



Zoo Edition Archives - Fall 2003

Excerpts from an interview with Patricia Medici, researcher with The Conservation Status of Jaguars, Pumas and Tapirs and Their Potential as Landscape Detectives for the Brazilian Atlantic Forest, one of the jaguar conservation projects supported by Woodland Park Zoo. The interview was conducted by Ryan Whitehead and Amy Brewer, two members of the zoo's teen program, Zoo Corps.

WPZ: Where are you from and where do you live now?

PM: I was born in Sao Paulo City, Brazil, and now live in the western part of the state, about 800 km from the city.

WPZ: What languages do you speak?

PM: I speak Portuguese and some English.

WPZ: Have you ever seen a jaguar in the wild?

PM: I have spent the last six years of my life in the field doing research and I saw my first wild jaguar about two weeks ago. We were on our way to a research site when we saw a jaguar in the middle of the road about 100 or 150 meters away. We stopped to watch it for a while, and it walked away into the forest. It was really great.

WPZ: How far do you have to go each day to do your research?

PM: We drive about 50 km to the sites in the park, and then walk 1 or 2 km to the site.

WPZ: Do you know how many jaguars are in the area that you are studying?

PM: We probably have 20 or 21 individuals in the park, both spotted and black jaguars.

WPZ: What is the main purpose of your research on tapirs, and how does it relate to jaguar conservation?

PM: We have been researching both species as landscape detectives, as we say, to reveal the dispersal routes and pathways in the landscape. We found out some time ago that these animals leave the park and visit the forest fragments nearby, so we have been taking advantage of this behavior and identifying the potential land pieces to be restored as corridors.

WPZ: What has inspired you to conserve rain forests?

PM: I grew up in a small district of Sao Paulo City, very close to the coast, in the middle of the Atlantic Forest. I grew up watching the forests being logged and being destroyed so I believe that was something that really planted a seed in my heart and made me want to do this.

WPZ: What do you like most about your work?

PM: I really like the fact that I get to be in the forest every day. I feel connected to nature and to the animals.

WPZ: What is the hardest part?

PM: The hardest part, I'd have to say, is the mosquitoes and the ticks. And the bot flies.

WPZ: What do you think kids should study in school to help become a researcher and conservationist?

PM: I strongly believe that professors should teach more about animals, nature and the different ecosystems. With more knowledge, kids would have more questions in their minds and become eager to answer those questions, which would encourage a lot more kids to become biologists and researchers and conservationists. Another important thing is for kids to learn more languages. There is lots of information about animals and nature in other languages, and most of the kids just don't have the chance to read that because they don't know the language.

WPZ: Besides donating money, what can I do in everyday life to help jaguars survive in the wild?

PM: First of all, whatever you learn about tapirs, jaguars, any other animal, or about different ecosystems, you should share with your friends, and make them excited about that. It would be nice if kids all over the world had the chance to get involved with local conservation initiatives. We tend to believe that conservation is something that can only be done by researchers and scientists, but there is always something near your home that you can do to help. So you just have to go ahead and see what can be done in your neighborhood and in your city, and that would really help.