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Abstract

The purpose of protected areas is to safeguard natural habitats and their biodiversity. However, few protected areas are large enough for the long-term conservation of resident species, making the landscapes surrounding protected areas equally important for species conservation. This is especially true for wide-ranging carnivores such as the jaguar (*Panthera onca*), for which conservation strategies stress the maintenance of range-wide habitat connectivity via protected areas and dispersal corridors. We used 587 interviews with local people in 441 36-km² sampling units to assess the presence of jaguar and six prey species in a critical corridor in Central America, linking Bosawas Biosphere Reserve and Wawashan Nature Reserve in Nicaragua. We analyzed these data using single-season false-positive detection models in a site occupancy framework. We found that agricultural encroachment, particularly pervasive within a protected area, was

the main factor limiting the presence of jaguar and three large-bodied prey species: white-lipped peccary (*Tayassu pecari*), collared peccary (*Pecari tajacu*), and red brocket deer (*Mazama americana*). We suggest that improperly-managed protected areas can suffer the loss of apex predators and their prey, thereby jeopardizing range-wide conservation strategies for threatened species.



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Keywords

Agriculture; Habitat use; Interviews; Nicaragua; Occupancy; Prey

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