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Amazon deforestation threatens jaguars, giant eagles

A jaguar is seen in Porto Jofre.



Mark, a wild Harpy eagle which is given food by guides working for South Wild Safaris in the Fazenda Nicolau, which is managed by a carbon forest NGO linked to French company Peugeot, is seen in Alta Floresta, Mato Grosso, Brazil. — AFP photos



Mark, a wild Harpy eagle.

breathhtaking biodiversity risks collapsing as the world's biggest rainforest approaches a "tipping point." Scientists say that is the point at which a vicious circle of deforestation, wildfires and climate change could damage the rainforest so badly it dies off and turns to savannah-with catastrophic consequences for its more than three million species of plants and animals.

'Flying rivers' drying up

The jaguar and harpy eagle are already feeling the impact. Ousado, a four-year-old, 75-kilogram (165-pound) male, was wounded a year ago when wildfires tore through

the Pantanal, fueled by the region's worst drought in 47 years. The region, which sits just south of the Amazon, is known for its stunning wildlife, drawing tourists from around the world. But nearly a third of it burned in last year's fires, killing or wounding countless animals - including Ousado, who was found with third-degree burns on his paws, barely able to walk.

Veterinarians took the big black-and-yellow spotted cat to an animal hospital, treated him, and then reintroduced him to the wild with a tracking collar to monitor his recovery - which is going well. The destruction of the Pantanal, Tortato explains, is directly linked to that of the Amazon. The rainforest's 390 billion trees generate water

vapor that dumps rain across much of South America - a phenomenon known as "flying rivers."

Sometimes appearing as wisps of mist streaking skyward, then gathering into giant clouds that look like streams of cotton, these "rivers" likely carry more water than the Amazon River itself, scientists say. As humans raze the forest for farms and pastureland, "the rainfall that would normally arrive in the Pantanal via the 'flying rivers' has diminished," says Tortato, 37, of conservation group Panthera. Classified as "near threatened," the jaguar, the biggest cat in the Americas, has its stronghold in the Amazon. Its population declined an estimated 20 to 25 percent over the past two decades.



A jaguar swims in Porto Jofre.



A firefighter looks at a large forest fire in Porto Jofre, Pantanal, Mato Grosso state, Brazil.