



## Season 2, Episode 2: The Jaguars of Iguazu Just Wanna Be Jaguars

**Edward:** This is How to Save It from the Whitley Fund for Nature, the podcast which takes you on a global journey to meet some of the world's most dedicated conservationists.

<Medley of 2025 winners saying

Olivier.....To a young person, to an old person, all of us, it's our role to protect  
Andres... How can we create solutions that are both positive for people, but also for wildlife?  
Yara.....They just want to hunt, raise their cubs, live in peace in the forest, just that  
Farina.... You always have to make sure whatever you promise, you must fulfil  
Ayu.....And spread the words about how beautiful, how wonderful they are to the world.

I'm Edward Whitley.

And I'm **Kate Humble**. And I'll be helping you on this guided tour as we find out more about the incredible work of this year's WFN winners and hopefully bring you a hefty dose of optimism as well.

**Edward:** Thank you, Kate. Well, in this episode, we'll be journeying to Brazil, to the Iguazu National Park, home to the famous waterfall and also home to the mighty jaguar. Here, Dr Yara Barros has helped to save this apex predator from the brink of extinction. But growing populations of jaguars had led to tensions with local communities. Let's hear more.

**Kate:** This is the sound of a jaguar.

<Jaguar sounds>

A jaguar has a bite more powerful than a lion or a tiger. They have no natural predators. But for Yara, her love of animals started with something much, much smaller.

**Yara:** When I was growing up there was this encyclopedia - this is how old I am - called The Animals and it was just drawings of them and they got completely destroyed because I was there like all the time all the time all the time and then I was I think 12, 11, my grandfather's friend gave me a budgerigar, you know, the parakeet, and I completely fell in love with that. And I ended up working in my master and my PhD with parrots, because of Pom Pom, because of that little budgie that totally connect me to parrots, because my mother never allowed us to have a dog or a cat, so when I got this bird, it was like, oh my God, like I could channel all the love for animals to him, and I ended up working with parrots.

Then it changed completely, because when I was invited to coordinate this project, I told... the chief of the national park, really. Because not only I never worked with jaguars, I never worked with mammals. They said, no, you have a background in conservation, so it doesn't change too much. I used to say, I didn't begin as a jaguar specialist, but as a jaguar enthusiast. And then it grew from there.

**Kate:** She explains what a jaguar encounter is typically like.

**Yara:** Jaguars are shy. They are incredibly powerful. They are the biggest cat in America.



But they are shy. When you have an encounter, which is rare with a jaguar, they tend to go away. They run from you and not to you. But eventually they go out of the forest and they go to farms, they might kill livestock or dogs and so people are afraid for their own security and also because of the possible economic losses. So we basically are there, my team are there all the time. The park has 185,000 hectares and there are 10 cities around.

Our headquarters is inside the park, but we work in all the properties around the 10 cities, because there is where the conflict will happen. So, we go there, we talk about jaguars, we explain a little bit about its biology, how can you do to keep your farm safe, like stop throwing remains of carcasses by the forest, don't leave, don't let the cows give birth inside the forest. And every time they call and say – oh there's a jaguar here – we go there, this is the differential of our project, we go immediately so this is helping increase the tolerance of people and also reduce this perceived fear because it's really just perceived, it's not real.

**Kate:** Yara is executive coordinator of the Project Jaguars of Iguaçú. She works across a vast area spanning Brazil and Argentina. It is Atlantic forest, as she explains.

**Yara:** The Atlantic forest is very magic. It's humid, it's close, it doesn't have mountains. It's an exuberant vegetation. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. You have lots of birds. I think the National Park has more than 300 species of animals.

And it is an island of life in a state that is very deforested. So because of this National Park, many threatened species are allowed to survive.

**Kate:** So what is it like to be close to such a powerful predator?

**Yara:** It's called, in Portuguese, it's called estubo. It's not like a lion roar, but it's a very strong sound.

**Yara:** It's like (jaguar noises..) Very, very strong. Very, very, very, very powerful. They use it to communicate, to mark their territories, to attract females, to keep other males away. But they are shy. They are not fast as cheetahs, for example. It's more about strength.

They are hunters, but like opportunistic hunters. Cubs are amazing. The cubs really look like domestic cats playing around the mother. It's a fantastic animal. And if you really look at a jaguar, if you remove your fear glasses and you really look at him, you see that they just want to be jaguars. They don't want to kill you.

They don't want to harm. They just want to hunt, raise their cubs, live in peace in the forest.

Just that.

As an apex predator, They only have us as predators and we are a horrible species. We are a very cruel predator species.

**Kate:** Jaguar numbers in the state of Para, where Yara works, had plummeted by 72 percent by the 1990s. Deforestation and conflicts with humans were rapidly wiping them out. Numbers were down to just 11 within the Iguacu National Park and 40 within a green corridor which spans both the Brazilian and Argentine border. Numbers have risen to 25 within the park and 93 in the green corridor.



**Yara:** When, for example, when someone phone us, sometimes 1 am, 2 am, the middle of the night, we go immediately. Because we think that if you say, OK, sorry, I'll be there next week, they'll never call you again – they will shoot the jaguar - so my team goes there. I have two people, Thiago and Aline, they are full time on it. They go there. We evaluate the situation because by the kind of bite, you know, if it was a jaguar, a cougar, or sometimes dogs.

And then we identify the predator. We put lights to keep the predator away. We teach the landowners how to make the place less vulnerable to attacks, like put animals away, lots of little things that you can do. And we put some devices like fox lights that blink, bells on the cattle. Every time there is a problem in a property, a predation, we stay there working for one year with cameras, with regular visits, with advice. Sometimes we, ourselves, my team helped build some structure, like a henhouse, which is very bad.

We helped to restore it and put electric fence. So what we do is we try to make sure, or at least do our best, that it doesn't happen again. Because sometimes people say, when there is a predator, they say, oh, when we get there, they say, oh, you're going to capture this jaguar and take it away, yeah? I said, no, because there is no way, There is no way. The park is very... this is what they have to survive.

And they walk a lot. So if you just take from one place to another, not always, not necessarily it's going to work. Maybe he'll come back. So what we try is increase tolerance by reducing the risk. So this is what we have been doing. My team was working in an area in Argentina together with Proyecto Yaguarete.

And with coexistence because there was Kunumi, a female that was there killing animals, domestic animals and this guy she killed a pig and the guy was on the on a tree with a gun pointing ....he filmed it, waiting for to kill her but as the team was there and says I know instead of this he called us so together with Proyecto Yaguarete I gotta tell we captured her so this animal is alive because of this. We believe that even if she shows up again there instead of trying to shoot her he will call us. So many people changed the way they saw jaguars, from enemies to just... a magnificent creature.

This is the vision of the project to have the national park and jaguars thriving together.

**Kate:** Catching a jaguar, however, is another matter entirely.

**Yara:** When possible, we capture them, we put satellite collars, because this way we can monitor the movements, we can know when they are out of the park in some property that they could go there and say, hi, there's a jaguar around, let's see if everything is working well here. At the moment, we have three jaguars, two collars. The idea was to have much more but the money is an impediment. A collar costs, like \$3,000, it's not cheap.

A capture campaign takes like 15 days and we use boxes to capture jaguars but also snares that really doesn't hurt them.

So imagine - before the campaign we put a lot of camera traps so you know exactly where they're going and they have to step in a 185,000 hectares they have to step exactly on a square where you have the trap and we stayed the whole night checking every hour so the animal that is caught



never got more than an hour - this is the idea - never stay for more than an hour in the trap we anesthetize them collect blood do a lot of samples to see how is the health, install the collar and wait until he wakes up and see him leaving happily back to, not back, he never left right, left nature, but see him going to the forest and safe.

**Kate:** Yara and her team are expanding their partnerships with local communities and schools, as well as continuing to communicate with local landowners about the importance of conserving the big cat. There's even a project aimed at empowering local women called the Jaguar Crocheteers Programme.

They've also managed to get the local airport to become jaguar-friendly, supporting research, displaying jaguar pictures and implementing safety measures to prevent the jaguars from entering the airport. There is no one answer to protecting these magnificent animals, but Yara is optimistic about the future.

**Yara:** And I think it's a very good example of two projects, two countries, joining efforts with a common goal of saving a species of the same population. We know that jaguars are in the Atlantic forest, they are starting to show genetic problems, like inbreeding.

So in the future, what must be done to the jaguars in this biome is to have a very efficient captive-to-breeding program and to do restocking and supplementation in certain areas of the Atlantic forest where the numbers are very low or they are genetically very poor. So this is a big challenge, I think, for the next 10 years.

**Edward:** It must be astonishing to see a jaguar in its natural habitat, and Yara is a true inspiration.

Thanks to her work, the critically endangered jaguars of Iguacu the chance to recover their numbers, and we hope one day we'll see them thrive.

**Kate:** I think with Yara as their champion, that's not too much wishful thinking, is it?

Well, that is all for this episode of How to Save It. We hope you've enjoyed this glimpse into the work of a remarkable woman in a remarkable place. Do look out for our next episode and like and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

Thank you for listening.