

Dog attacks on mountain tapirs highlight a growing threat to endangered wildlife

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Mountain tapir. Credit: Camilo Botero, CC-BY 4.0

Researchers who captured footage of dog attacks on endangered mountain tapirs in Colombia are calling for action to protect threatened wildlife.

Using [camera traps](#), a team from WILD Campo Silvestre, the Tiger Cats Conservation Initiative, and the Fundación Caipora captured images of two attacks in the Campoalegre Soil Conservation District, Santa Rosa de Cabal in a period of two months.

Domestic dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) were photographed chasing and attacking mountain tapirs (*Tapirus pinchaque*) in a protected area of the Central Andes. These images were subsequently published in a [research paper](#) in *Neotropical Biology and Conservation*.

The study offers insights into the impact of [domestic dogs](#) on wildlife, particularly on species of conservation concern such as the mountain tapir. The authors highlight the urgent need for [population management](#) and control of domestic dogs inside and around protected areas.

Conservation measures such as neutering and vaccination programs for stray and owned dogs in the vicinity of natural reserves have been recently applied to protect the threatened clouded tiger cat (*Leopardus pardinoides*) in the region. The research team call for these measures to be extended to WILD Campo Alegre and surrounding lands.



Photographic evidence of domestic dogs A attacking and B chasing mountain tapirs in a private protected area of the Central Andes of Colombia. Credit: *Neotropical Biology and Conservation* (2024). DOI: 10.3897/neotropical.19.e117437

"Domestic dog incursion into protected areas is a global threat to wildlife that is difficult to mitigate because of the inherent social dilemma of controlling dog populations," says Juan Camilo Cepeda-Duque, lead author of the study.

"Dogs can contribute to the extinction of vertebrate species, can imbalance the trophic dynamics among predator guilds and even have the potential to collapse entire ecological communities."

The mountain tapir is an emblematic herbivore of the Andean cloud forest, globally classified as "Endangered" according to the IUCN Red List due to [habitat loss](#) and poaching. The presence and aggressive behavior of domestic dogs not only threaten the physical well-being of these tapirs but also their reproductive performance, foraging efficiency, and overall [population health](#) due to increased stress, potential for [disease transmission](#), and alterations in habitat use.

The research team highlights that their observations are not isolated cases, as locals previously reported the same dogs chasing and attacking mountain tapirs and cattle. Additionally, no detection of juvenile mountain tapirs was obtained in the survey.

A new protected area in the northern extreme of the Campoalegre Soil Conservation District has been established by the NGO WILD Nature Foundation, particularly with the target of protecting the habitat of

mountain tapirs and the last remnant populations of the fuerte's parrot (*Hapalopsittaca fuertesi*) in the region.

Currently, the reserve is carrying out an unprecedented restoration program, planting thousands of trees to recover the land once cleared for the establishment of cattle ranching.

More information: Juan Camilo Cepeda-Duque et al, Howling shadows: First report of domestic dog attacks on globally threatened mountain tapirs in high Andean cloud forests of Colombia, *Neotropical Biology and Conservation* (2024). [DOI: 10.3897/neotropical.19.e117437](https://doi.org/10.3897/neotropical.19.e117437)

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