

The fire took away
her home; today,
almost — two years
later, she returns to
the forest.

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YAGUARA



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**Dedicated to the guardians of
biodiversity who prove that life
always finds a way if there are
hands willing to guide it**



Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi

YAGUARA: THE CHRONICLE OF A LONG JOURNEY TO RECLAIM WHAT FIRE STEALS IN AN INSTANT

For nearly two years, technical, scientific, and human work made it possible to rehabilitate the female jaguar and prepare her for her return to the wild. This achievement marks a milestone for wildlife conservation in Bolivia, constituting the first successful release of a rehabilitated jaguar after being rescued from forest fires.

Her story reveals a blunt truth: while destroying a forest and wiping out hundreds of lives can take mere moments, saving a single individual demands time, knowledge, resources, and an unwavering collective will.

The roar that the fire could not silence

The story of Yaguara began with a burst of ash and fear. There were no certainties regarding her mother's whereabouts, but the context is painfully predictable in the lowlands of Bolivia: forest fires advanced relentlessly, devouring habitat and pushing wildlife toward the brink of devastation.

Fleeing from the flames, a jaguar cub barely 7 to 9 months old ended up taking refuge on a cattle ranch in the Nueva Jerusalén community, about 48 kilometers from the Ambue Ari Custody Center, which would later become her temporary home.

That initial captivity could have been the end of her life in the wild. However, when environmental authorities were notified and the cub was transferred to the Ambue Arí Wildlife Custody Center, destiny changed course. The initial evaluation was definitive: it confirmed that the jaguar had already acquired stalking and hunting skills, among others, from her mother, which are fundamental for surviving in the wild.

Therein lay the challenge. There were no precedents. Bolivia had never before rehabilitated a large feline for the purpose of release into the wild. The easy option was to transfer her to a country with already established capacities, but the institutions and experts involved made a unanimous and brave decision: the capacities had to be built at home. An Inter-institutional Technical-Scientific Committee was formed, comprising independent specialists in genetics and veterinary medicine, and the administrative resolution that ignited the spark of hope was approved.

The school of silence

Rehabilitating an apex predator demands a medical and biological paradox: caring for it intensively without letting it notice the presence of its caretakers. The great enemy of freedom is not confinement, but habituation to humans; if a jaguar loses its natural behavior around people or begins to associate them with food, the risk of conflict with human activities increases, endangering both its survival and its coexistence with communities.

To avoid this, a monumental 10,000-square-meter enclosure submerged in a completely natural environment was designed. The space included a lagoon 10 meters long, nearly 7 meters wide, and 2 meters deep, an aquatic space where Yaguara learned to swim, dive, and develop muscles worthy of a queen of the forest.

Biologist Iván Márquez and veterinarian Irene González, professionals from CIWY, worked on-site throughout the process, ensuring the appropriate conditions for Yaguara's rehabilitation. Their presence in the enclosure was kept to the absolute minimum required so as not to disturb the animal and to encourage her progressive adaptation. For two years, they were the only people who approached the perimeter. They entered with electronic devices turned off, in absolute silence, with their faces and bodies covered to erase any anthropogenic stimuli.

In 730 days, Yaguara had minimal visual encounters with the team, and she always displayed aversion and flight behavior, immediately retreating into the undergrowth.



Meanwhile, through screens and camera traps broadcasting 24 hours a day, the team monitored her progress. The enclosure was designed with dynamic entry points for local fauna. Small and medium-sized mammals crossed the fences at random, turning the space into a true laboratory for spontaneous hunting. Yaguara learned on her own to stalk, to apply the exact bite based on the size of the prey, to drag her catches under vegetative cover, and to ration her food over days, perfectly mimicking the behavioral repertoire of a completely wild jaguar.

Concurrently, the veterinary sub-committee looked after her internal health. Under strict protocols, Yaguara underwent three sedations throughout her growth. They evaluated her dentition, took blood, urine, and fecal samples, and measured her morphometrics to verify that her metabolic development was flawless and to rule out infectious diseases that could jeopardize wild populations. During the final sedation, she was fitted with a satellite collar programmed with remote-release technology, marking the first time this type of technology has been implemented in Bolivia.

The technological device to monitor Yaguara during her return to the forest was ready.



Operation Return

The choice of the release site required a profound technical analysis carried out by a technical sub-committee formed specifically for this purpose. Four alternatives were evaluated, but the final decision leaned toward the north: Noel Kempff Mercado National Park. This ecological jewel shares habitat characteristics, within the transition zone between the Amazon and the Chiquitano Dry Forest, with Yaguara's place of origin. Furthermore, it boasts permanent water, an abundant availability of prey, zero human presence in its core area, and, crucially, an active team of park rangers under the management of SERNAP, which guarantees territorial control and the security of the area and her new habitat.

The transfer was a masterpiece of logistics and endurance, a multimodal journey where personnel safety and reducing the jaguar's stress hung by an invisible thread. The operation began with chemical restraint via blowpipe inside her management cage. Once asleep, Yaguara began an epic journey: first by land from the custody center, then by air in a light aircraft that took off from Guarayos toward the Ramón Darío Gutiérrez naval airstrip, and finally by river, navigating Amazonian waters in a boat to the heart of the protected area.

An advance team had already prepared the ground. By the time Yaguara fully woke up from the anesthesia, the environment surrounding her no longer had bars. It was the infinite horizon of Noel Kempff Mercado National Park.



The first step in the promised land

The moment to open the transport crate stopped the hearts of scientists, park rangers, and coordinators.

There were no erratic movements or bursts of panic.

Yaguara poked her head out with a majestic caution, caught the scent of her new life in the air, and, with a careful, slow, and confident step, ventured into the densest vegetation.

Satellite data from the first week have confirmed the experts' most optimistic forecasts.

During the first three days, the feline went on long walks covering several kilometers, a natural behavior to dissipate the stress of the journey and survey the new environment. On the fourth day, the GPS points began to cluster, indicating that Yaguara has temporarily settled into a favorable niche, exploring and seeking out her first prey in freedom.

The journey, however, has only just begun.

The team led by Iván Márquez will maintain strict post-release monitoring for a year and a half to two years. In the medium term, they hope to see how she establishes a definitive home range, patrolling, marking, and defending her territory against other jaguars. In the long term, ultimate success will be written on the day a camera trap records that Yaguara has become a mother in the forest.



The price of a miracle and the value of hope

Carrying out this technical-scientific odyssey cost approximately 120,000 dollars, funded thanks to an exemplary alliance of funds and companies such as the Brigitte Bardot Foundation, BBVA Foundation, Bisa Seguros, the Foundation for the Conservation of the Chiquitano Forest (FCBC), the Foundation for the Development of the National System of Protected Areas (FUNDESNA), the Friends of Nature Foundation (FAN), the Quebracho Firefighters, among others, in perfect institutional coordination led by the CIWY team.

While Yaguara's rehabilitation involved complex fieldwork, it also required extensive management and coordination of procedures with authorities at national and departmental levels. These administrative processes were a fundamental part of the path traveled, and in many cases, they represented additional challenges that had to be addressed in parallel with the technical work, in a context that demanded perseverance, institutional articulation, and continuous follow-up.

In a country where it sometimes seems so painfully easy to strike a match, pour a jerrycan of gasoline, and reduce hectares of biodiversity and wildlife to ashes, Yaguara's story stands as a beacon of moral and technical resistance. The monumental infrastructure built in Guarayos remains intact, and professional capacities are now planted in Bolivia; this is not an isolated effort for a single individual, but rather the birth of a school of conservation for the country's large felines or for other wildlife species that need to be adapted for release.

Yaguara is already walking in the dense forest of Noel Kempff Mercado. Her presence regulates the forest, balances the rivers, and restores health to the ecosystem. She is living proof that, in the face of destruction, humanity is also capable of orchestrating miracles of scientific precision and deep love for wildlife.



A window to the world:

This chronicle and its technical memories will be formally presented to representatives of the most important environmental funds in the region at the upcoming Congress of the Network of Environmental Funds of Latin America and the Caribbean (RedLAC Bolivia 2026). Thus, Yaguara's story will be projected as a symbol of pride and vanguard for Bolivian conservation.

In this release into Noel Kempff Mercado National Park, the Bolivian Environmental Funds, FUNDESNAF and the FCBC, were also part of the collective effort that made this moment possible, enabling her flight toward freedom.

A contribution that reflects the importance of articulation between organizations, allies, and financing mechanisms committed to conservation, proving that protecting biodiversity requires coordination, a shared vision, and the joining of wills capable of turning hope into concrete actions for our common future.





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