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Open Spaces

A Talk on the Wild Side.

Protecting Central America's
Five Largest Wild Places: Indio
Maíz-Tortuguero

(<https://www.fws.gov/news/blog/index.cfm/2016/3/9/Protecting-Central-Americas-Five-Largest-Wild-Places-Indio-MazTortuguero>)

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Tortuguero National Park in Costa Rica is part of the Indio-Maiz corridor. Credit: Global WaterForum (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/globalwaterforum/19674194701/>) / cc license

This week we are excited to feature a series of articles about some of the most important landscapes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service helps to protect in Central America, that are home to an incredibly biodiverse array of wildlife. As part of “Central America Week,” we invite you to learn more about our cornerstone strategy with Wildlife Conservation Society (<http://newsroom.wcs.org/News-Releases/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/8606/Central-American-Mega-flyover-to-Measure-Impacts-of-Humans-Cows-in-Largest-Remaining-Rainforests.aspx>) to protect Central America’s five largest remaining wild places. We will also be spotlighting some of the charismatic species that live in these critical habitats. All of our Central America Week stories can be found here (<https://www.fws.gov/international/wildlife-without-borders/central-america-week.html>).

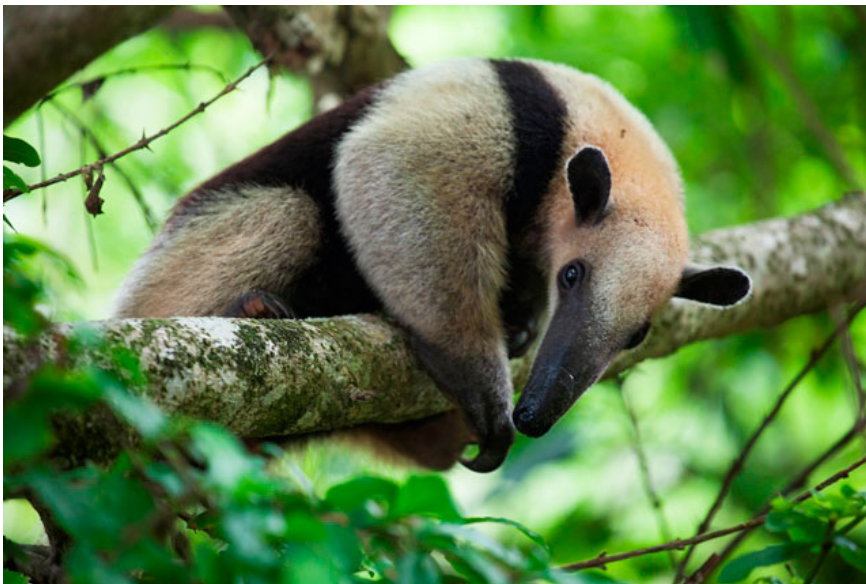
Indio Maíz-Tortuguero is a critical stronghold for wildlife within the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. This Delaware-sized group of reserves and indigenous territories includes some of the most pristine forest remaining in Nicaragua, and Costa Rica’s Tortuguero National Park. The Indio Maíz -Tortuguero forest landscape contains a mosaic of upland forests, swamps, mangroves and beaches famous for their sea turtle nesting sites.

The Indio-Maíz Biosphere Reserve in Southeastern Nicaragua is one of the two remaining core areas for Baird’s tapirs (*Tapirus bairdii*) and jaguars (*Panthera onca*) in the country. Globally, it is one of the three most important habitats for tapirs. The Baird’s tapir is the largest land mammal in Central and South America, and because of habitat loss, hunting and its low reproductive rate, it is now considered an endangered species (<http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/21471/0>) by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.



A Baird's Tapir gets its ears cleaned. Credit: Emmanuel Rondeau

This landscape is also key habitat for many other rare animal and plant species including harpy eagles (*Harpia harpyja*), giant anteaters (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*), great green macaws (*Ara ambiguus*) and wild almond trees (*Dipteryx panamensis*).



A tamandua hangs out. Credit: Emmanuel Rondeau

These species are threatened by habitat degradation from encroachment by cattle ranchers and widespread poaching.

Nationally, more than 75,000 hectares of forest (185,328 acres) are being illegally cleared every year, mostly in Nicaragua's two Biosphere reserves, Bosawas and Indio-Maíz. For comparison, the amount of area being deforested is larger in size than well-known U.S. cities like Denver, Chicago, New Orleans and Philadelphia. Without action, Indio-Maíz could disappear within a decade.

Species Spotlight: Read 5 Fun Facts about White-Lipped Peccaries (<https://www.fws.gov/news/blog/?mode=entry&entry=581DE2E2-92D1-E799-E44A52D9A522E50D>)

To prevent the landscape from being utterly destroyed, the Service is

partnering with Global Wildlife Conservation. Working together we aim to reduce illegal cattle ranching and poaching in the Indio-Maíz Biosphere reserve. In addition, by working with local indigenous communities, the national Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment, and the Secretariat of Natural Resources, and other partners, we are developing and implementing a sustainable community-based forest ranger program to protect this ecologically pristine area well into the future.

Story by Brendan Tate, International Affairs. For more stories from Central America Week, please click here. (<https://www.fws.gov/international/wildlife-without-borders/central-america-week.html>)