

Interview with Biologist Carlos López González

January 1, 1999



Biologist Carlos López González

In May 1999, students interviewed Carlos López González, the biologist tracking wild cats and other carnivores that live in the tropical dry forest in Mexico. In this interview, Carlos discusses his efforts to understand the various wild cat species and other animals who live in this environment. Here are his answers to students' questions.

Do bobcats have an enemy that is not human?
 Kyle, 5th Grade
 Murray

Answer:

Habitat loss is the greatest threat, but bobcats are good adaptors to environmental change. Their other enemies include bigger cats like pumas, jaguars, coyotes, and birds of prey.

If necessary, will an ocelot eat its own young?
 Kevin, 6th Grade
 South Elementary

Answer:

Normally an ocelot will not eat its young -- only if it is stressed or the conditions are really bad.

What conditions do wild cats live best in?
 Matt, 5th Grade
 University School

Answer:

Generally the best conditions are those in which there is a dependable prey base, a source of water, and cover.

Which are the wild cats' strongest senses?
 Room 114, 1st Grade
 Richard Elementary

Answer:

Wild cats' hearing is highly developed. They also have binocular vision (eyes face forward like humans), providing good depth of field.

Where did the name ocelot come from?
 Stephen, 6th Grade
 South Elementary

Answer:

The word 'ocelot' is from the 'nahuatl' language, a language in Central Mexico. The word means 'tiger.'

Why are you working in a group of scientists and not just by yourself?
 1st Grade
 Richard Elementary

Answer:

Because working with many scientists allows you to be more creative when discussing situations.

Can wild cats see in color?

Emily, 8th Grade
Marshall

Answer:

Cats cannot see in color as we do, but they are sensitive to green and blue light. Their eyes are modified to see better with poor light, which would mean that color vision is not really necessary.

Do wild cats ever eat each other?

Steph, 3rd Grade
St. Helen

Answer:

It is a very rare event that depends on many particular situations and we do not understand why they do it.

How long do the baby wild cats stay with their mom and the other siblings?

Shania, 4th Grade
Clearview

Answer:

How long a baby wild cat stays with its mother depends on the species. Ocelots remain with their mother until they are one year old, but mountain lions remain up to 1 1/2 years. Other species are very independent at only three or four months old.

Have you ever seen a mountain lion catching its prey at night?

Room 114, 1st Grade
Richard Elementary

Answer:

No, mountain lions (also called pumas or cougars) are very secretive and human activity affects their behavior greatly.

What do wild cats eat when they are hungry?

Megan, 3rd Grade
Wagrener Ranch

Answer:

The six species of cat at Chamela appear to eat a broad range of mammals, reptiles, birds, insects, and even vegetal matter. We figure out what different cats eat from analyzing scat (droppings) along the trail. Pumas seem to prefer deer. Ocelots favor iguanas and mice, although there is evidence that they eat a lot of other things.

Who are a wild cat's enemies?

Alma, 3rd Grade
Clearview

Answer:

Small or medium cats can be killed by large owls, large snakes such as boas, or canids such as coyotes. Large cats can compete between themselves, but their only true enemy is man.

How do you know how old a cat is when you find one?

Daren, 3rd Grade
Smith School

Answer:

You can tell the age of a cat by its size and teeth. You look at indicators such as how long large the teeth are, how much the gums have receded, and how yellow the teeth are.

Are there poachers after the wild cats?

Amaris, 7th Grade
Frank Lloyd Wright

Answer:

Yes, but the poachers are not necessarily after the cats for their pelts. In fact, they're not strictly going after the cats. Deer poachers will also kill a cat if they come across one. They say they do this to avoid a possible conflict between cattle or chickens and wild cats.

Has anyone been bitten while trying to catch an animal?

Dominique, 8th Grade

Answer:

Not on this expedition. We try to be careful both with the animals and with our health. There may be some diseases potentially harmful to humans.

What made you choose your occupation?

Hillary, 6th Grade

Answer:

I have been exposed to animals since I was six or seven years old. That is what made me realize that I wanted to do something dealing with wild animals and help them survive in a world of humans.

Why are the wild cats endangered?

Steven, 5th Grade
Heritage Elementary School

Answer:

The primary threat to wild cats is prey and loss of habitat due to human development and deforestation. Wild cats are also hunted and killed for their fur.

How many different wild cats are there?

Marcus and Andrew, 5th Grade
Glendale School

Answer:

At Chamela we have confirmed the presence of six different species of wild cat: jaguar, puma, ocelot, bobcat, jaguarondi, and margay.

Are all wild cats nocturnal animals?

Angel, 7th Grade
Frank Lloyd Wright School

Answer:

No. Results of radio-tracking sessions at Chamela show the jaguarondi is more active during the day than at night. However, ocelots, pumas, and bobcats appear to be more nocturnal.

How aggressive are the wild cats?

Eric, 5th Grade
Gardner Grade School

Answer:

The wild cats at Chamela are actually very shy. They avoid contact with humans.

Does it ever rain in the tropical dry forest in Chamela?

Thalia, 4th Grade
Central School

Answer:

When we refer to a forest as dry, this means it gets a very small amount of rain compared to most places.

Why are you studying wild cats and other small carnivores?

Jacob, 7th Grade

Answer:

The small carnivore is important because it helps population control of smaller species. Small carnivores play an essential role in keeping the diversity of the forest.

Why is the tropical dry forest endangered?

Jenny, 3rd Grade

Answer:

The forest is endangered because of loggers, farming, and hunters.

How big do ocelots get?

Mr. Beech's Class, 4th Grade

Answer:

Grown ocelots are a meter long and between 30 and 45 cm. tall.

What systems are you using to record data and what are your techniques for sampling the population?

Lucy, 7th Grade

Answer:

We are using four different types of traps in order to collect data about the animals. The traps include:

1. live trap
2. soft-catch hold trap (This trap and the live trap have sedatives attached to them and are checked twice a day to minimize the risk of any animal spending an extended period of time in the trap.)
3. 35 mm camera trap (The shutter of the camera is motion sensitive.)
4. scent traps (Animals are attracted by a smelly pellet and leave their tracks in the sand.)

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