

My thoughts on Macho B  
Emil McCain 3-3-09

Macho B lived a long and magnificent life in a vast and magnificent wilderness. His presence will be missed greatly. But we need to remember one thing. In the final days of his long life he placed his foot into a snare and gave us a great gift, a gift that will help us to ensure a future for his kind, and quite possibly his offspring, in southern Arizona and New Mexico and northern Mexico. He was a very old animal with limited time left; he was going to pass on regardless. All jaguars die. But he did not die unseen and unknown. All living creatures ultimately strive to ensure the survival of their family. Before Macho B passed on he presented himself to the research and conservation efforts of an amazing collaborative Arizona/New Mexico Jaguar Conservation Team. His capture drew international attention to this unique and valuable treasure of the Sierra Madres of northern Sonora, Mexico and the Sky Islands of Arizona and New Mexico. From the day he changed the lives of hunters Jack Childs and Matt Colvin, to the days he posed for trail camera photographs, and then to the day he was air-evacuated to one of the country's leading wildlife veterinary clinics, he has made the world aware that jaguars still roam in the wild and diverse southwestern United States. His story now ranks with that of Smokey the Bear. He gave us his valuable DNA, a first for modern science, which will give us genetic information about his origin, his relatedness to other jaguars, and thus the viability of borderlands jaguars. His death is terribly sad. But it is now up to us to cherish and learn from Macho B's gift, and we must work hard to conserve for the continued presence of his kind in our wild country.

Macho B was the oldest known wild jaguar in history and that is a clear testament to the habitat quality here in southern Arizona. The fact that this jaguar was able to survive in this habitat for longer than any other jaguar in any other habitat, not only confirms that jaguars can indeed thrive here, but also that a huge network of public and private lands is currently being managed in a healthy and sustainable way. But that landscape and that collaborative conservation network is fragile, and we must do everything in our power to maintain that habitat for this magnificent cat.

Macho B roamed over large portions of southern Arizona for at least 13 years, yet to the best of our knowledge, he was only ever seen twice. It remains unknown how many other jaguars may remain unseen within or partially within Arizona and New Mexico. So far the Borderlands Jaguar Detection Project has only surveyed 12% of the potential habitat in Arizona, and there is more in New Mexico.

One important aspect of big cat biology is territoriality, especially in adult males. We know Macho B was a territorial male from the videos we obtained of him exhibiting three different territorial scent-marking behaviors. When a jaguar's territory becomes empty it is often filled by another younger male. It is quite possible that another jaguar will take over Macho B's territory. However, with no confirmed reproduction in the US since the 1920's, jaguar presence here is entirely dependant upon dispersal from northern Mexico. That means we must maintain habitat connectivity across the border and insure their safety in northern Mexico. We clearly have a lot of work to do.

The re-capture of Macho B was absolutely necessary. I had been monitoring his every move from satellite technology. Immediately after the original capture the cat appeared to be totally fine. He behaved exactly as you would expect, he fled the capture site to a secluded area to recover. However, in the following days it became clear that his movements were not normal, and that he was spending a huge portion of the time not moving. Collectively, we made the decision to check the sites where he had been, and the tracks found led to further concern. The following day wildlife veterinarian Dr. Alcumbrec made a visual assessment that the cat was in very poor condition and needed further attention. These things always happen on a Sunday, but the Arizona Game and Fish Department was able to put together the Dream Team overnight. The best possible individuals gathered with the best possible resources to capture the cat for a full veterinary assessment. The very difficult and delicate mission was beautifully orchestrated by AZGFD. Guided by my emails and phone calls from Spain regarding the cat's real time satellite location, the team performed a quick and low stress capture.

His condition of total kidney failure was terribly unfortunate, but somewhat to be expected in a cat of his age. Despite the tragic outcome, the Jaguar Conservation Team and its cooperators have pulled off an amazing feat. I want to personally thank each and every individual who made every effort possible to assist our old jaguar.

Macho B has become an international ambassador for jaguar conservation. He has pulled many diverse sources together for a common goal, and yesterday we pulled all of our resources together to help him with unbelievable grace. On his behalf, I urge us all to keep that momentum moving forward, beyond international boundaries and beyond the lifespan of one individual.

There are not words to describe how I feel about the cat's very unfortunate death. But at least his last sights and conscious thoughts were high on a mountain overlooking his favorite haunts. May his spirit roam there forever, and may his descendants as well.