiana is from hunting. The species is not legally protected and was classified in 1995 as one of 12 game species. Therefore it can be harvested and sold without any limits on numbers taken. In the southern part of the country, subsistence hunting occurs, but the main hunting pressure comes from illegal gold miners who are widespread on most of rivers and tributaries. In the north, logging activities result in clearings for hundreds of kilometres of tracks. Despite a very selective timber harvest, such easy access for hunters into large forested areas has dramatic consequences for large species. At the national level forested habitats are not fragmented, but no more than 3% of the country is under protection. Four of the 5 existing nature reserves have forested habitats, but the tapir is present in only 3 of them. The National Park project, which has been planned for 15 years, is now frozen possibly due to lobbying from the gold mining industry.

We assume that the tapir is still present in large areas of French Guiana but believe nevertheless, the direct harvest must be urgently restricted. Although it may not resolve the entire problem, the species must be legally protected. The tapir is regarded as the main game species by most local people, and as a result, the French government may be reluctant to pass legislation to restrict tapir hunting. In the northern belt, probably the more efficient way to reduce the hunting threat would be an improved optimisation and planning of logging activities. This may prevent laying

waste to suitable habitats, reduce access to pristine forest, optimise refuges, source areas, and corridors (de Thoisy *et al.*, 2001). The closure of tracks after logging would also allow population recovery in logged forests. In the south of the country, management and auto regulation by communities should be attempted, but external and uncontrolled pressure from gold miners may cause conflict. There may not be an optimistic outcome to these issues and thus for the conservation of the tapir and other game species and aquatic wildlife (otters, fish, carnivorous birds) unless the French government assumes its responsibilities in terms of conserving biodiversity within its territories.

#### **Reference**

de Thoisy, B., Dewynter, M., Joubert, P., & Latreille C. 2001. Hunting and logging: GIS as a tool for forest management. V Congreso sobre el manejo de Fauna Silvestre en Latin Amazonia y Amazonia. Cartagena, Colombia.

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## **Colombia**

### **Conflict Between Mountain Tapirs (*Tapirus bairdii*) and Farmers in the Colombian Central Andes**

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In the last century the "Antioqueña" colonisation process transformed the Colombian Andean forest to cropland. This was predominantly in the form of coffee plantations, as coffee was the top Colombian export product in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Simultaneously, cities like Ibagué, Armenia, Pereira and Manizales were founded on an economy based on coffee and thus dependent on the exploitation of natural resources. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Pereira, the capital of Risaralda State, was the oldest coffee producer in Colombia. Due to the highest human population in the country, habitat fragmentation and loss increased. River levels diminished and demands for wild meat increased. For this reason the Ministry of Agriculture bought almost all the farms on the Otún river basin. These lands were