

Field Museum expedition captures animal selfies in Amazon Rainforest

22 April 2016



Despite being the size of a large pig, the giant armadillo (*Priodontes maximus*) actually spends a lot of its time inside large burrows it digs in the ground. In fact, the species is considered a habitat engineer, as its burrows also provide shelter to other birds and mammals in its environment. The giant armadillo uses its claws to dig through the ground looks for its favorite meal -- termites. Unfortunately, the pressures of deforestation and hunting often times put the largest animals at risk first, and this species is vulnerable to extinction. Credit: The Field Museum

If you've been on the Internet lately, you've probably seen a cat selfie. Now, a Field Museum expedition to the Peruvian Amazon has elevated the animal selfie phenomenon to a whole new level. Earlier this year, a team of 25 scientists trekked to the unexplored reaches of Medio Putumayo-Algodón, Peru and spent 17 days conducting a rapid biological and social inventory of the area. As part of their efforts to document the region's biodiversity, the team set up 14 motion-activated camera traps and used a drone to capture aerial footage of the rainforest. The results are amazing.

The camera traps revealed remarkable biodiversity in the area, showing animals like ocelots, giant armadillos, curassows, giant anteaters, tapirs, peccaries, and pacas up close and personal in their native habitat. Meanwhile, the aerial drone footage helped paint a picture of the overall landscape, sharing a never-before-seen look at the vast forest, which is only accessible by helicopter.

"No scientists have ever explored this area, let alone document it with cameras and drones," explains Jon Markel, The Field Museum's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialist.

"These images are the first time this remote wilderness and the species that call it home are being recorded for science."

During the inventory, biologists encountered an astonishing amount of wildlife, recording 1,820 plant, fish, amphibian, reptile, bird, and mammal species, including 19 species believed to be new to science. The team documented the largest number of frogs and snakes of any Field Museum rapid inventory, discovered large peat deposits, and found clay licks that provide salt essential to the health of local wildlife.



Ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*) live under the green canopies of South American rain forests, but can be found as far north as Texas. These cats are twice the size of an average house cat, and are largely nocturnal. Our Rapid Inventory team shared that they often see ocelot tracks, but only see the cat rarely. It should also be noted that their beautiful fur has made them a target for hunters, despite protection in most countries where they live. Credit: The Field Museum



The social team worked with the nine indigenous groups living in the region to understand their use of the landscape and their aspirations for the future. They have a clear vision of wanting to protect these lands. However, the area is under threat from illegal mining and logging, as well as a proposed road.

"You can't argue for the protection of an area without knowing what is there," said Corine Vriesendorp, Director of The Field Museum's rapid inventory program. "We discovered an intact forest inhabited by indigenous people for centuries and teeming with wildlife. We want it to survive and thrive long after our cameras are gone."

Over the past 17 years, The Field Museum's rapid inventory program has conducted 28 rapid inventories and helped governments establish 18 new protected areas totaling 26.5 million acres. The program is weaving these successes together into vast, unbroken conservation corridors that honor the continental-scale and splendor of the Amazon. To learn more about The Field Museum's conservation efforts in South America, visit the Museum's [website](#).

In the rainforest, you can tell me a herd of white-lipped peccaries (*Tayassu pecari*) has been nearby recently. Living in groups of multiple hundreds, these animals travel great distances to find fruit and leave a strong odor in their wake. Unfortunately, peccaries are highly prized by hunters and have been hunted to extinction in many areas of the Amazon. Credit: The Field Museum

Provided by Field Museum

APA citation: Field Museum expedition captures animal selfies in Amazon Rainforest (2016, April 22) retrieved 25 September 2020 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-04-field-museum-captures-animal-selfies.html>

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