

# COSTA RICA

## The Jaguar Rescue Center

by Cyril Brass

**I**ts name caught my attention; The Jaguar Rescue Center. In particular the word Jaguar, the most fierce and dangerous mammal in the forests of Costa Rica. I had never seen one in all my travels throughout Costa Rica. Maybe this was the day.

The Jaguar Rescue Center is located in the wetland rainforests just outside the town of Puerto Viejo along the Caribbean coastline of Costa Rica. The center was established by two devoted naturalists, Encar who is an expert on mammals and her husband Sandro who is an expert on reptiles. The rescue center was created as a result of locals finding injured and mistreated animals and bringing them to the couple's home. One of the first animals brought to the center was a Jaguar. Although this beautiful wild cat did not survive, it did inspire Encar to create the center and its name.

The Jaguar Rescue Center is a rescue facility. It is not a zoo. It is not a wildlife sanctuary. The center's main goals are summed up by 3Rs; rescue, rehabilitate and release. Injured, mistreated and confiscated animals and abandoned babies are accepted at the center. Medical attention is provided to save the animal's life, to restore them to proper health and with full intention of eventual reintroduction back into their natural habitat. This is only a temporary home for the animals unless the animal is injured so severely it would not be able to defend itself or escape from potential predators out in the wild.

Most animals that are brought to the center are the result of human development and related issues affecting the beautiful and fragile ecosystems for these wild creatures. One of the biggest issues facing wild animals is the harm caused by electric power lines running through forests connecting to homes, hotels and restaurants. It is easy for monkeys or sloths to go from a branch to an electrical wire, which is not one hundred percent insulated, resulting in injury or death for the animal.

Another huge problem is domestic dogs. People in the area own big aggressive dogs to protect their homes and property and they allow them to run free in the towns and region. When a dog attacks a monkey or sloth, they have little defense.

Here are a few of the close encounters and incredible experiences I had during my visit at the Jaguar Rescue Center.

### SNAKES



The Snake Exhibit displays a variety of snakes of all colors and sizes. The purpose of the snake exhibit at the center is for education and reproduction. Many snakes are killed unnecessarily due to people's lack of knowledge. Locals need to be educated on what, where, and how to deal with snakes. Also public awareness of the ecological impact that snakes have on ecosystems needs to be known. Of the 140 species of snakes living in Costa Rica, 40 are venomous. I was shown several of the poisonous snakes and learned the main characteristics of each; the bushmaster (second largest venomous snake in the world), the fer de lance (most dangerous snake in Costa Rica) and the highly venomous eyelash pit viper.