



Dr. Rabinowitz visits jaguar range in Honduras in 2012.

Dr. Alan Rabinowitz

The Life of a Conservation Legend, 1953-2018

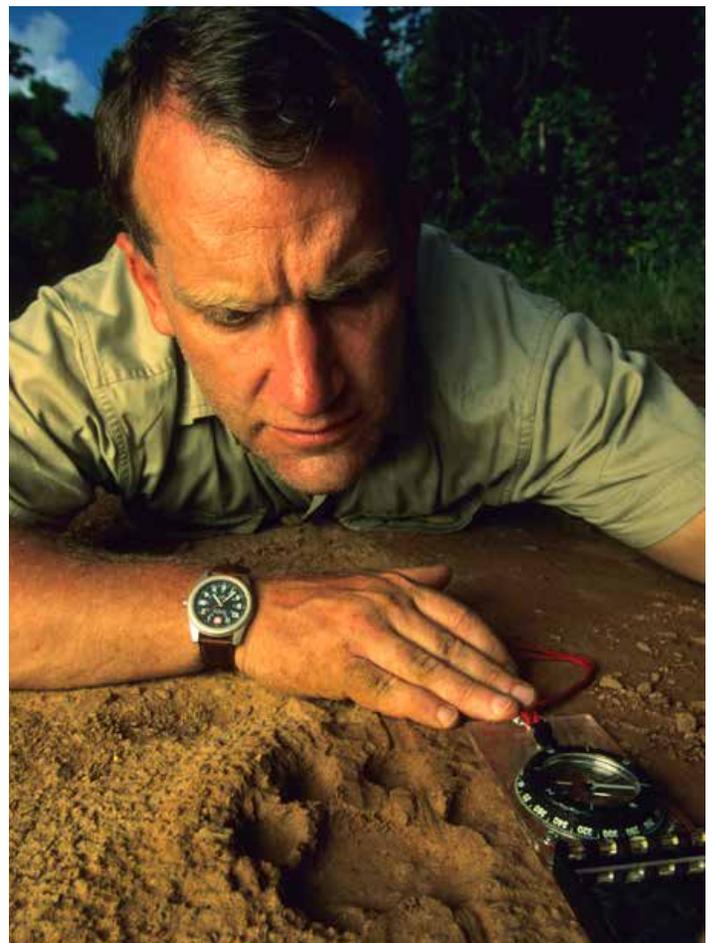
Throughout a career spanning more than three decades, Dr. Alan Rabinowitz was a protector and advocate for wild animals. Battling a severe, debilitating stutter in his youth, he vowed that if he ever found his voice, he would use it to fight on behalf of the planet's wild creatures—like him, both voiceless and vulnerable.

“My earliest memories are filled with pain, embarrassment, and coming to terms with the reality, reinforced by adults, that I was one of life's broken creatures,” Rabinowitz revealed in one of his books. “My place of greatest comfort in those early years was the closet in my room in my parents' home. In this small, dark world, I felt normal, I wasn't scared to speak, and I could live out my fantasies. My companions, a little menagerie of chameleons, green turtles, garter snakes, and hamsters, were the only living beings around me that seemed to listen but not judge. They had feelings, but they too had no voice to express themselves. They were me.”

As a child of New York City in the 1950s, glimpses of the wild were scant, but Rabinowitz found solace among the big cats at the Bronx Zoo, kindred spirits in their isolation and silence. It was there that Rabinowitz promised the zoo's lone jaguar that he would strive to become a voice for all cats—that he would “find a place for us.”

In the following years, he harnessed that drive and determination, overcoming his stutter—as much as possible—by age 19. From that point forward, he dedicated his life to fulfilling his promise to the animal companions of his youth.

The first leg of Rabinowitz's journey pulled him from New York to Western Maryland College (now called McDaniel College) in Westminster, Maryland, where he dove headfirst into his love of the sciences. After earning his bachelor's degree in biology and chemistry in 1974, Rabinowitz then entered graduate studies at



Dr. Rabinowitz measures a jaguar paw print in Belize's Cockscomb Valley.

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Following his Ph.D., Rabinowitz began work to change the trajectory of the world's wild cats. He landed a job in New York City at the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) as a research fellow and staff zoologist. Invited by the legendary conservationist Dr. George Schaller, he traveled from New York to Belize to conduct some of the first research on wild jaguars in 1982. During his sojourn in the jungle, Rabinowitz witnessed firsthand the devastation that poaching was inflicting on the nation's jaguars—and persistently petitioned the government to protect them. In 1986, only a decade removed from his debilitating stuttering, Rabinowitz spoke eloquently for over an hour before the prime minister and his cabinet, ultimately convincing them to create the Cockscomb Basin Jaguar Preserve, the world's first jaguar preserve. Years later, Rabinowitz was struck by how the preserve had truly blossomed for both wildlife and local inhabitants: “This was definitely not the Cockscomb I had known and worked in,” he wrote in his book *Jaguar: One Man's Struggle to Establish the First Jaguar Preserve*. “It was much, much better.”

Rabinowitz quickly found his stride at WCS, being promoted as the Asia Program Director in 1993 and serving as the Director of Science for Asia from 1997 to 1998. Later, from 1999 to 2005, Rabinowitz directed WCS's Global Carnivore Program, from which he was promoted to Executive Director of the Science and Exploration Program, a position he held from 2006 to 2008. His research subjects over the years included a veritable menagerie of creatures: jaguars, clouded leopards, Asiatic leopards, tigers, Sumatran rhinos, bears, leopard cats, raccoons, and civets.

Since his victory for wild cats in Belize, Rabinowitz's ground-breaking work has led him to voyage across the globe in their name. To describe his rugged and daring adventures trekking jungles, tracking big cats, and living with tribes in Asia and Central America, *TIME Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and others dubbed him “the Indiana Jones of wildlife conservation.” In Taiwan, Rabinowitz established the country's largest protected



Dr. Rabinowitz does research on a raccoon as part of his graduate studies at University of Tennessee.



A villager in Belize and Dr. Rabinowitz analyze the skin of a jaguar.

area and last piece of intact lowland forest. His work in Thailand's Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, later designated as a World Heritage Site, generated the first scientific research on Indochinese tigers, Asiatic leopards, and leopard cats there. Moreover, his intrepid work in conflict-laden Myanmar, and a willingness to engage some of the world's most feared and inaccessible figures, led to the creation of five new protected areas there. Jewels in this crowning conservation achievement include Myanmar's first marine national park, their first and largest Himalayan national park, the country's largest wildlife sanctuary, and the world's largest tiger reserve. In addition, Rabinowitz discovered four new species through his work in Myanmar, including the leaf deer, the most primitive deer species in the world.

In 2001, while establishing the Hukaung Valley Tiger Reserve in Myanmar, Rabinowitz was diagnosed with chronic lymphatic leukemia. Suddenly, after a life spent defending the lives of animals, Rabinowitz was in a fight for his own life. Cancer only hardened his resolve, though, to do everything he could to ensure he could leave his two children, Alexander and Alana, a world still teeming with big cats.

The next leg of Rabinowitz's journey positioned him at the forefront of the fight against tiger poaching—and at the helm of a new non-profit organization that saw wild cat conservation through a different lens than what had previously been the status quo. In 2006, he co-founded Panthera with his close friend Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan, guided by the philosophy that wild cats hold the key to conserving vast landscapes and all the life within them. The group continually proved itself in the field, evolving from a conceptual start-up to the world's only organization focused on the conservation of the world's 40 wild cat species. Under Rabinowitz's leadership, Panthera has created model conservation programs for all seven big cat species: cheetahs, jaguars, leopards, lions, pumas, snow leopards, and tigers.

One such program, "Tigers Forever," was born of teaming up conservation science with the world's leading law enforcement experts. The now world-renowned Tigers Forever program emphasizes the lessons on partnerships that Rabinowitz has mastered. Collaborating with governments, local NGOs, and community members, Tigers Forever recovers critically endangered tiger populations by intensively monitoring the world's most important tiger sites and locking them down from poachers with world-class site security and law enforcement.

While leading Panthera's global programs, Rabinowitz also returned to his roots to ensure jaguars have strong voices in their corner. One of his greatest achievements was the creation and implementation of Panthera's Jaguar Corridor Initiative, an unprecedented effort to safeguard a series of biological and genetic corridors across the jaguar's range, protecting the genetic continuity of the species and ensuring its survival for generations to come.

Rabinowitz even virtually brought Panthera's supporters along on this quest, realizing his vision to cement safe passage for jaguars through the "Journey of the Jaguar," a multi-year conservation initiative he spearheaded to shine a light on the efforts to protect the Jaguar Corridor. Some surprises along the way, such as witnessing a jaguar dragging a dead caiman out of the water in the Brazilian Pantanal, have astonished even him. With "Journey of the Jaguar," Rabinowitz endeavored to expedite progress and secure the commitment of all the Corridor nations to research, protect, and mitigate conflict for the iconic cats.



Dr. Rabinowitz meets with a Myanmar government official about protected areas for wildlife.



Dr. Rabinowitz studies tiger claw marks on a tree in Bhutan.



Dr. Rabinowitz and fellow Panthera Co-Founder Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan in the Brazilian Pantanal

A beloved advocate for conservation, Rabinowitz made his research and voyages accessible for everyone. He wrote more than 100 scientific papers and popular articles, drawing attention to the complex issues surrounding wildlife. Various outlets, including The New York Times, Scientific American, Audubon, Men's Journal, Outside, Explorer, The Jerusalem Report, and National Geographic Adventure Magazine, have profiled him and his exploits. He was the subject of an acclaimed PBS/National Geographic television special called "In Search of the Jaguar." Rabinowitz also starred in Tiger Tiger, renowned documentarian George Butler's film about Rabinowitz's journey into the Sundarbans – a tidal mangrove forest spanning the India-Bangladesh border and the one tiger habitat Rabinowitz had never visited. Furthermore, Rabinowitz authored eight books that bring the reader along for his experiences in conservation, inspiring new generations of conservationists. These include Jaguar: One Man's Struggle to Establish the First Jaguar Preserve (1986/ 2000), Chasing the Dragon's Tail: The Struggle to Save Thailand's Wild Cats (1991/ 2002), Beyond the Last Village: A Journey of Discovery in Asia's Forbidden Wilderness (2001), Life in the Valley of Death: The Fight to Save Tigers in a Land of Guns, Gold, and Greed (2008), and An Indomitable Beast: The Remarkable Journey of the Jaguar (2014). His autobiographical children's book, A Boy and a Jaguar, reminds youngsters and adults alike that one can overcome hurdles and keep promises that may seem impossible. The book has received the Schneider Family Book Award, embodying, per prize criteria, an "artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences."

In 2017, Rabinowitz stepped down as Panthera's CEO and took on a new adventure as its Chief Scientist, taking his passion and expertise to scale by strategizing range-wide conservation programs and advocating for thought leaders and decision-makers to prioritize wild cats.

In 2018, as one of his last actions before his cancer fatally recurred, Rabinowitz helped bring together 14 Latin American countries, jumpstarting a new coalition for jaguar conservation. The 14 Latin American countries resolved to work together on a number of key actions to promote jaguar conservation from Mexico to Argentina. Their Jaguar 2030 New York Statement followed a high-level United Nations forum on the species co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and Colombia and co-organized by Rabinowitz and Panthera. "At a time when many big cat species around the globe hang on by a thread, with some populations hovering in the dozens, the future of the resilient jaguar shines bright, thanks to the dedication of the governments and people sharing their homes with this big cat," Rabinowitz said.

Reflecting on Rabinowitz's life, he more than fulfilled his long-ago promise to that caged jaguar in the Bronx. He meticulously studied cats, helped create protected areas spanning from Belize to Taiwan, and took a stand against the illegal wildlife trade. Fighting for attention and resources in a big crowd, Rabinowitz was a clear and fearless voice for wild cats and other threatened wildlife, the diminishing lands they roam, the often impoverished people living near and among them, and, in his private endeavors, those who stutter like he did.

Dr. Thomas Kaplan, Panthera's co-founder and Chairman of the Board, sums up Rabinowitz's tremendous contributions to conservation: "Panthera, and every person who has been captivated by the grace and mystery of the world's big cats, owes a colossal debt to Alan, a man who is justifiably as iconic as the species he has spent his life saving."

Images courtesy of Steve Winter/Panthera, Steve Winter/National Geographic, Carlos Rosero and Panthera



Dr. Rabinowitz and Panthera Jaguar Program Executive Director Dr. Howard Quigley on the Journey of the Jaguar in Colombia



Dr. Rabinowitz in the Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary he helped establish

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