

CAT

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news





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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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Cover Photo: Indian male leopard meeting with two females in Rajasthan, India
Photo: Marlon du Toit

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Jaguars scavenging on a common bottlenose dolphin carcass in Tortuguero NP, Costa Rica

Two female jaguars *Panthera onca* were recorded scavenging on a common bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* carcass on 24 May 2021 in Tortuguero National Park, Costa Rica. This is the second record of jaguars scavenging on a marine dolphin in America. Our findings provide further insights into the opportunistic scavenging behaviours of jaguars.

Records of jaguars feeding on dolphins are scarce. Castañeda et al. (2013) documented two male jaguars scavenging on a marine dolphin carcass (unidentified species) in Honduras. Similar records of jaguars hunting river dolphins *Inia geoffrensis* have been reported in South America (Best & Da Silva 1993, DeFler 1994, Trujillo et al. 2010). Here we report the first record of jaguars scavenging on a common bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* in Tortuguero National Park, Costa Rica. On 24 May 2021, a common bottlenose dolphin carcass (10°23'594" N / 83°25'040" W) was found on the beach by park rangers during a morning patrol. Although the cause of death was unknown, it was presumed that the dolphin died at sea, drifting for a few days prior to being washed ashore. The carcass

corresponded to an adult individual. Based on the state of decomposition (e.g. strong smell of decay, presence of insect larvae, absence of blood, skin peeling, exposed bones) it was estimated by the rangers that the carcass was approximately four days post-mortem. In the afternoon, a team returned for a more detailed examination. The carcass had been dragged by a jaguar nearly 50 m into the vegetation evidenced by the presence of jaguar tracks around the carcass. The team identified canine teeth puncture marks towards the right side of the skull, the right flipper, and the abdominal area. Based on the size, shape, and location of the wounds we determined they were most likely made by a jaguar (Schaller & Vasconcelos 1978). In these same regions of the carcass, there was also evidence of

feeding activity. There were several scratch marks across the carcass that corresponded with jaguar claws. After the body check was completed, a camera trap equipped to record video (Browning Strike Force APEX Trail Camera) was installed near the carcass for a period of four days (i.e. until 27 May 2021).

Two adult female jaguars were recorded at the dolphin carcass (see video at [www.http://coastaljaguarconservation.org/](http://www.coastaljaguarconservation.org/)) displaying different behaviours related to feeding activity (Table 1). Jaguar activity around the carcass occurred mostly at night (54% events; 20:00–6:00 h), but also during crepuscular (26% events; 6:00–8:00 h, and 18:00–20:00 h) and diurnal hours (20% events; 8:00–18:00 h). A similar pattern was described by Castañeda et al. (2013), with most scavenging occurring at night. Both female jaguars were recorded scavenging separately but were also observed scavenging together on three different occasions (Fig. 1), which differs from Castañeda et al. (2013) who only reported the two male jaguars scavenging from a marine dolphin at different times. Further, and unlike Castañeda et al. (2013), both females consumed a large portion of the carcass. As described by Guilder et al. (2015) jaguars tend to return to a carcass and consume considerably more when prey availability (i.e. nesting marine turtles) is low (i.e. non-peak season: October–June) in the study area. The tolerated scavenging recorded between the two female jaguars is not

completely unexpected considering that the local jaguar population is well known for its high level of social tolerance and prey sharing (Guilder et al. 2015).

As part of a long-term monitoring program within Tortuguero National Park, Costa Rica, we have documented both female jaguars consistently on our camera traps since 2010 (Female 2) and 2012 (Female 1). Both females were adults when first recorded, therefore, the degree of relatedness between them is unknown. Although the local jaguar population is characterised by a marked overlap between the home ranges of conspecifics, these observations constitute the first time we have recorded two adult females at one location at the same time. The lack of similar records could be due to home range overlap (and therefore direct encounters) being less frequent between females (Arroyo-Arce 2013) as a strategy to protect key resources and their dependent young. Although females avoid direct contact with other adult females, we have documented these specific individuals, as well as other adult females, at a same location with a small-time difference between records (less than 24 h). This could be a sign that females, as well as males, can exhibit a certain degree of tolerance of a conspecific at a shared resource (e.g., carcass, coastal habitat; Elbroch & Quigley 2017).

Jaguar predation on nesting sea turtles is well known in Costa Rica (Fonseca et al. 2020) and has been studied in Tortuguero National Park since 2005 (Arroyo-Arce & Salom-Pérez 2015). Therefore, it is not unexpected that jaguars could take advantage to feed from other marine resources available while patrolling the coastal habitat – which reflects its well-known opportunistic and generalist behaviour (Rabinowitz & Nottingham 1986). Our results also provide additional information regarding the little-known scavenging behaviour of jaguars.

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Supporting Online Material SOM Table T1 is available at www.catsg.org

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Fig. 1. Photograph of two adult female jaguars scavenging on a common bottlenose dolphin in Tortuguero National Park, Costa Rica. Above: Female 2 feeding from the carcass while Female 1 rests in the background. Below: Female 1 licking the carcass (Photos Coastal Jaguar Conservation).

Thomson I., Arroyo-Arce S., Cedeño-Calderón J., Segura-Fernández E., Luke B. & Vargas-Ramirez E. Jaguars scavenging on a common bottlenose dolphin carcass in Tortuguero NP, Costa Rica. *Cat News* 75, 34–35. Supporting Online Material

SOM T1. Jaguar activity recorded at the common bottlenose dolphin carcass with a camera trap (Browning Strike Force APEX Trail Camera) in Tortuguero National Park, Costa Rica.

Date	Hour	Jaguar	Minutes	Behaviour
24 May	16:44	Female 1	49	Approaching carcass / licking / biting the carcass / consumption of flesh / resting / aggressive display towards something off camera / dragging
24 May	17:40	Female 1 & 2	20	Resting
24 May	18:09	Female 1	90	Resting
24 May	21:24	Female 1 & 2	3	Feeding / resting
24 May	21:55	Female 1	30	Resting / walking away
24 May	22:28	Female 1 & 2	20	Consumption of flesh / resting
25 May	0:25	Female 2	38	Approaching carcass / resting
25 May	1:53	Female 1	6	Resting
25 May	5:06	Female 2	20	Resting
25 May	23:23	Female 2	20	Resting
26 May	6:02	Female 2	20	Approaching carcass
26 May	7:27	Female 2	3	Passing by / approaching carcass
27 May	1:12	Female 2	10	Approaching carcass
27 May	3:51	Female 1	20	Walking away