

# Venezuelan Government Bans Wildlife Hunting and Trading in Some Areas

By Minamb, AVN

The Venezuelan government has banned trade and possession of wildlife species in some states, and is also implementing a special turtle preservation program.



The guacamaya (archive)  
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The tricolored-plumage ara macaws, best known as guacamayas, are one of the endangered species in Venezuela because they are frequently extracted from their habitat in the Amazonas, where they mate for life. This is the reason why they die when they are hunted and taken out of their environment.

These birds, and other animals such as parrots, monkeys and snakes, are exhibited by their captors in cages for days on the main road of Amazonas state, southern Venezuela. Their buyers move them in wrapped boxes to bypass the National Guard checkpoints. When they reach their "new home," these animals usually die as a result of stress and sudden habitat change.

Hence, the Bolivarian Government is taking measures in the Metropolitan Area of Caracas and the states of Anzoategui, Bolivar, Falcon, Guarico, Lara, Monagas, Miranda, Sucre, Zulia and Yaracuy in order to guarantee that this situation does not worsen.

The measures ban the illicit trade and possession of birds and other wildlife species, as well as products derived from wildlife, on public roads (roads, highways, paths, streets and avenues) and in unauthorized shops.

In addition to these measures, the Venezuelan state is promoting a number of environmental preservation programs.

## **Arrau Turtle Preservation Program**

The arrau turtle, also known in Venezuela as the Orinoco turtle, is the biggest of the Podocnemis genus and was widely abundant 200 years ago. Nevertheless, since 1995 it is an endangered species, although it has been legally protected since 1946.

In the first quarter of 2011, the Bolivarian government, through the environment ministry, freed 10,000 Arrau turtles (*Podocnemis expansa*) in Amazonas state, Venezuela's south, as part of the conservation program to protect this endangered species.

The program, which is being developed to prevent illegal hunting, aims to transport endangered nests to zoo-farms over a one year period, in order to subsequently return the species to their natural habitat. Over 51,000 turtles bred in captivity are expected to be freed this year.

José Zambrano, director of the environmental office in Amazonas, said that this activity "shows the interest of the Bolivarian government in preserving wild fauna, especially endangered species."

So far, 12,806 Arrau turtles have been freed in the Refuge of Wild Fauna and Protecting Areas, located in the village of Santa María del Orinoco, in the south-western state of Apure, and 6,000 in south-western Bolívar state. By June, 22,000 turtles are expected to be freed in Azoátegui state, Venezuela's northeast, and 949 in Barinas state.

## **National Parks under protection**

For a long time, Venezuela was the victim of an activity that caused irreparable harm to the environment. The Fun Race private organization staged off-road car races in different national parks of the country where its participants had to cover hundreds of kilometres in the shortest possible time. Many of the circuits did not have the authorization required by the Venezuelan authorities to hold these races, which helped the company earn millions.

Venezuela's Attorney General, Luisa Ortega Díaz, imposed a ban on this type of activity. "These races cause irreparable harm because the vegetation cover wears out and its recovery can take up to 200 years.

The Bolivarian government took legal actions and ordered the Fun Race company to promote, design and develop awareness-raising campaigns to show the ecological harm caused by this activity in the country's national parks and protected areas.

## **Mission Tree recovers natural ecosystems**

Venezuela features a 123.5 million-acre forest area that represents 56% of its territory. In South America, this is equivalent to 5.6% of forests and 1.3% of the world's forest area.

Communities nationwide have organized jointly with the Ministry of People's Power for the Environment (Minamb) to working on the consolidation of Mission Tree (Misión Árbol in Spanish), which aims to contribute to the restoration and maintenance of forests and local green areas.

Currently, nearly 5,200 conservation committees, comprised of 50,000 people, have been created. Over 19 million plants have been planted throughout the country, thus allowing for the recovery of over 56 acres. The Venezuelan minister for the environment, Alejandro Hitcher, said that "the government's social program strengthens the spirit of conservation of the population, thus contributing to economic development and environmental sustainability."

*Edited by Venezuelanalysis*

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