

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

- WINTER 2024 -

THE BEARS
CAUGHT
IN PERU'S
WILDFIRES

WAYS TO GIVE

TEAMING UP
WITH DISNEY TO
PROTECT THE
PRIDE AGAIN



Wildlife Conservation Network

The Bears Caught in Peru's Wildfires

The truck pulled into the village and rolled to a stop, with conservationists from Spectacled Bear Conservation (SBC) jumping out to distribute supplies to outstretched hands. Deep concern enveloped this rural community as thick as the smoke wreathing the sky above. This year, Peru has endured a frenzy of wildfires raging across the Amazon and the Andes; with nearly no



LOCAL PEOPLE IN LAQUIPAMPA DOUSING A FIRE ON THEIR LAND.

response measures in place, the government declared a state of emergency that lit panic across communities in the fire's path. Remote mountain regions like Laquipampa receive little attention during crises, so SBC is defending Laquipampa's families and its fragile spectacled bear population from wildfires.

SBC's Laquipampa conservation area lies in northern Peru, a 75,000-acre landscape encompassing a national protected area, Indigenous-owned community land, and the Calicantro private land that SBC is in the process of purchasing. Calicantro is particularly vital because it's the key feeding area for 150 bears that roam throughout all three sections of Laquipampa. This is the last bear population living in this equatorial dry forest ecosystem, and Laquipampa is their last intact landscape,

so protecting both is SBC's highest priority. SBC believes this population will increase over time since they have a high gradient of food sources—Calicantro at the base of the mountains, and another area at the top—so long as major threats like wildfires don't destroy their forests.

Dread set in when multiple large wildfires were recently recorded in community lands adjacent to the Laquipampa conservation area. Most fires are accidentally caused by local farmers, who often burn sections of their property to plant crops. These fires sometimes go wild, blossoming into disasters whose effects are worsened thanks to drier conditions caused by severe drought and climate change. The remoteness of these villages makes emergency response from the government challenging, and recent weakening of Peru's environmental policies to



COMMUNITY MEMBERS LINING UP TO RECEIVE DISASTER RELIEF SUPPLIES FROM SPECTACLED BEAR CONSERVATION.

allow for easier land clearance has led to more careless and uncontrolled burns, with 22 of Peru's 24 regions reporting forest fires this year. With so much at stake for Laquipampa's bears and people, SBC mobilized quickly to help this region surrounded by fire.

SBC delivered emergency food, medical supplies, and firefighting equipment to the most vulnerable

villages. They partnered with regional authorities to teach communities about fire prevention and the threat that fires pose to Laquipampa's bears, not just their own property. SBC also launched local radio broadcasts, reaching roughly 40,000 people about fire safety best practices and the urgency of reporting smoke sightings. These measures have prevented any fires from entering the Laquipampa conservation area, but more work is needed to protect the bears in the long-term. With many people living in or near Laquipampa bear habitat, the threat of human-caused wildfires is ongoing, so SBC is collaborating with the government to establish a robust community fire prevention program. This will include educational training and the formation of community fire brigades to improve local readiness for future disasters.

By educating communities to prevent and mitigate wildfires, SBC is empowering people to protect their homes and lives and safeguarding a key spectacled bear population's fate from being determined by an unfortunate shift in the wind. ■

By driving bears out of forests and closer to settlements, wildfires can increase human-bear conflict over livestock predation. SBC views wildfire prevention as a way of eliminating this branching threat of conflict and retaliation.

Along with coordinating community wildfire response, SBC is working with the government to increase protections for the 20,000-acre protected area within Laquipampa, which is currently only staffed by three rangers.



Ways to Give to Wildlife

All of us at Wildlife Conservation Network continue to be grateful for and inspired by the generosity that our community shows toward our mission. Together, we've safeguarded endangered wildlife and wild spaces around the world for more than 20 years. Our donors are essential to making conservation possible.

This holiday season, we invite you to explore the many different ways you can support wildlife. To make a donation visit wildnet.org/donate.



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Scan here to donate online



Teaming Up With Disney to Protect the Pride Again

When Walt Disney Animation Studios' classic, *The Lion King*, first debuted in 1994, Africa's iconic big cat found a place in the spotlight and in the hearts of a generation. Yet in the 30 years since Simba's adventures first illuminated the big screen, Africa has lost half of its lions. Habitat loss, human-lion conflict, and wildlife crime have taken a considerable toll on their numbers, with only about 23,000 lions remaining in the wild today.

"Everything the light touches is our kingdom." This is what the regal Mufasa tells Simba, his son and heir to this aforementioned kingdom, in the original *The Lion King* film. In real life, to recover Africa's lions, we must take an approach that also encompasses everything the light touches; a holistic approach that includes lions, landscapes, and local communities. Since 2017, the Lion Recovery Fund has used this approach to advance lion conservation across Africa, supporting impactful organizations that protect lions, their landscapes and prey species, and promote coexistence between lions and the people that live alongside them.

To celebrate the release of the stunning live-action adaptation of *The Lion King* in 2019, Disney collaborated with the Lion Recovery Fund to launch the global Protect the Pride campaign, which raised awareness and funds for lion recovery. The success of this campaign has helped the Lion Recovery Fund invest in more than 300 lion conservation projects in 25 countries, with at least 50 percent of the sites receiving LRF investment already showing stable or increasing lion populations. And now, five years later, the circle of life continues.

With the theatrical release of *Mufasa: The Lion King* — the highly anticipated feature film that explores the unlikely rise of the beloved king of the Pride Lands — only in theaters December 20, Disney and the Lion Recovery Fund will once again reignite the Protect the Pride campaign in continued support of our vision to double the number of Africa's lions by 2050. The funds provided through this campaign will help the Lion Recovery Fund expand its efforts to support conservation groups, governments, and local communities across Africa and create long-lasting impacts for lions and their landscapes. By working together, Disney and the Lion Recovery Fund will continue helping the king of beasts reclaim its kingdom. ■

We're grateful to Disney for their continued commitment to lion conservation. We hope you'll help us Protect the Pride and build a brighter future for lions, alongside the people and wildlife that share their pride lands. Learn more and support the #Mufasa #ProtectThePride campaign at lionrecoveryfund.org/disney

Happy Holidays from Wildlife Conservation Network



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WCN protects endangered wildlife by supporting conservationists who ensure wildlife and people coexist and thrive.

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WAYS TO GIVE

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