

## Conservation of the Amazonian “Guanta”: stopping illegal wild meat trade

*“In the days of our grand parents this wonderful forest full of secrets was also home to an abundance of “Guanta” (Caniculus paca, a wild Amazonian pig). Our brave Waarani men used to venture into the forest and hunt them, as they were a substantial part of our diet.”*

The old Waarani mother smiles at the memories from the days she was a young girl. Her audience is a young lady from the capital, who is fascinated to capture the indigenous knowledge about the fast dwindling number of the Guanta.

A few days later when she talks in the nearest town about the importance to conserve the “Guanta” she gets a very different reaction: *“What we need here is jobs, what we don’t need here are conservationists restricting economic progress by campaigning against the consumption of wild meat”*. The mayor of the small Amazon city of Francisco de Orellana is firm. It is hot, she wipes a few drops from her forehead and continues in a loud voice: *“Look at the Waarani indians from the forest making a little money selling the wild pigs they hunt. Look at the local women here earning the school fees for their kids by serving this delicious treat of wild meat in their small restaurants to their customers from the oil industry and tourists. What do you - people from the capital preaching about conservation - know about how hard life really is here!”*

That was a few years ago. Now in this part of the Ecuadorian Amazon the wild meat market has dried up. Thanks to Ana, a conservationist from TRAFFIC and their team. She was not discouraged by the mayor, nor by the fierce men of the Waarani tribe, whose pride since generations it is to hunt. She managed to get the ear of the women in the forest communities. Listened to their family stories, their dreams and worries. Tried to understand their relationship with the forest. Discussed with them healthy diets, reminded them of the diets of their grandparents vis-a-vis the canned food from the city they thought was the modern thing to do and explored with them how to improve the community economy.

She appealed to their sense of pride as indigenous forest owners and the forest products that were so closely connected to their family lives. She told them the sad stories from Indian communities in Peru, that had overhunted the “Guanta”, by providing its meat as a delicacy for Amazonian restaurants. She showed them additional livelihoods from the forest that would provide more income to the family than the wild meat money, that anyway disappeared mostly in the tavernas. She introduced fish ponds and a special cocoa variety for fine chocolate production, which is much in demand by European Fair Trade organizations. The women were eager to follow up and called for a meeting of the men. They could continue hunting, but only to provide for their family’s needs, so that their sons also could become proud hunters in the future. The Waarani council agreed.

At the same time Ana had meetings with the women of the small restaurants in the city of Coca. Introducing new recipes that would be even more in demand of their clients. Helping them with cooking courses, utensil and other equipment. She made videos and radio clips

*"we don't need to eat Guanta"* to raise awareness among tourists and oil workers who travel on buses and airplanes to this part of the country. She gave courses to the police officers to help them to become advisors in the transition from enforcement of illegal trade rules to the new ways of economic development.

And now the *Guanta* delicacy is not anymore on the menu of the roadside restaurants in and around Francisco de Orellana. The Pompeya market, which used to be the most important place for wild meat trade, is now closed. When Ana's boss after two years went the city of Francisco de Orellana, he went quietly around and asked all over the city where he could buy wild meat: *"not for sale here anymore"* was the answer he got everywhere. *"I am now convinced that Conservation - done in this way - can work, especially when we make it personal "* the mayor told him, showing him around the schools and women training centers.