

Fundación Zoológica Colombiana
Reg. Cámara de Comercio de Villavicencio
N°S052190 NIT: 0822007661-2

STRATEGIES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE GIANT OTTER IN THE META DEPARTMENT, COLOMBIA, SOUTH AMERICA

Background

The giant otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*) is one of the most critical endangered wild species in Colombia according to the IUCN, CITES and Alexander Von Humboldt National Biological Research Institute, being classified as VU, Appendix I and CR, respectively.

Based on IUCN information there is a high reduction of free populations in the whole distribution range from the northern Argentina to the Guyana, being described two subspecies in the whole range, one supposedly extinct. In Colombia the species is found in the Orinoco Region and the Amazonian.

The general problem situation has been the overuse of the species, where approximately 40 thousand individuals were hunted in the past to make "pelo de guama" hats, product from the Llanos Orientales of Colombia and Venezuela.

The species is also repelled by local fishermen in their distribution range because of the competence for fishing and feeding; besides that is considered as part of the indigenous and settler's food.

Problem Situation of the Giant otters at the Meta Department, Colombia.

The Meta Department has changed on its forest covering between 1983 and 2003, especially in areas close to water streams and wetlands, main habitat for giant otters.

The satellite images from the Agustin Codazzi National Geographical Institute show the real damage caused to those habitats. The increased change on the soil use due to the agriculture and cattle besides other factors has been decreasing the ecosystems, but the real effects and their impact in populations' dynamics and water quality are unknown.

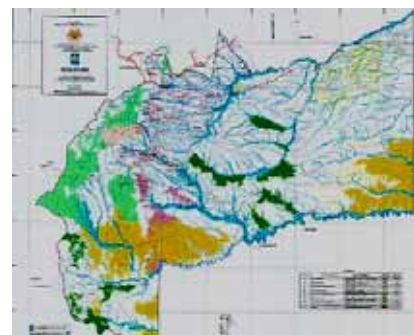
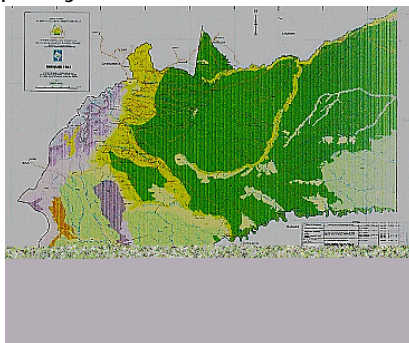
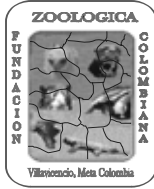


Image 1. Forest covering 1983. Meta Department. Image 2. Forest Covering 2003. Meta Department. Colombia





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The possible presence of organo phosphates and chlorate pollutants in the ecosystems is a preoccupation because even though their use is not allowed in the country, people used them secretly for the plague control during the sowing.

Water used at the petroleum perforations is poured to the rivers; the quality of the resource is not optimal because it has a high level of salts and metals which interrupt the cycle of microorganisms and other bigger fishes, main food for giant otters and community.

The breaking of the cycle is believed to be the reason why the density of fishes for human feeding is so low. The fishermen from Puerto López Region expressed a higher difficulty for fishing and a biggest effort done every day in order to get larger animals.

The effusion of organic material and other pollutants from cities and shore river's community damage the quality of the water founding domestic animal's parasites in native fishes as Characidae, main food of the giant otters and human community, being another factor that affects all the ecosystems of the area.

Captivity Conservation Program

PIPO
17 Days old

The program officially started at 2004 with an agreement between the Fundación Zoológica Colombiana (NGO) and the Corporación Autónoma para el Área especial de la Macarena "Cormacarena" (Environmental regional authority) on head of Dr. Joaquin Patarroyo B, Director.

The conservation process started 9 months before the legal agreement with the hand raising and physical rehabilitation of a male giant otter called Pipo, who was confiscated by the environmental authority and surrendered to the FZC for its care. The animal came from the Tomo River in the Vichada Department, Orinoco Region, Colombia.

Image3.Male Giant otter.
FZC.

Animal Care

The rehabilitation procedure started with medical, nutritional and biological protocols applied. The medical care was supported on laboratory proves, the animal presented dehydration and intestinal candidiasis and was treated immediately.

At nutritional level, its management was established under the basal rate metabolism requirements for the species (BRM) and growth rate, taking approximately 6 nursing bottles of 8 onzes every 3 hours.

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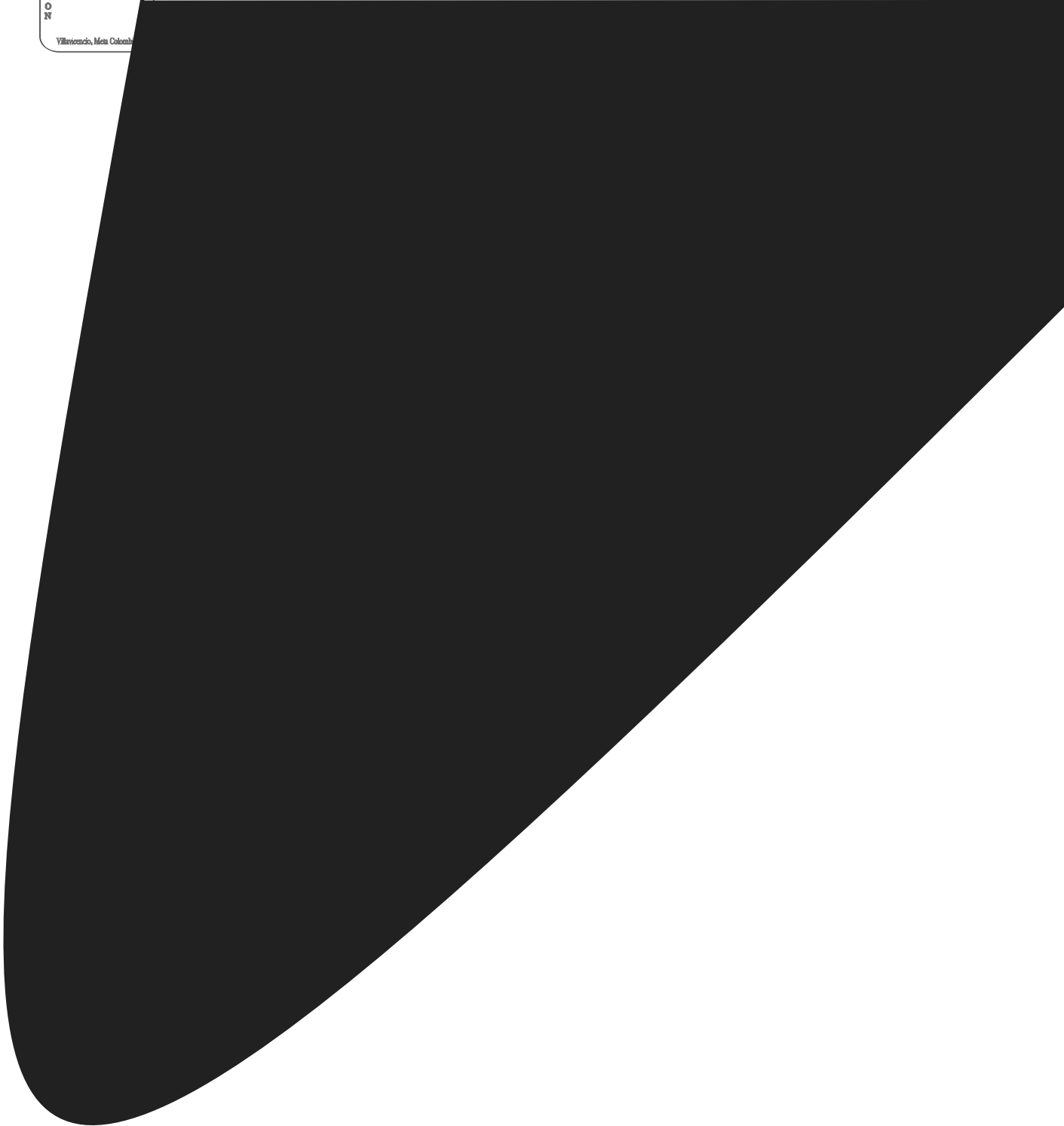


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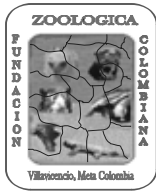
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Their new life style generated distress in the animals expressing a quiet behavior because of the new conditions, bigger space and pond.

The animals have been developing their natural activities as sub aquatic swimming, periscope movements, exchange of objects games, and courting behavior.



Image 14. Enjoying their new habitat.



Image 15. Camila resting.

The behavioral patterns include different types of vocalizations, which are related to precise face and body expression.

Their trophic habit has helped to analyze their diets at their natural habitat, establishing that probably they are not strict fish eaters. Besides fish, they had hunted birds and crayfish, and compensate their vitamins deficiency from natural native fruits.

The comfort of the animals at captivity is produce through necessary elements in order to develop their natural behavior.

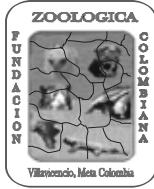
The inclusion of fishes and the induction of their capture is a healthy element for the animals used as environmental enrichment.

The rehabilitation process has produced important results, the establishment of the type of food preferences obtaining there is a preference for crayfish.



Image 16. Eating native fruit.





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The FZC has the purpose to increase the physical space, beach and soil besides the water surface to 400m² from the current habitat; and also guarantee the food supply, which is one of the concerns because of its high cost and daily quantity needed by the animals.

The FZC is not a zoo, **it is a** Non profit organization that looks for the conservation of endangered species and ecosystems of the Orinoquia Region in Colombia supporting and working with the environmental regional authorities of the Llanos Orientales Region.

There are too many ways to contribute and support this program. If you want to do it, please contact us by email fzcolombiallanos@yahoo.com.

IVAN J. RUBIANO V. DMV
DIRECTOR

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