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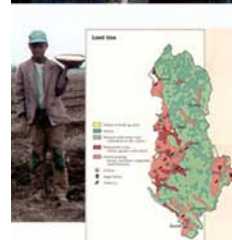
Land Tenure Center

PRESENTATION OF PROJECT RESULTS TO THE COLEPATO COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE

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*Presentation of Project Results to the Colepato Community Cooperative
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On May 31, 2009, we returned to the Colepato community to present the results from the 2008 Andean bear camera trap study. The goals of this meeting were to (1) share the results in a way that was meaningful to the community and beneficial to current and future conservation projects, (2) compare the results of species diversity with their knowledge of the wildlife on their property, and (3) to ask permission to continue Andean bear research on their land. We compiled an album of camera trap photos from their property as a thank-you gift to the community and as a visual record of the project to be stored in the community meeting hall. For the individual community members, we brought printed copies of bear and puma photos for each family to take home.

Our study was one of several on Colepato land in 2008. Before the meeting began, we were told that the community was frustrated because they had not been informed of the outcomes of these projects. There was also concern that they might feel negatively towards additional projects on their land because they did not perceive any benefits. As a result, we hoped to use this meeting to show the community that their participation in conservation-based research is productive. Making the results available to them for their own conservation initiatives would ensure that they felt relationships with researchers to be mutually beneficial.

We invited the entire community to the presentation and projected the camera trap photos on the wall of the meeting hall. Overall, the community seemed very excited about the photos and our results. The photos sparked conversations between community members and many questions. Members discussed the locations of photo-captured wildlife and identified most species using local names (e.g. puma = gran bestia). We reported that through the use of the unique facial patterns we were able to identify at least three bears on their land (at the time a fourth bear was not yet identified). In response, one community member claimed that there were many more than three bears on their property. We



Photos: (top) Local alpaca rancher and owner of All Things Alpaca Ecuador, a Certified Wildlife Friendly business, Stuart White, looks at an album of camera trap photos;(middle) R. Zug presents the album of camera trap photos to the Colepato community president, Jose Manuel Ojeda;(bottom) Colepato community members select printed camera traps photos to take home.

Photo Credit: V. Shelley/Carnivore Coexistence Lab

explained that this was not a population count, that the identification of three bears did not mean that only three are present, and that partial photos did not allow us to clearly identify all bears in all photos. When asked if there were species we did not photo-capture they said that except for a few species (rabbits, tapir, various birds spp.) we had a representative sample of the local wildlife. We concluded this portion of the meeting by presenting the photo album to the president of the cooperative. The photos for individual families were laid out on a table to be collected by the community members at the end of the meeting. These gifts were received with a lot of enthusiasm and appreciation. All photos were taken by community members.

At the close of the meeting our colleague (T. Jones) asked permission to conduct additional bear research on their land from June-August 2009. Due to a local political rally, this decision was deferred to the community meeting scheduled for the following Sunday. Despite their initial doubts about the usefulness of research, a week after our presentation the community granted permission for this new study of bears on their land.

Based on these experiences, we believe that all future work with the Colepato community should incorporate reporting research results. Further, future research projects should, specifically, be aligned with the conservation initiatives of the community. For example, Colepato is currently involved in a conservation initiative with a large hydroelectric company that provides incentives for wildlife conservation. These camera trap pictures will be used as baseline data to support this project. By sharing the photos from bear research in 2009 the community may be able to prove that wildlife is persisting on their property over time. In addition, more tangible data such as a local bear population estimates may more closely match their own estimates. This could, in turn, inspire more confidence in the accuracy of the data produced by biologists.

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