



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Global Ecology and Conservation

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/gecco>

## Short Communication

# Insights into the illegal trade of feline derivatives in Costa Rica

Jennifer Rebecca Kelly Ph.D.

Department of Sociology, 317 Berkey Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, 48824, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 13 October 2017

Received in revised form 14 February 2018

Accepted 14 February 2018

### Keywords:

Felines

Illegal

Residency

Masculinity

Social status

Value

## ABSTRACT

Research has given the illegal trade of feline derivatives in Mexico as well as Central and South America little attention. The purpose of this article is to: 1) Begin a dialogue among human dimensions of wildlife scholars about the economic and cultural values of feline derivatives throughout Mexico, Central and South America; 2) Present the range of economic values that emerged in my interview and participant observation data from Costa Rica; 3) Offer an explanation of how sociological concepts influence the buying and selling of dead jaguars (*Panthera onca*), pumas (*Puma concolor*), and ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*) in Costa Rica. The principal results are: 1) The sociological concepts of social status and masculine identity interlace with and motivate the illegal trade; 2) The value of feline parts in Costa Rica ranges from \$25 to \$5000; 3) This value differs by culture and geographic residency of the seller (urban versus rural) and diverged from values discovered in other countries; 4) The men who adorn their homes with illegal trophies are not necessarily the poachers. The value of jaguar skin has been recorded for as little as \$100 in a 1983 study conducted in Belize and for as high as \$600 in a study done in Venezuela in approximately 2011. Because of cultural differences, Cabécar sell a feline skin for as little as \$25 and up to \$400 if it includes teeth and nails, but Ticos, who are non-indigenous Costa Ricans, sell the skins from \$500-\$5000. Non-indigenous, wealthy urban men indicate prestige by the display of feline parts. My findings align with existing research that jaguar skins are sold to people in larger cities and that adornment of feline derivatives is a masculine tradition that can be linked with Amerindian cultures and ancient times. Historically jaguars have been associated with elitist symbolism and evidence in this study suggests this continues in today's culture as a sign of social status. Results suggest that money alone does not drive illegal hunting. The contribution of this study urges researchers to: 1) Develop a typology which includes the characteristics of not only the poachers, but also the buyers of illegal wildlife parts; 2) Evaluate concepts of culture, geographic residency, masculine identity, and social status in the illegal trade of feline derivatives in Mexico, Central, and South America.

© 2018 The Author. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

The illegal taking of wildlife has been framed as a social problem, where structural and social psychological explanations have been presented (Eliason, 1999). One North American poaching typology was developed. It hypothesized—commercial gain, household consumption, trophy poaching, recreational satisfactions, thrill killing, protection of self and property,

E-mail address: [kellyj24@msu.edu](mailto:kellyj24@msu.edu).

poaching as traditional right of use, disagreement with specific regulations, and gamesmanship—as motivations for killing (Muth and Bowe, 1998). Sociological explanations of poaching, such as these, need to be linked to specific species, geographical contexts and cultures, and must consider the motivations for the buyers of illegal wildlife parts.

Species, such as jaguars (*Panthera onca*), a keystone predator vital for maintaining ecosystem balance in tropical forests (Terborgh, 1992), are threatened by hunting. Research shows hunting of jaguars still occurs as a matter of social tradition, as a threat to livelihoods and human life (Marchini and Macdonald, 2012), and for traditional uses of feline parts (González-Maya et al., 2010). The illegal selling and purchasing of feline derivatives also provides an impetus for hunting and killing felines. Hunters can market paws, teeth, and other derivatives throughout Mexico, Central and South America (Caso et al., 2008). Research on human dimensions of jaguar conservation touches on the illegal trade of felines but does not focus on it (Navarro-Serment et al., 2005; Jedrzejewski et al., 2011; Rabinowitz, 1986). In other words, more research is needed to understand how the illegal trade of feline derivatives impacts the conservation of jaguars as a keystone species.

This article presents my findings regarding the trade of dead felines in Costa Rica. In part, my goal is to begin a dialogue among human dimensions of wildlife scholars about the economic and cultural values of feline derivatives throughout Mexico, Central and South America. Further, I present the range of economic values that emerged in my interview and participant observation data from Costa Rica. Finally, I offer an explanation of how sociological concepts of culture, social status, masculine identity and urban residency influence the buying and selling of dead jaguars, pumas (*Puma concolor*), and ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*) in Costa Rica.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study site

The Barbilla Destierro Biological Sub Corridor (SBBD), part of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC) of Costa Rica, consists of 37,589 ha of land that connect Nicaragua in the north to Panama in the south. The rural region includes 8000 people living in 26 small settlements (Rojas and Chavarría, 2005), most of whom are farmers and ranchers (González and Poltronieri, 2002). Further, Cabécar indigenous peoples live in isolated reservations with limited access to public services and the outside market (González and Poltronieri, 2002). Cabécar communities have a subsistence livelihood and depend on government subsidies (Rojas and Chavarría, 2005).

### 2.2. The study

The 14-month study began in 2013 and ended in 2014. Semi-structured open-ended in-person interviews and participant observation took place throughout the corridor. The larger study conducted over one hundred interviews that took place in Spanish, Cabécar and English in 23 towns and 12 communities, within three indigenous reservations of the SBBD. Three research assistants (two Ticos who are non-indigenous Costa Ricans, and one Cabécar) assisted with the interviews. A snowball sample design was used to identify participants, beginning with ranchers and Cabécar who lived in the same community as the research assistants. I did not keep record of the people in the snowball sample who declined to be interviewed. Additionally, participants in Panthera's ([www.panthera.org](http://www.panthera.org)) rancher program were interviewed, those not interviewed were deceased, declined or were not easily accessible. While I did not keep track of exactly how many interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants, most of them were. All participants interviewed were adults and most respondents were interviewed individually. While the larger study included 15 interview questions, related to ecological knowledge, norms and behaviors, the current paper addresses only five of these (the appendix lists them).

The data presented in this paper emerged while I was analyzing the results from this larger project. In other words, the analysis and results in this paper were derived from the larger study, with the exception of results below regarding the lack of feline trophies in rural homes within the SBBD. Specifically, the data below was from 16 interviews and participant observation with 19 people, consisting of 35 participants total. Ages of the 16 interviewees ranged from 24 to 92 years old, (Ticos 30–92 and Cabécar 24–90). Of the 16 interviewees, one Cabécar and three Ticos were women, five Cabécar and seven Ticos were men. Participant observation consisted of guided public, private and behind the scenes tours at ecotourism establishments, private reserves, and regular attendance at two monthly corridor meetings, and, on five occasions between January 2014 and August 2014, accompanying Panthera in their rancher outreach program visits, which lasted on average three days, although this study was not a part of Panthera's project. The data below was derived from participant observation with six Cabécar and thirteen Ticos—three of them were women. I did not record ages of the Ticos, but the six Cabécar were men and ranged from 19 to 91 years in age. They were observed by my Cabécar research assistant.

### 2.3. Analysis of data

As described above, the larger study was not designed to evaluate the conditions of dead felines as attached to illegal trade, rather, such findings emerged. When analyzing my data for the original larger study, I noticed there was a stream of data related to the illegal trade of feline derivatives. From there, I pulled out all of the data that had the word, “skin” in it. Then I conducted a content analysis of any data related to feline derivatives by categorizing data into themes—economic values, culture, geographic residency, masculine identity, and social status—that emerged organically. Of data from 35 participants

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8846225>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8846225>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)