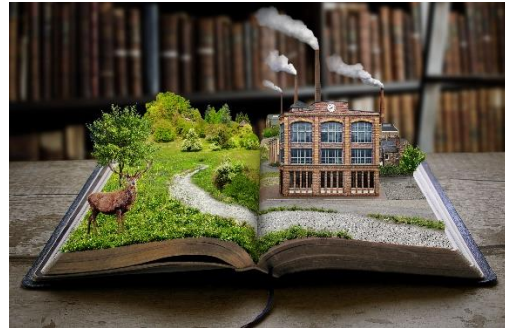


*Use of evidence for decision-making by conservation practitioners in the illegal wildlife trade*

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In recent years, the illegal trade in jaguars has become a growing concern for conservation scientists, decision-makers and practitioners. One of the key challenges to addressing this threat to jaguars is that even though we know that the problem exists, there is little information available on the issue, and a large portion of it is based on anecdotes that have not been confirmed through scientific studies or enforcement efforts. Regardless, those in charge of addressing the illegal jaguar trade (and the trade in wildlife more generally) need to act quickly to avoid loss of species. Sometimes, though, acting quickly in reliance on bad evidence can cause more harm than good. We interviewed conservation decision-makers and practitioners working to address the illegal trade in jaguars in Mesoamerica to learn about the types of evidence they normally use, and how they use that evidence to make decisions or to take actions to protect species. We also asked them to prioritize pieces of evidence that we provided based on examples of jaguar trade. We found that those working to address the illegal jaguar trade have little time and resources to plan their actions and to look for high quality scientific evidence. Instead, they are under pressure to react to information that comes from sources they trust, which describes events happening recently and close to them, and in which they can directly intervene to reach a positive outcome like an arrest or a seizure of jaguar parts. They also tend to pay more attention to elements of the information that suggest the trade is more damaging to jaguars. These elements include the participation of foreign traders or of traders that are motivated by commercial gain. However, in reality impacts on jaguars may not be linked to these attributes on which conservationists and decision-makers rely (e.g. extensive local trade may kill more jaguars than limited foreign trade).

We provide guidance for conservation decision-makers and practitioners,



*Earrings made with jaguar claws confiscated in Belize. Photo credit: Melissa Arias*

especially those working on illegal wildlife trade, so that they can more easily distinguish evidence of low quality that merits further investigation from evidence that merits a swift and strong reaction, thereby improving outcomes for the species concerned.

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