

## Prisoners in Bolivia trading rare jaguar parts for fashion items, researchers discover

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Products created inside Mocoví Prison. Credit: Photos: Unknown Source/World Animal Protection

Prisoners in Bolivia are trading in jaguar skins and other wild animal body parts to produce wallets, hats, and belts for sale in local markets. The fangs and bones of jaguars are being illegally exported for use as traditional Asian medicine.

The trade, which further threatens the future of this species, has been

uncovered by researchers investigating reports of illegal trading at Mocoví prison, in Trinidad, Bolivia.

As the largest big cat in the Americas the [jaguar](#) (*Panthera onca*) has ecological and cultural significance in the landlocked country of Bolivia, but numbers are declining fast due to reasons including habitat loss—as well as domestic and international demand for their body parts. The illegal market exists despite the fact that jaguars have been legally protected against commercial trade internationally since 1975 and nationally since 1986.

Inmates at the Bolivian prison have been buying skins of jaguars and other animals including boa constrictor snakes (*Boa constrictor*) directly from traders at local markets, and then selling fashion items back again at a profit in order to provide income for their daily sustenance.

According to the researchers, Neil D'Cruze, Angie Elwin, Eyob Asfaw and Roberto Vieto, writing in the journal *Oryx*, large orders for the wildlife products are being received from non-Bolivian international clients.



Jaguar fangs and products made with their skins are sold in markets like El Campesino. Despite being illegal in the country to kill and sell jaguars and their by-products. Prisoners at the Mocoví prison are creating wallets, hats and belts with illegal jaguar skins inside the institution. These products are then sold in markets like El Campesino. Photos taken at El Campesino Market, June 2022. Credit: World Animal Protection/Emi Kondo.

Videos shared on [social media](#) as recently as February this year even show the director of Mocoví prison inviting the public to visit a craft fair held at the facility to buy wildlife products—including those from jaguar parts—made by the inmates.

Dr. Neil D'Cruze, Head of Wildlife Research at the International NGO, World Animal Protection said, "Our research confirms that Bolivian

inmates are paid to produce jaguar wallets, hats, belts and purses from their cells. Contrary to previous anecdotal reports, the footage provided showed no evidence of inmates being coerced into this [illegal activity](#); instead, an [inmate](#) stated that they did so willingly to 'earn a living for daily sustenance.'"

"Illegal wildlife trade is one of the most pressing threats to wildlife conservation. To support existing efforts to protect jaguars and other wildlife in Bolivia, there is a need for improved [law enforcement](#) and political will to take action against illegal activities. In addition, awareness must be raised on how wildlife products are being produced and the effect that such production has on the [wildlife](#) and the people involved."

All the information gathered by the authors of the report has been passed on to the Bolivian authorities.

**More information:** Going over the wall: Insights into illegal jaguar product production in a Bolivian prison, *Oryx* (2023). DOI: [10.1017/S0030605323000492](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605323000492)

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