



Activity report of the YAQU PACHA working group from Venezuela for 2021

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During the year 2021, we carried out several field expeditions to gather information on three species of aquatic mammals: the manatees (*Trichechus manatus manatus*) and Guiana dolphins (*Sotalia guianensis*) in Lake Maracaibo in the west of the country and the Amazon river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*) in the llanos rivers of Venezuela.

We can highlight that it was possible to visit 5 new fishing communities of the lake, in which data on bycatch, hunting and use of manatees and Guiana dolphins were compiled. Confirming that in all of them there is use of one or both investigated species, despite the fact that it is classified as a crime according to the current Venezuelan law. For this reason, the educational campaigns that we have been developing for 4 years were reinforced, with the support of organizations such as **YAQU PACHA e.V.**

In addition, it was possible to visualize two groups of manatees on the eastern coast, within the "Ciénaga de la Palmita e Isla de Pájaros" wildlife refuge, one made up of a mother and her calf, and the other of 5 individuals in courtship behavior, a reported event and visually recorded for the first time in the country. Considering that manatees are classified as "Critically Endangered" at the regional level and it is estimated that their population has been reduced by 80%, this encounter is encouraging. The community settled on the coastal margin of this area (eastern coast of the lake) is committed to the protection of the species and we have reached a community cooperation agreement to constantly report observational data or incidental catches, as well as contribute to establishing an offer ecotourism that benefits them economically and represent an incentive the conservation of manatees.

Additionally, two scientific expeditions were carried out to estimate for the first time the relative abundance of the Amazon river dolphin in 200 km of the Capanaparo river of the "Santos Luzardo" National Park, and in 100 km of the Portuguesa river, both in the lowland states of Venezuela. This represents an advance in the objectives proposed in the national action plan for the conservation of freshwater mammals in Venezuela, and is aligned with the research priorities contemplated by the group of specialists that make up the South American River Dolphin Initiative (SARDI), in which the 6 countries of the region where the species is present participate.

During these expeditions, the contrast of a highly preserved river such as the Capanaparo, which is immersed in the National Park vs. the Portuguesa, was observed. In the latter it was possible to verify a great loss of the riverside forest, and in its place there were human settlements and plantations, however, the river still seems to offer resources for the permanence of the dolphins and therefore it was decided to start an educational and awareness campaign to mitigate anthropic impacts on the community and, it was contemplated to improve the ecotourism offer



for dolphin watching through the training of the operators who offer the service, activities that were well received.

We concluded 2021 successfully, with new and valuable information for the three species, data was obtained from areas never before explored in Venezuela thanks to the support of national organizations and entrepreneurs such as “**Hato Las Caretas**” and international organizations such as **YAQU PACHA and Nuremberg Zoo**, results that will serve to define future actions with the firm intention of guaranteeing the protection not only of dolphins and manatees, but also of their ecosystem, linking research, education and ecotourism.

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Venezuela