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One of the few jaguars in the U.S. found dead

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TUCSON, AZ (Tucson News Now) - A young male jaguar, one of two thought to be alive in the United States, was shown dead in a photo released Thursday, June 21.

The image shows a pelt with markings that match Yo'oko, who made the Huachuca Mountains in southern Arizona his home in recent years.

"[Jaguars] are like snowflakes. If you have a clear photo of their flank, you can verify it's the same animal," explained Randy Serraglio, conservation advocate, Center for Biological Diversity."

Based on other clues in the photo, Serraglio indicated why another conservation group, the Northern Jaguar Project, believes the photo was taken in Mexico.

"The rustics of the doorway look like Mexico," he explained.

It's a mystery who took the photo, but Serraglio emphasized the need to protect jaguars. The animals are trying to repopulate in the Southwestern U.S. after being wiped out by government predator control programs and those protecting their livestock, he explained.

Most likely, according to Serraglio, someone protecting their livestock killed the jaguar.

"People in the livestock industry see them as enemies. It's not necessary to kill them. It's illegal. We need to amplify programs that reduce conflict between the livestock industry and jaguars," he stated.

Even if those responsible for the death of the jaguar is found, they may not be punished.

"Many are left off the hook," added Serraglio. "They get a fine. If it's particularly egregious, they will receive a minimal jail sentence."

The cat's name, which is the Yaqui word for jaguar, was chosen last year by students of Hiaki High School in Tucson.

Including Yo'oko, there have only been seven jaguars in the U.S. in the past 20 years, with three detected in the last three years, said Serraglio.

"This tragedy is piercing," said Serraglio. "It highlights the urgency to protect jaguar habitat on both sides of the border and ensure that these rare, beautiful cats have safe places to live."

Jaguars are protected by the Endangered Species Act and sanctuaries Serraglio indicated exist because of lawsuits from conservation groups.