

# Uncovering a secret slaughter

Suriname's jaguar trade exposed



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# Introduction

Jaguars are being cruelly killed in Suriname, South America primarily to fuel a trade in their body parts for traditional Asian medicine. A 10-month World Animal Protection investigation uncovered this illegal trade. It occurs mostly around the country's mining and logging sites that are mainly under Chinese ownership.

Investigators interviewed: hunters; wildlife rangers; shopkeepers selling jaguar teeth and jewellery; jaguar 'glue' makers, and conservationists. They found a highly secretive hunting and trading chain involving considerable cruelty. Jaguars may be tracked for hours or days, wounded and killed with multiple gunshots.

# Making connections – the trading chain

Jaguars are killed mostly by local hunters who see the trade in their carcasses as very lucrative; they can sell them to mainly Chinese middlemen for a substantial amount of money. Nearly half of Suriname's estimated population of 558,000 live in poverty<sup>1</sup>.

The carcasses are then transported by the middlemen to urban areas, where processors based largely in Chinese shops and facilities will buy them.

Processors use carcasses in a variety of ways to produce different products made from 'big cat' which is how they refer to tigers, lions and jaguars. The products are used for arthritis pain, to enhance sexual performance and to foster health and wellbeing, despite the ready availability of effective, humane, non-animal product alternatives.

- **Jaguar paste**

Through a complicated chopping, boiling and drying process over up to seven days, the dead jaguars can be turned into a black paste-like substance that can be put into tubs for illegal export. These tubs are generally shipped to China in the smugglers' hold luggage; their smells masked by a strong-smelling substance to avoid detection by sniffer dogs. This paste, when mixed with other traditional medicine ingredients, is believed to treat arthritis, increase vitality and expel toxins from the body. However, there is no proof it can do so. Each jaguar could be rendered down in 20 - 30 tubs and can sell for a high price in China.

- **Teeth and claws**

Jaguar teeth are coveted, and investigators found teeth both plain and set in gold, for sale around the shops and stalls of Paramaribo. Prices varied in tourist shops, with the teeth being sold either set in gold or just on their own.

- **Meat**

Both Chinese and Filipino communities in Suriname sometimes buy jaguar carcasses to eat the meat, make soup and reportedly even wine from the bones. Jaguar penises are also highly sought after as they are believed to increase virility.

Because the trade in jaguars and their body parts is highly illegal, the investigators discovered that the jaguar carcasses were kept in various locations during transit to avoid detection by enforcement. Both processors and traders

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<sup>1</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/CountryProfiles/SUR.pdf>

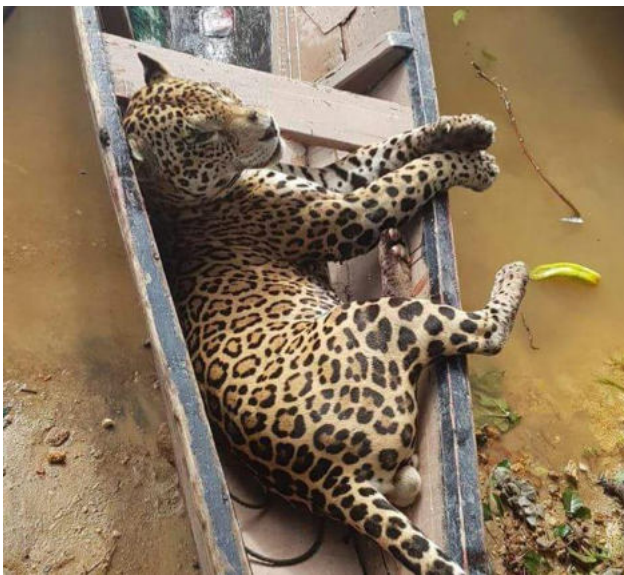


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move their premises frequently to keep out of the reach of the law. Jaguars are traded through social media, by phone or through personal networks.

Processing and sale occur largely around Paramaribo, Suriname's capital city, and its surrounding urban areas.

**Image:** Precious cargo: Shot jaguars are transported in a variety of ways out of their rainforest natural habitat and sold to middlemen who take them for processing to urban areas. Left: shot jaguar in a canoe; right: jaguar being carried through a village; below: jaguar tied to a pole



“By the time you receive information that it’s at a shop or some place, they are preparing it. By the time you arrive, it’s already gone.”

**Wildlife ranger**

**Image right:** Jewellery trade: Jaguar body parts are mostly used for traditional Asian medicine, but their teeth and claws are often sold separately in Suriname jewellery shops.



# Hunting – tracking and baiting

During the World Animal Protection investigation, both poachers and rangers confirmed that jaguars are usually shot after tracking or baiting. Baiting them with other animals – such as a tethered dog or goat is common. The jaguars are attracted by the noise they make. One hunter reported letting the jaguar eat a dog – its last meal – and then shooting it.

Hunting happens both opportunistically – when a jaguar accidentally crosses a hunter’s path – or deliberately to make money for the Chinese market. Some jaguars are also shot by local people out of fear and in cases of human-wildlife conflict – where jaguars are felt to be preying on cattle and dogs.

One ranger in particular confirmed that he knew of approximately 25 jaguars that had been shot for this purpose and was confident that the actual numbers were far higher and thought there would be possibly hundreds.

Investigators were given photographic evidence of dead jaguars fastened to a motorbike and a small tractor – being transported for the trade. They were also told that hunters may get commissions via social media to hunt jaguars for the trade.

“If you need money as living is hard, prices in the shops are too high, you have to shoot what you see to live.”

**Hunter**

Hunting can involve considerable cruelty and suffering. Jaguars may be stalked and shot numerous times in attempts to kill them. When they are too injured to move, a final bullet to the head is their only release from suffering. Investigators were told that in one recent instance a jaguar was shot seven times until it died after being shot in the head.

Adult jaguars are not the only victims of the Suriname trade. World Animal Protection received reports that jaguar cubs are taken from the wild and sold to wealthy, mostly Chinese businessmen who like to keep them as status symbols.



These animals are fed inappropriate diets — cows' milk and sugar water when very young — and kept in cages until they become too big and dangerous to their owners. At this point they may be killed and their body parts sold into the traditional Asian medicine trade.



**Image:** Hunted trophy: A jaguar shot by a gold miner for Chinese clients in February 2018. The jaguar was killed in Suriname near the French Guiana border.



# Protecting jaguars – stopping the trade

Jaguars – Latin name: *Panthera onca* – are listed as ‘near threatened’ on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) red list<sup>2</sup>. Within the bordering countries of Suriname, and within French Guiana and Guyana, jaguars are classified as endangered and in need of protection<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, it is illegal to target and hunt the species for export, recreation, the domestic pet trade or for bushmeat.

There are only a few exceptions where jaguars may be captured and shipped for education, exhibition and research to zoological parks, museums and wildlife reserves.

Only around 173,000 jaguars remain in the wild; the population is believed to have declined by 20–25% over 21 years<sup>4</sup>. Jaguars are becoming increasingly vulnerable in Suriname as mining and logging encroach on their natural habitat.

Mining opens big areas of land by bulldozing trees and bush in jaguar habitat. The normally elusive jaguars stray on to the roads to look for prey – including the dogs kept around the mining camps – and are more vulnerable to being tracked and shot. This habitat loss is making it easier for opportunist poachers and organised gangs to source jaguars in the wild.

There are grave concerns that jaguar numbers will fall significantly if their body parts continue to be seen as substitutes or supplements to, tiger body parts. The poaching of big cats for use in traditional medicine has led to the sharp decline of wild tigers – there are now fewer than 3,900 left today<sup>5</sup>. Even the processors themselves admitted that they are now struggling to find jaguars to kill.

One government source informally told investigators that they estimate the trade is already worth millions of dollars. They fear it is likely to increase as demand from China for big cat products and Chinese investment in Suriname continues to grow.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/15953/0>

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[http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/2010\\_exo\\_citation\\_of\\_the\\_jaguar\\_onc\\_omer\\_large\\_forest\\_cats\\_in\\_suriname\\_irvin\\_kerman.pdf](http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/2010_exo_citation_of_the_jaguar_onc_omer_large_forest_cats_in_suriname_irvin_kerman.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?ic=10.1371/journal.pone.0194198&type=primary>

<sup>5</sup> <http://tigers.panda.org/news/what-the-new-global-tiger-number-means/>

Chinese nationals are now estimated to control around 90% of the country's supermarkets, small grocery stores and food shops. All the main parties in the recent election fielded a prominently placed candidate of Chinese heritage.<sup>6</sup>

"Jaguars already face the challenges of habitat destruction and human-animal conflicts. They are now cruelly and needlessly killed and left to die agonising deaths. It is extremely sad news for these incredible big cats whose numbers are already in decline. And while jaguar cubs might seem very cute, they are still wild animals and belong in the wild, not in the illegal pet trade."

**Nicholas Bruschi, World Animal Protection investigations advisor**



**Image:** Processing pot: Through a boiling and cooking process, which lasts for up to seven days, jaguar carcasses are turned into a paste highly sought after for traditional Asian medicine.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/23/sri-lanka-china-business-influence>



**Image:** Paste package – the paste like this from jaguar carcasses, is packaged into tubs which can then be transported illegally to China and sold with a high mark-up.

# Taking action – next steps

World Animal Protection moves the world to protect animals from cruelty and suffering. This investigation was carried out to provide information for our continuing work to protect animals affected by the trade in and production of traditional Asian medicines.

Until this investigation, little was known about jaguar poaching and carcass use to make a paste-like substance for traditional Asian medicine, similar to that made from tiger body parts. In addition, the poaching of jaguars in Suriname specifically has not been widely reported.

To tackle the issue, we have shared our findings with the authorities – specialist agencies in Suriname that enforce laws relating to jaguar protection. We will cooperate with them to develop tangible solutions and share intelligence to prevent poaching. We hope that the Suriname government will put greater enforcement within their borders to stop poaching, but also prevent the smuggling of jaguar products out of the country.

Poaching can be eliminated in various ways. These include positively engaging with communities that use the products, local campaign and education initiatives that encourage people to understand the importance of animals to their communities, and how they can change their behaviour to protect them. These initiatives should emphasise medicinal alternatives to products using animals. The lobbying of governments to ensure national animal protection laws are in place is also vital. And to enforce these laws local governments and authorities must be given sufficient support to do their work.



**We are** World Animal Protection.

**We end** the needless suffering of animals.

**We influence** decision makers to put animals on the global agenda.

**We help** the world see how important animals are to all of us.

**We inspire** people to change animals' lives for the better.

**We move** the world to protect animals.

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