



05

A LIFETIME OF ENCHANTMENT:
Izamal and Its Hidden Treasures

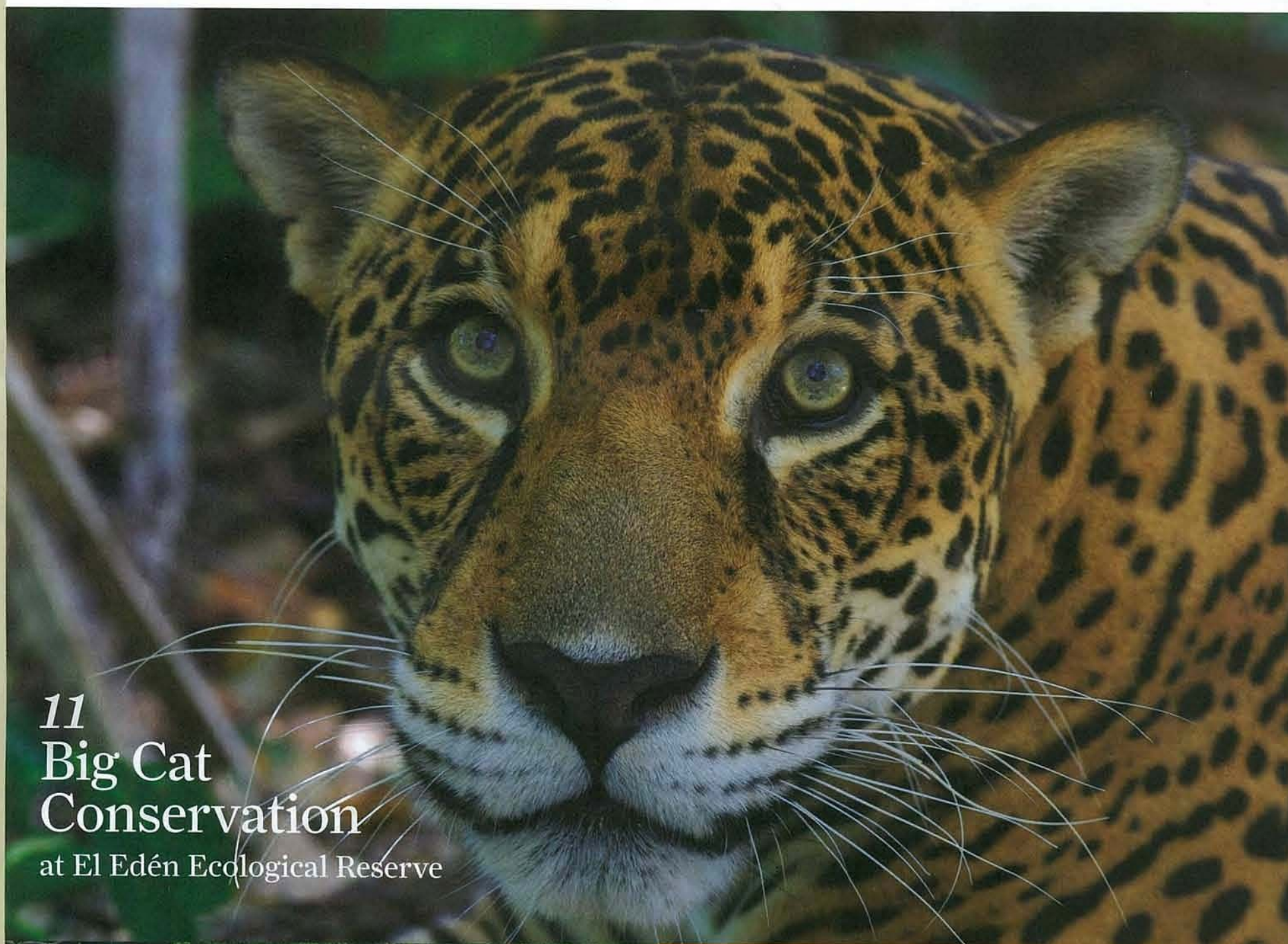


08

HEAVEN'S TEARS
James Turrell's latest inspiration is none other than the Yucatan's startling spiritual cenotes

Haciendas

DEL MUNDO MAYA



11
Big Cat Conservation
at El Edén Ecological Reserve



12 **COMMUNING WITH THE BIRDS... IN MAYA**
Barbara MacKinnon brings economic growth and a renewed sense of pride to the region's guides.



Big Cat Conservation

AT EL EDÉN ECOLOGICAL RESERVE

EL EDÉN GENERAL DIRECTOR MARCO ANTONIO LAZCANO BARRERO OFFERS HACIENDAS READERS A PRIMER ON THE YUCATÁN'S MAGNIFICENT AND ENDANGERED FELINES—ALONG WITH AN UPATE OF THE RESERVE'S LATEST BIG-CAT CONSERVATION EFFORTS.

*by Marco Antonio Lazcano Barrero
Translated and Adapted by Michael Parker Stainback*

THE JAGUAR IN NATURE

Jaguars are yellow with brown spots and rosettes, or can sometimes be quite dark, almost black. A close feline relation, the panther, is in fact a black jaguar, though if you observe its coat under direct sunlight, you'll see the jaguar's typical "rosette" markings. Jaguars generally live around 15 years and Yucatán males can reach up to 80 kilos (176 pounds) and grow to be from 60-65 centimeters (23-25 in) long. Litters vary from one to four cubs. Jaguars are carnivores who prey on peccaries, temazate deer and badgers. Of the eight big cat species that live in the Western Hemisphere, six can be found in Mexico and five on the Yucatán Peninsula: jaguars, pumas, ocelots, tigrillos and jaguarundis. Additionally, the Yucatán is home to the largest jaguar populations in North and Central America.

THREATS TO SURVIVAL

The jaguar is the most important predator of the Western Hemisphere's tropical ecosystems and is today in grave danger of extinction. Its principal threats are large-scale ranching, poaching, forest fires, and above all, the conversion of habitats into residential and tourist developments. Because of habitat fragmentation as well as barriers created by human activity, jaguar populations are in retreat; such barriers restrict or impede jaguar migrations to and from healthy habitats. This contributes to regional extinctions through reduced genetic exchange and subsequent population depression.

CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY AT EL EDÉN RESERVE

El Edén is a private reserve dedicated to scientific research and biodiversity conservation on the regional level. Its studies are often supported by CONAFOR (Mexico's National Forest Commission), Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM), its National Commission for Protected Natural Areas and the University of Veracruz. A recent study discovered a density ranging from seven to eleven jaguars per square kilometer at El Edén. Such a density is high and strong and allows for a population structure that includes gestating females, high cub birthrates and a good stock of prey such as peccaries, deer, badgers, etc., as well as other felines such as the puma, who enjoy similar population densities.

We estimate as many as 300 jaguars in the northeast region—still a relatively high number. That said, in order for jaguar populations to be viable over time, they should contain at least 500 animals within a continuous habitat, or should occupy two or three areas extensively connected by jungle, wetlands or even some "human-disturbed" environments. Current populations are not at this level.

The El Edén Biological Reserve also enjoys support from the Amigos de Sian Ka'an organization and the ICA Foundation, who have begun a study to understand the effects of the Mérida-Cancún Turnpike on jungle wildlife. As well, financial support from the Fundación Benpensa has

allowed us to begin studies wherein we attach telemetric collars to jaguars that let us monitor individuals in movement and the effects of highway infrastructure on jaguar populations.

This is key data, as our goal is to effect a planning process that will allow us to create continuity and contact between the northeast and other Jaguar Conservation Units such as Sian Ka'an and Balam Ka'ax, located on the peninsula's central coast.

Maintaining viable jaguar populations is essential. If we can keep a predator like the jaguar at the top of the food chain, then we create an "umbrella" that allows us to protect numerous other plant and animal species that share the jaguar's environment further down the food chain. Today the jaguar is the best available tool for the construction of biological corridors that can connect publicly owned municipal, state and national reserves with other areas administered by private-sector entities or as part of lands held communally by indigenous groups. In turn, jungles and forests will be maintained as water-collection zones for numerous species including hundreds of migratory birds that inhabit the Yucatán's forests and wetlands as they travel to and from Canada and the United States. By saving the jaguar's jungles and wetlands today, we ensure a natural balance for the future. 🐾

Visit www.reservaeleden.org to find out even more, along with ways you can contribute to El Edén's efforts.