

Special section: Invasive hippos in Colombia

The presence of numerous hippos in the Colombian wild is unusual and highly controversial. In the 1980s, the infamous drug lord Pablo Escobar imported four hippopotamuses to his private farm in Puerto Triunfo, Antioquia, as part of his exotic animal collection. However, after his death, the hippopotamuses were abandoned on the farm, and over time, without any control, their population began to grow and spread beyond the estate's boundaries. They established themselves in nearby ecosystems and expanded throughout the Middle Magdalena Valley basin. This species has recently been classified as invasive in Colombia, and their growing population poses serious threats to the local ecosystem and public safety, as these animals can be very aggressive.

Several efforts have been made to control this population; however, managing it remains a significant challenge for Colombian authorities. For this reason, the editors of the *Revista de la Academia de Ciencias Exactas, Físicas y Naturales* invited a group of experts to present their perspectives on various aspects of this current issue in this special section. Given their experience and expertise on the subject, we invited experts who have conducted research on these populations from universities and research groups (Jiménez and collaborators), those who actively participated in a recent field study in collaboration with the Institute of Natural Sciences of the National University of Colombia and the Alexander von Humboldt Institute (Moreno), experts in mammalogy and invasive mammal species in the country (Ramírez-Chaves and collaborators), as well as those who have directly faced the problem from regional autonomous corporations in the invaded area (Echeverry and Fernández). Finally, we invited those who have analyzed the legal aspects of the issue and its possible solutions, including the concept of species justice (Doornbos). It is important to note that, as of today and according to consultation with a legal advisor, the legality of Resolution No. 0346 of 2022 from the Ministry of Environment is pending determination, in light of what is stipulated by the Legislator in Law 1774 of 2016, whose nullity was requested from the Council of State for disregarding the attribution of hippopotamuses to the category of “sentient beings” instead of property.

As a general conclusion derived from these works, the complexity of managing these populations is illustrated, as the rights and interests of the species must be considered while protecting the environment and human communities. Additionally, a well-informed and mixed management approach to the hippopotamus populations is urged to minimize their negative impact while taking advantage of the research and educational opportunities they offer. Lastly, the need for a multifaceted approach to their management is emphasized, balancing ecological, social, and ethical considerations. We hope this section clarifies the issue of invasive hippopotamuses in Colombia and provides all our readers with the basis for an informed opinion.

✉ **Martha Patricia Ramírez Pinilla**

Escuela de Biología, Universidad Industrial de Santander
Associate Editor