

The First International Tapir Symposium

By Patrícia Medici and Charles Foerster



We would like to start by saying that this is just an informal report to give you an idea of what happened in Costa Rica! Complete reports will be prepared as soon as we finish compiling the final results, plans, and ideas generated by the conference. All the information, including pictures, will be available on the

Tapir Gallery website soon!

The symposium was a historic event! Never before have there been so many tapir experts and conservationists assembled under one roof to share their knowledge and address the challenges ahead for these endangered species. It took us two years and a lot of work and energy to organize the event but it was worth it!

We had 85 participants, of which 27 were Tapir Specialist Group members (42% of the group; quite a significant number!). Participants included field researchers, husbandry and captive management specialists, non-governmental organization representatives, university representatives and other key players in the development and implementation of tapir conservation programs.

A significant fact about this conference was the level of zoo participation. Ten years ago there was little or no collaboration between zoos and tapir field researchers. Today, modern zoos are focusing more on their primary mission of conservation rather than just exhibition. A good example of the modern zoos' new commitment to conservation is the support they gave to the tapir symposium. Our budget for the symposium was just over \$50,000, and over 80% was covered by donations from four major zoos (Houston, Los Angeles, Disney and San Diego). The directors of two of these contributory zoos, Rick Barongi from the Houston Zoo and Manuel Mollinedo from the Los Angeles Zoo, attended the symposium.

One of the significant events at the symposium was the auction conducted to raise funds to donate to Dr. Daniel Janzen's efforts to purchase reserve land in the Area de Conservación Guanacaste in Costa Rica. One of the first things that the members of the planning committee discussed at the beginning of the symposium

organization was that we would like to leave something behind in Costa Rica. We wanted the symposium to somehow contribute to a conservation program in the country and Dr. Janzen gave us the opportunity. Attendees were asked to bring typical items from their countries to sell at the auction. Wally Van Sickle (Idea Wild, United States) kindly organized and conducted the auction and the symposium raised \$5,000 for Janzen's project. And that's not all. Before the auction was held, the Wege Foundation had agreed to match any amount we collected through the auction. So, in all, we actually raised \$10,000 which will buy 15 hectares of threatened rainforest in Costa Rica.



Rick Barongi, Director of the Houston Zoo, Chair of the AZA Tapir TAG, and member of TSG, opening the First International Tapir Symposium.

Photo by Patrícia Medici

Specific topics of the paper sessions were Ecological Studies, Population Management, Husbandry and Education, Veterinary Issues/Diseases and Tapir Bio-Politics. In all, 48 papers and 9 posters were presented. All of these presentations and posters provided the audience with a very complete overview of current tapir research (*in-situ* and *ex-situ*). The keynote speakers were Richard Bodmer (Kent University, UK), Daniel Janzen (University of Pennsylvania, United States) and, William Konstant (Conservation International, United States) and their speeches were truly inspiring. Special evening presentations were con-

ducted by Wally Van Sickle and Matthew Colbert (University of Texas, United States). The titles of all presentations, as well as the abstracts and contacts of the presenters will be available online soon.

We also conducted four workshops to discuss more specific topics related to tapir research and conservation. Wally Van Sickle conducted an amazing workshop on fundraising and exchanged ideas with participants on how to acquire funds to sustain their projects for the long term. Patty Peters (Columbus Zoo, United States) and Diane Ledder (Disney, United States) conducted a Marketing and Media Affairs workshop and shared with us their experience of how to get the conservation message out to the general public. Patrícia Medici conducted two other workshops. The first one, the IUCN/SSC Tapir Specialist Group workshop, was more of a presentation about our ideas for the future and the next steps we need to take in order to make the group more active in terms of tapir conservation. Our species coordinators, Emilio Constantino from Colombia (Mountain Tapir), Denis Torres from Venezuela (Lowland Tapir), Eduardo Naranjo from Mexico (Baird's Tapir) and, Nico van Strien from The Netherlands (Malay Tapir) were introduced to the audience and made brief comments about their views on the future of the group. For the second workshop, which focused on the Tapir Action Plan (TAP), Patrícia had the great help of Alfredo Cuarón from Mexico, who participated in the process of writing the first edition of the TAP. During that session, we discussed the need to review the 1997 version and the creation of a group of people to work on that.

The last session of the symposium was a plenary session which we called "Plans for Action". It was beautifully conducted by Susie Ellis (Conservation International, United States) who used her skills to help us to establish our priorities and get participants committed to the tasks and challenges we will have ahead of us. Each task has a leader who will be responsible for it and a committee of volunteers that will help the leader to reach the objectives. Some of the goals for the near future are related to the structure of the TSG, internal and external communication and fundraising. In terms of structure, new guidelines for future membership will be established (coordinators Patrícia Medici and Lewis Greene). Wilson Novarino and Sonia Hernandez-Divers have agreed to lead a committee that will work on annual plans for the group's activities. Matthew Colbert, Heidi Frohring, and Patrícia Medici will direct a committee to list the tasks for each one of the positions we have created. Charles Foerster and his com-

mittee will develop a set of guidelines for proposals seeking TSG endorsement/support. In terms of internal communication, we will revise the 1997 version of the Tapir Action Plan (coordinators Alfredo Cuarón and Patrícia Medici). Rick Barongi has agreed to lead a group to improve the communication between field biologists and zoos. Ways to improve communication between biologists and veterinarians will be explored by Sonia Hernandez-Divers and her committee. In terms of external communication, Alberto Mendoza will coordinate an effort to develop educational and TSG brochures. Charles Foerster, William Bob Harris, and Patrícia Medici will explore funding opportunities for TSG and tapir research projects.



Dr. Daniel Janzen receiving a cheque for \$10,000 from TSG Chair, Patrícia Medici, for the Área de Conservación Guanacaste in Costa Rica.

Photo by Sonia Hernandez-Divers

Another noteworthy event at the symposium was a meeting held by the veterinarians present to discuss the concerns of veterinarians working with tapirs. Some of the issues considered were a) lack of communication, b) lack of access to other veterinarian's data, research project information, articles published, c) the need to improve the availability of local vets for field projects that need veterinary support, and d) the need to discuss the AZA Tapir TAG and IUCN/SSC TSG Veterinary Committee goals. As a result of this meeting the group of veterinarians, under the guidance of Dr. Sonia Her-

nandez-Divers, have created a list of tasks for the near future. Some of the tasks include making a list of potential functions of veterinarians in research projects, training biologists and veterinary students, improving communications between veterinary and biology/ecology universities, developing a veterinary website and a list serve for tapir related questions and for listing relevant publications.

A group of Colombian researchers and students gathered together at the symposium to form a specialist group of those who work with tapirs in Colombia. A direct result of this meeting was the creation of the "Colombian Tapir Network". This is reported on in more detail in this newsletter.

During the next few months, we will be asking all paper and poster presenters and keynote speakers to send us their complete articles so we can start working on the symposium proceedings. That will be as important as the event itself! We must ensure that all the information and recommendations that resulted from the symposium are published and implemented so that there are immediate and long-term benefits for tapir conservation worldwide. All participants will receive a copy of the proceedings. If you did not attend the symposium but are interested in receiving a copy of the proceedings, please let us know.

All participants are very excited about the possibility of having this symposium every two years and we decided to do so. The options for the next one (2003) are Venezuela, Colombia or Ecuador. Another option would be to stay in Costa Rica.

First International Tapir Symposium Planning Committee

- Rick Barongi, Houston Zoo, AZA Tapir TAG, United States
- Mike Dee, Los Angeles Zoo, AZA Tapir TAG, United States
- Heidi Frohring, Woodland Park Zoo, United States
- Lewis Greene, Prospect Park Zoo, Wildlife Conservation Society, AZA Tapir TAG, United States
- Sonia Hernandez-Divers, University of Georgia, AZA Tapir TAG, United States
- Donald Janssen, San Diego Zoo, AZA Tapir TAG, United States
- Sharon Matola, Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center, Belize
- Patrícia Medici, IPÊ – Instituto de Pesquisas Ecológicas, Brazil

- Phil Schaeffer, Caligo Ventures, United States
- Brandie Smith, American Zoo and Aquarium Association, United States
- Sheryl Todd, Tapir Preservation Fund, United States

Organizations

IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Tapir Specialist Group; American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) Tapir Taxon Advisory Group (TTAG); Tapir Preservation Fund (TPF).

Symposium management and organization

Caligo Ventures (United States); Horizontes (San Jose, Costa Rica); Corobici Melia Confort Hotel (San Jose, Costa Rica)

Funding agencies

Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund; Houston Zoo; Los Angeles Zoo; San Diego Zoo; Wildlife Trust; Tapir Preservation Fund – Club Tapir; Conservation International; Wildlife Conservation Society; Continental Airlines.

Sponsors of Participants

Zoo Conservation Outreach Group – ZCOG (United States); American Association of Zookeepers (AAZK) – The Puget Sound Chapter (United States); International Gibbon Foundation (Indonesia); Natureza e Sociedade/Programa de Treinamento para Profissionais na Área de Conservação – USAID/WWF (Brazil); German Research Community – DFG (Germany); Fundación Tropenbos (Colombia); World Society for the Protection of Animals (United States); Zoocriadero Ecopets (Venezuela); El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (Mexico); Instituto de Ecología – UNAM (Mexico); Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (Spain); Wildlife Conservation Society (United States); Ark Angels (Canada); Conservation International Colombia; Fundación APAS (Colombia); Fundacite (Venezuela); University of Malaysia (Malaysia).

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Conservation Committees Founded

Red Danta Colombia (Colombian Tapir Network)

By Diego Lizcano

The Tapir Network of Colombia was the result of a lunch at the First International Tapir Symposium in Costa Rica. The Colombian participants were motivated to create the network because Colombia is the only country that has all the Neotropical tapir species. Despite this privilege, the local people don't know very much about tapirs and the situation of the species in the field is very worrying.

Currently there is a good quantity of information available on the web about tapirs but little of this information is accessible to Spanish speakers. It is for this reason that one of the main objectives of the Colombian Tapir Network is to share information in Spanish about tapir ecology and conservation projects carried out in Colombia. Our goals for the network are to promote study and conservation projects about tapirs in our country. We are also interested in sensible discussion about policies that concern tapirs. We are field researchers, conservationists and students interested in tapir ecology and conservation. To date we have developed a web page (<http://clik.to/danta>) and an e-mail list of Colombians interested in tapirs.

Each species has its own coordinator. Jaime Andres Suarez is in charge of mountain tapir (*Tapirus pinchaque*) information, Javier A. Sarria for lowland tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*) and Emilio Constantino for Baird's tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*). Other group members offer advice and support to the species coordinators. Franz Kaston Florez is the veterinary assessor, communicator and diffuser of scientific information to the group. Delio Mendoza is responsible for the use of new technology in the study of tapirs. Hector Ruiz is interested in subsistence hunting. Diego Lizcano, Alonso Quedo and David Alfonso Bejarano are interested in the ecology and conservation of mountain tapir and Sergio Sandoval, a specialist in large Andean mammals, is the web master. We welcome the addition of new members to the group. We hope to be strong enough to influence our government in developing good tapir conservation policy. In the near future, we expect to publish detailed information on our web page about tapir studies in ecology, conservation projects and zoos exhibiting

and zoos exhibiting tapirs. If you are interested in finding out more, or would like to join us, then please visit our web page. <http://clik.to/danta>

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The Mexican Committee for Tapir Conservation and Recovery (MCT)

By Eduardo Naranjo

The Mexican Committee for Tapir Conservation and Recovery (MCT) was formally created on November 30th, 2001. This committee is sponsored by the National Institute of Ecology (INE), which is an agency of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT). The MCT was initially composed of 15 professionals (mainly biologists and veterinarians) who have worked with tapirs in Mexico. However, we expect more people to join the group in the future. Eduardo Naranjo (President), Epigmenio Cruz (Secretary), and Alfredo Cuarón (Information Vocal) constitute the first board of directors. None of the members of the MCT receives any payment for their services, although there may be a possibility for group members to obtain partial funding in order to attend group meetings.

The following are the proposed, primary goals of the MCT:

1. To be the "official" consultancy group for national and international institutions and persons related to conservation, management and research on tapirs and their habitat in Mexico.
2. To suggest and promote actions and policies for the conservation and recovery of Mexican tapir populations.
3. To facilitate communication among people and institutions interested in tapir conservation and research in Mexico.

The initial tasks of the MCT are:

1. Identification of priorities for conservation, management and research on tapirs and their habitats in Mexico (review and adaptation of the IUCN Action Plan).
2. Discussion and proposal of specific, immediate actions to be taken in order to address the identified priorities for tapir conservation.
3. Coordinate with the IUCN Tapir Specialist Group to obtain funding for tapir research in Mexico.
4. Creation of a database and a web site to include available information about tapirs in Mexico.
5. Publication of a National Action Plan for tapir conservation and recovery in Mexico.

At the moment, the most important goal for us is the publication of the national action plan. We have set deadlines and personal commitments to achieve this goal, and we will hold a couple of two-day meetings this year to discuss our progress with the manuscript.

Eduardo Naranjo

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Current Project Updates

■ CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICAN JOINT PROJECT

The Influence of Large Herbivores on Neotropical Forests

By Patricia Medici and Charles Foerster

Four TSG members are joining forces to investigate the role tapirs and other large herbivores play in maintaining and shaping the plant communities of Neotropical forests. Specifically, we will examine how the removal of the large herbivores will affect the physical structure and floristic diversity of the understory vegetation in four different ecosystems of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica.

Many ecologists have documented the important roles played by large animals in seed dispersal, seed predation, herbivory, pollination, and predation, but until recently few have considered what would happen if the large animals were removed from the system. In order to simulate the removal of these herbivores from the forests, we will construct exclosures that will prevent them from foraging in selected areas. The results obtained will provide additional insights into the ecological functions of these herbivores. Tropical rainforests are the most complex and important ecosystems on the earth. How would these forests change if the large her-

bivores were removed? How do large herbivores contribute to the success and functioning of tropical ecosystems?

Past field research on tropical herbivores has focused primarily on their basic ecology, population dynamics and the risk of extinction of small populations. Genetic viability and demographic parameters are the most common concerns surrounding low population sizes. However, by emphasizing the importance of plant-animal interactions, it can also be argued that reduced numbers or complete absence of large herbivores will have an impact on the functioning of the ecosystem.

The results obtained will provide additional insights into the ecological functions of these herbivores, which will, in turn, enhance existing and future management plans. By showing the importance of large herbivores in maintaining the ecological processes of plant communities, wildlife managers will be better able to justify the implementation of programs designed to prevent the disappearance of large herbivores in the forest. For example, environmental education programs can focus on the importance of herbivores in the forest. Law enforcement agencies can use this information to justify increased efforts to reduce hunting pressure. The results can also justify the implementation of specific habitat management programs such as the creation of protected areas large enough to maintain viable populations of large herbivores, the establishment of