

"ZOO 50 - GOLDEN JUBILEE"

Conference : "The Role of Zoos in International  
Conservation of Wild Animals".

---

Contribution of F. C. Lehmann  
Director, Museo de Historia Natural  
Cali, Colombia.

"THE CONSERVATION SITUATION IN COLOMBIA"

Even though the title assigned to my contribution is:  
"Colombian Zoos and their Influence on Conservation", I like to talk  
here about something that is more important for the conservation of  
wildlife than not our small zoos not only in Colombia, but also in  
other Latin American countries, where the situation is almost the same.

In Colombia we have three small Zoos. One in Barranquilla.  
This one has now about 200 animals, well fed and fairly well kept but,  
both the vernacular and scientific names, are in many cases wrong.

Medellin has a Zoo too, here we have almost the same situation,  
but some of the labels are used to describe, as in the case of a Jaguar,  
the ferocity and cattle killing prowesses of the animal, wich does not  
help conservation.

In Pereira, there is a nice location for the Zoo and they have  
a good number of animals well kept and clean, but here again we find the  
same problem of wrongly labeled specimens in the most part and what is  
worse, they don't want to change the names. Food is not adequate in some  
cases.

I consider that our small Zoos have no influence in helping  
conservation, and if there is any influence, this may be a bad one,  
stimulating the capture of animals, many of which die before reaching  
the Zoo, or shortly after, due to improper care, transportation, or lack  
of proper food.

But what I want to talk about is the devastation that is taking place, not only in the way of killing animals, but what is worse, the too rapid destruction of the forests and other habitats, which combined with continuous hunting and the more recent use of pesticides and poisons, are accelerating the destruction of the fauna.

Colombia is well known the world over for its wealth in bird life, or at least in the known number of bird's species recorded from its territory. Unhappily, I think, at least 500 of the listed forms -subspecies- can not be found now in this country.

Very vast areas, where not many years ago, there were beautiful and luxuriant tropical forests, have been converted into pastureland or agricultural areas. But where the most of damage, not only to the fauna and flora, but also to the water supply and soil, is taking place, is in the Andean region that in Colombia branches in three Cordilleras, of which the more affected are the central and eastern cordilleras.

Every effort is needed to help the establishment of National Parks, or Natural Reserves, in some of the few areas still suitable for this purpose, because before long, nothing will be left large enough, to deserve its preservation as a wild area. The forests are being destroyed very rapidly by axe and matches, -wood- cutting and burning. Not even important watersheds escape the destruction, and large and smaller cities are suffering from drought, insufficient hydroelectric power, and the valleys lack enough water for irrigation of their cultivated areas.

Here, we are concerned with conservation of wildlife, so I will inform about several problems we have in relation with this subject.

The problem has different sources: a) the principal one, is destruction of the habitat. The transformation of forests into pastures, and farming land. Shifting cultivation is perhaps what affects more conservation, when these activities take place in very steep hillsides of the Andes, or when the soil is apt to be washed away, in very few years the beautiful forests are transformed in to waste lands, deserts or rocks,

and the abundant wildlife disappears in most cases, or is replaced by a few new species of open country. b) Another is continuous hunting, with no bag limits or closed seasons, or regulations as to preservation of females. c) Commercialization of wildlife. This has two aspects. One is the capture and selling of live animals of all kinds: mammals, birds, reptiles, fishes. The other is the export of wild animal's skins, including those of game animals.

In the first case, thousands of animals are exported alive every year, but, with some species, many more die before one specimen reaches alive its destination, as is the case with colombian Quetzals, Cocks-of-Rock, many Tanagers, and fleasheating species, because of improper care and food. In the case of Quetzals and Cocks-of-the-Rock, I believe that no less than 50 die before one reaches alive its destination. One week, one exporter shipped 30 Quetzals alive. How many died before? Parrots are shipped by the thousands monthly to Mexico, from where they are smuggled into the United States. Not even reptiles or fishes escape the trade. Hundreds of thousands are exported alive, from lizards, caimans, turtles, to all kinds of fishes. With this paper I submit as information some figures given by official inspectors in Cali, and Leticia, and denounced by an sporting magazine of Barranquilla. The figures for Cali and Barranquilla are short of the reality, many specimens leave the country unchecked. The figures for Cali and Barranquilla refer only to live specimens, while those for Leticia include skins too.

Turtle eggs are collected in very large numbers, endangering their survival. This takes place in the Magdalena, Meta, and Caquetá rivers mainly.

Many game animals are slaughtered for their skins as is the case, with peccaries, deer, jaguar, pocelot, amazonian otter (Pteronura). Others as the Capibara, are killed by the thousands to sell the meat. Trowing away the valuable skins.

This trade, I think, is more difficult to stop as the one of

live animals, because some official agencies sponsor this kind of trade in order to obtain exchange money.

Buying countries like United States, England, Holland, Belgium and Germany, could help a lot in reducing or perhaps even in cancelling this dangerous practice, if they could do something to reduce or stop their imports of live animals, or of the so-called "Pets", permitting only this activity to well established Zoos.

Colombia is at this point striving for the establishment of national Parks, and perhaps some nature reserves, but we conservationists, need help to be able to convince the government authorities to take action. Three have been recently established in the north by C.V.M. a government agency for the development of the Valleys of Rivers Magdalena and Sinú. Also one large area "Sierra de la Macarena" has been established as a Nature Reserve, with 11.000 square kilometers, also one small area was established to protect the Oil Birds, as Parque Nacional "Cueva de los Guácharos", but these last two need organization and vigilance.

Two more areas have been selected by the Departamentos del Valle and Cauca, one is "Farallones de Cali" highest mountain in the western Andes, in Valle, and "Puracé" in the Central Andes in Cauca. But unhappily until now, these two areas have not been approved by the central government, and destruction of flora and fauna continues there. These should be saved before the destruction is such that they are unfitted for National Parks.

---

Film on the Condor in Southern Colombia. A film of this species in the site of Juanambú, where the deep canyons form a natural habitat for the condor, a few pairs still leave.

The owner agrees to give to the Colombian Society for the conservation on Nature, the bluffs that form the home of the condors, and permits

the use of his ranch-house by bird watchers or students.

Some money is needed to arrange facilities to fix the place and the road. It is only 10 minutes drive from one air port that can be reached by propeller air planes from Cali in one hour. This amount is estimated in 8 to 10 thousand dollars to save this condor refuge and give some confort to visitors. Condors can be seen all year long, and visitors staying 24 hours may be granted to see them.

---

fcl/anaj.