

## Chiqui the Jaguar Cub!

What fun to write a happy report about such a special animal, Chiqui (short for Chiquibul), the recently rescued jaguar cub. This little girl had such a tough start in life. Rescued by Rangers from Friends of Conservation and Development, FCD, who found her drowning in a stream, she was then taken to Belize Wildlife Referral Clinic, BWRC, and over a period of time, her health was lovingly restored.



But the challenges facing the little cub did not end. Transferred to The Belize Zoo, much time needed to be devoted to “Chiqui”, so that her behavior would become cool and calm. At first, she was ultra shy and hesitant. But feedings of delicious meals from a spoon each day, combined with long visits from her zoo caregivers, gradually began to transform the shy little cub into a trusting and happy-natured “small big cat”.

She was given a “friend”, her very own stuffed koala bear, and “Chiqui” quickly bonded with her bear. Sleeping with the bear, grooming the bear and cuddling it, brought a big sense of comfort to our rescued “Chiqui”. More fun was in store for her. We happily found out that little “Chiqui” loves to play with feathers. Big, white jabiru stork feathers seemed to get her nod of approval, and batting those feathers with her paws, again and again, provides excellent “fun time” .

Any other happy diversions? Oh, yes, entertainment time happens each and every night. “Chiqui” is left with “paper balls”, crumpled up pages of none other than The Reporter newspaper! She makes good use of these “paper balls”, pouncing on them, and tearing and batting them around in her private den with joy. All of these behavior enrichments have given “Chiqui” a sense of security and belonging. Zoo staff agreed. Day by day, she was becoming more comfortable with her home, her new friends, and her changed-forever life.

The importance of “Chiqui” being “people-friendly”, cannot be understated. Eventually, when funds are available and she becomes older, “Chiqui” will have a permanent and beautiful exhibit on zoo grounds. She will become a “Jaguar Ambassador”, drawing attention to her magnificent species. Sadly, jaguar populations are in decline. The more attention jaguars receive through public awareness efforts, the greater their chances are for a future in the wild.

“Chiqui’s” home forest, the Chiquibul Forest, is in urgent need of strict protection and stewardship. As a “Jaguar Ambassador” , she will be unaware of her role: Assisting the people working so diligently to save this important tropical forest. However, once zoo visitors view “Chiqui” and read about her history, all will surely want to staunchly protect the Chiquebul Forest, her birth home in Belize.