

MOUNTAIN TAPIR

Tapirus pinchaque (Roulin, 1829)

Order PERISSODACTYLA

Family TAPIRIDAE

Distinguishing characteristics: The smallest of the tapir species, "... the inchlong, crinkled hair is black or blakish brown over the body with the sides of head paler, white ear fringes and lips being made more conspicuous by the dark coloration and dense coat". (2:500).

Present distribution: "From upper subtropical and temperate zone forests into bordering 'paramos', or grasslands, of the Andes in Colombia, Ecuador, and possibly in northern Peru and western Venezuela (Sierra de Mérida)" (1:470). "Tapirus pinchaque" is not recorded from lower slopes of the Andes and the other tapirs are not known to encroach upon the upper levels, or temperate zones, of the Cordilleras" (1:468).

Colombia: The northern limit of its range is roughly 5°N., in the temperate and cold zones around Mount Tolima. The species is entirely absent from the western Cordillera. It exists or existed, however, in the northern parts of the eastern Cordillera, at 7°N., near the Venezuelan frontier (4:215). Not confirmedly specimens only by tracks.

Ecuador: Occurs in a few restricted and localised areas of the eastern chain of the Andes. None has ever been taken or seen in the western Cordillera, although favourable biotopes exist (4:215) (Llanganates 10,000ft. Cloud Forest.).

Perú: "This species appears to be restricted to the Ayabaca and Huancabamba Provinces of the Department of Piura, and the Jaen Province of the Department of Cajamarca, where it occurs on high ground from the Ecuadorian border to about 6°00'S. It is absent from the Department of Tumbes. The mountain tapir is locally reported to be common in the mountains between the towns of Ayabaca and Huancabamba and to the east of the latter town, where it inhabits thick bush country in the zone of wind-dwarfed Polylepis trees and Hypericum. It is probably also to be found along the mountainous ridges running south from Huancabamba, for several small groups are known to exist where those ridges are cut by the Olmos-Jaen road some 60 kms. to the south, including one party of five to seven animals living at only 2,000m. 35 kms. east of Olmos. The

species is also known from several localities near to Tabaconas and Chontali in the Jaen Province (3:77-78).

Former distribution: "Distribution of ^{pinchagua} pinchacus points to its prior arrival into South America and at a period when a temperate climate prevailed at sea level in equatorial latitudes. It inhabits an area representing part of the original Colombian Central Land Mass, and South American side of the inter-continental land bridge where Tertiary mammals entering from North America established foothold. Present restriction of ^{pinchagua} pinchacus to the Colombian Central Land Mass, now the temperate zone of the bulk of the Venezuelan, Colombian, and Ecuadorian Andes, probably is the result of an inherited urge for sustenance in cooler climates pari passu with increasing rise in height of the Andes above sea level and rising temperatures at sea level. Newly established tropical zone habitats at the base of the Andes were invaded subsequently by other kinds of tapirs" (1:470).

Status : Available data are insufficient to enable a precise assessment to be made, but there is evidence that during the last few decades the species has undergone a substantial and continuing decline (4:214-220).

Estimated numbers : "The Peruvian population cannot number more than one or two hundred individuals" (3:78).

Breeding rate in wild : "Births of tapirs are usually of single young and apparently may occur at any season. The gestation period is roughly 13 months or 400 days" (2:502).

Reasons for decline: Agricultural and pastoral expansion have resulted in increasing loss and degradation of habitat, thereby reducing the animal's range and compelling it to retreat into the higher, less accessible parts of the eastern Cordillera (4:252). Since 1966, the hunting and capturing of tapirs for zoos has reduced numbers. It has been estimated that for every tapir exported alive, 40 to 60 have been killed (4:247). In Peru "the mountain tapir does not appear to be much persecuted by hunters, but the species is said to be intolerant of disturbance and to be disappearing from areas where it was formerly common" (3:78).

Protective measures already taken : At IUCN's request, AAZPA and IUDZG have agreed to impose restrictions on the purchase of further specimens by their members.

Measures proposed : "The creation of a national sactuary in the Huancabamba Province (of Peru) to preserve a representative group of this species, but ... ultimate responsibility for the mountain tapir must lie with Ecuador or Colombia. The mountain tapir has also been included on the list of animals to be accorded complete protection when control of hunting is introduced" (6). The best hope for safeguarding this species lies in the establishment of large national parks or equivalent reserves in the still untouched areas of the eastern Ecuadorian Andes (4:252).

Number in captivity : 6 ♂♂ and 5 ♀♀ In 7 zoos, all except one pair captured during 1968 (5:65). Of the three specimens recorded by Crandall as having been kept at the New York Zoological Park up to 1955 none survived more than a little over two years (2:503-504).

Breeding potential in captivity : "Neither the mountain tapir nor Baird's appears to have been bred in captivity up to 1963" (2:502).

- References:
1. Hershkovitz, 1954
 2. Crandall, 1964
 3. Grimwood, 1968
 4. Schauenberg, 1969
 5. Int. Zoo Yearbook Vol. 9., 1969
 6. I.R. Grimwood In litt. 13/5/67

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