

Jaguars rival tigers as expert swimmers

WASHINGTON - When it comes to status, the jaguar - the cat, not the car - can't compete with the three other big cats, the lion, tiger, and leopard, the jaguar's closest relative.

It's image problem lies in the nature of the beast. The world's largest spotted cat leads a very secretive life in thickly forested junbles in inhospitable lands, from Mexico south into Argentina. It is one of the most mysterious of all large cats, and one of the most threatened. No one knows for sure how many are left.

Feared and revered, the jaguar has a reputation as a killer. The instinctive reaction that still prevails among people deep in the interior of Brazil, for example, is to shoot "el tigre" on sight - not get to know him.

Swimming To Survive During the three years that wildlife biologist Howard Quigley spent there studying the animal, more jaguars were killed in the wild than were captured for research. ''It's considered macho," he says.

Quigley's research - the first to focus on a jaguar family - found that jaguars rival, and possibly surpass, tigers in at least one arena: water. They have no fear of piranhas and caimans, are remarkably good swimmers, and can easily cross five-milk aquatic expanses.

In the swampy Pantanal region of southwestern Brazil, they must swim to survive. In the rainy season, more than 70 percent of the nearly 25 million acres of savanna are under water for as much as six months of the year.

"Jaguars have no problem going from one patch of forest to another through water six feet deep to find swim a mile or two in a night.'

The jaguars' affinity for water, he explains, is substantiated by where they tend to live. The animals are more numerous in the wetter parts of the Pantanal, while mountain lions and pumas are more prevalent in drier habitats.

But swimming can be fatal, too. He says boaters shot two swimming jaguars and left them to be devoured by piranhas.

Quigley's research is a continuation of the jaguar ecology project begun in 1977 by Dr. George B. Schaller, director of the New York Zoological Society's Animal Research and Conservation Center, and Peter G. Crawshaw, Jr., a Brazilian research biologist.

Because of the extreme difficulties in finding and tracking jaguars, Quigley's year in the Pantanal stretched into three. His study, the basis of his doctoral work at the University of Idaho, was centered on a privately owned 600,000-acre ranch.

Up A Tree

In the steamy heat of Brazil's Mato Grosso, even the plants are inhospitable. "If the bugs don't bite you or sting you, then the plants will stick you," says Quigley whose lip was torn open by a bamboo spine when he was tracking a jaguar on horseback.

There are no common jaguar trails in the Pantanal. Only dogs could successfully sniff out jaguars. It took from five to seven trained dogs to corner one jaguar. When the dogs closed in, the jaguar, an excellent climber, would head up a tree.

'We'd pull the dogs away and shoot the jaguar with a tranquilizer. Then we'd climb the

prey," says Quigley. "They can tree ourselves and lower the animal by ropes. It's very impressive having a 200-pound jaguar asleep at your feet. You could feel its power," says Quigley.

Once the animals were fitted with radio collars, another logistics battle began - keeping up with them. "They move much faster than we do, and they don't have to get into a canoe or saddle a horse first," he says. "What we wanted to do was just stay within radio contact with them.'

Ultimately Quigley took to the air — flying after the jaguars in light planes. At that, he felt lucky

to be able to keep an animal within range for 24 hours at a time.

What he learned of the jaguar's lifestyle came mainly from one family: Mother, her pair of offspring named Dr. Wonderful and Felicia, and a later offspring called Felix.

Jaguars are most active when their prey are active, at dawn and dusk. They feed primarily on cattle, calves, capybara (the world's largest rodent), and peccaries (wild pigs). Hunted for killing ranch cattle, jaguars are increasingly forced to feed on them because the habitats of their other

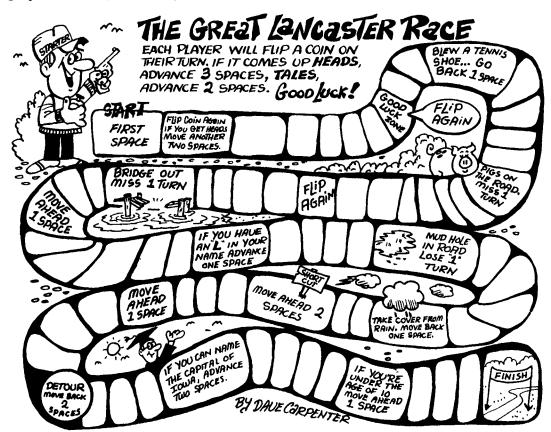
prey are being gobbled up t development. Jaguars also are th only predator powerful enough t take down an adult steer.

Mother apparently taught he young to hunt. In one 12-hou period, she and Felix killed thre peccaries, more than would hav been needed just for food, Quigle says.

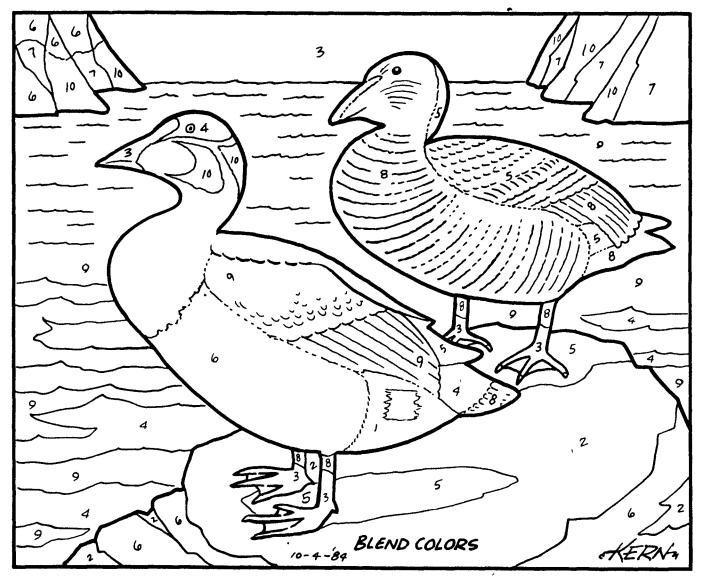
Extensive Ranges

Young jaguars stay within thei mother's protection until they are 18 to 20 months old, venturing of

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5. BROWN 10. LT. GREEN

THE COMMON EIDER IS IMPORTANT TO THE ESKI-MOS FOR THEIR EGGS FOR FOOD AND THEIR SKINS FOR CLOTHING AND BLAN-KETS. EIDERS ARE OUR LARGEST DUCKS THEY LIVE IN ARCTIC SEAS AND ARE SELDOM AWAY FROM SALT WATER THE MALES STRIK-ING BLACK AND WHITE PAT-TERN AND THE RICH DARK BROWN OF THE FEMALE MAKE IDENTIFICATION EASY.