

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Technical Bulletin Insert Wildland Management Center The University of Michigan

THE MURIQUI — AN INDICATOR OF EASTERN BRAZIL'S DYING FORESTS

The Muriqui or woolly spider monkey (*Brachyteles arachnoides*) is the largest New World monkey and among the most endangered primates in the world. It is the most ape-like Neotropical primate species and is found only in the Atlantic forest region of southeastern Brazil.

The Atlantic forests are a unique series of ecosystems quite distinct from the much more extensive Amazonian forests to the northwest. They once stretched almost continuously from the state of Rio Grande do Norte at the eastern tip of South America as far south as the southernmost Brazilian state, Rio Grande do Sul. They included some of the finest forests anywhere on earth. However, this region was the first to be colonized, and it has developed into the agricultural and industrial center of Brazil. Further, it has within its borders two of the largest cities in South America, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, now also the largest city in the world.

Large scale forest destruction, particularly because of economic development within the last 10-20 years, has resulted in a reduction of the original Atlantic forest cover to between one and five percent of the region. Primary forest which has never been modified by man accounts for well under one percent of this area. In effect, this is a dying forest formation.

Since the Atlantic forest is composed of a number of unique forest types, it has high endemic plant—including 53.5 percent of its tree species—and animal life. With more than 80 percent of its primate species as endemic, the situation of the critically endangered Muriqui can be indicative of what is happening to this region as a whole.

When the German naturalist Prince Maximilian zu Wied explored south-

eastern Brazil in the early 1800's, he found this primate to be quite abundant, and his expedition party frequently lived off Muriqui meat. Since that time unceasing forest destruction has all but eliminated its primary habitat. Illegal hunting for food and for sport also threatens populations of the near-extinct Muriqui.

In four years of survey work in southeastern Brazil, a joint Brazilian-American survey team, supported by World Wildlife Fund-U.S. and led by Dr. Russell A. Mittermeier/WWF-US along with Ademar F. Coimbra-Filho of the Rio de Janeiro Primate Center and Celio Valle of the Federal University of Minas Gerais, has been able to confirm the existence of only about 200-250 Muriquis in seven small remnant forest areas. Three of these forests are government reserves and four are privately protected, but none can be considered entirely secure.

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New Partnership Makes Technical Bulletin Available to Subscribers

This issue of the *Endangered Species Technical Bulletin* marks the beginning of a new partnership involving the Wildland Management Center at the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources, the World Wildlife Fund, U.S., and the information and technical resources of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

The decision several years ago to restrict free subscriptions to the

Bulletin deprived a wide range of constituencies of timely and important information. FWS, recognizing this, has endeavored to develop an efficient information delivery system which is cost-effective from the Federal point-of-view while continuing to serve the broader community interested in endangered species issues. We believe that this reprint series sponsored by the Wildland Management Center and WWF-US will meet those needs while allowing expanded services, including information about important meetings or conventions, research notes and book reviews. We invite reader participation in these expanding activities, as well as suggestions concerning features which would increase the utility of the series.

While we cannot offer free subscriptions as FWS once did, we can make the *Bulletin* available at cost, and that is precisely our intent. Generous and timely support from WWF-US will allow us to provide a three-month "grace" period to former subscribers. Subscription information is available elsewhere on this insert.

In closing this introductory note a brief word on editorial policy is in order. The over-riding goal of this effort is information exchange and its core will be the *Bulletin*, exactly as printed by US-FWS. Additional material, in the form of the WMC/WWF insert, will be clearly distinguishable from the reprint. The objective of this material will also be exchange of scientific information or publication of activities related to endangered species. Exhortation or polemic will be regarded as appropriate in other forums.

We at the School of Natural Resources and at WWF-US are excited about this endeavor. We believe that the communication it facilitates will provide tangible benefits to habitat and species protection. We invite your substantive involvement in the process.

David F. Hales
Director, Wildland Management Center

The Muriqui—

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A complete assessment of the status of this species awaits survey work along the coast of the state of Sao Paulo, long considered to be the stronghold of the Muriqui. Yet this region has been subjected to heavy hunting pressure for so long that the Muriqui population, a prime target, is not likely to exceed a few hundred individuals. Effective protection in this vast area, where hunters are better equipped, more knowledgeable and more motivated than the handful of guards, is difficult or impossible to institute.

Although the Muriqui remains very poorly known, preliminary studies indicate that it breeds slowly, lives in large groups of at least 25 individuals, and that it feeds primarily on leaves, fruits and flowers. It has a long, powerful prehensile tail, and moves through the trees on all fours or hand-over-hand beneath branches. Adult Muriquis weigh at least 12kg (26 lb) and perhaps as much as 15kg (33 lb). They can measure almost 1.5m (5 ft) from head to tail-tip. The species has never been bred in captivity and presently there is only one captive individual in the world—in the Sao Paulo Zoo.

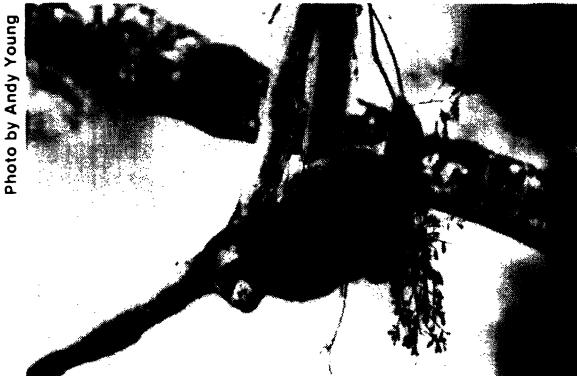


Photo by Andy Young

Since the Muriqui is the largest mammal entirely restricted to Brazil, and a single-species genus with no close relatives, it has become an appropriate symbol for the Brazilian conservation movement. In addition, World Wildlife Fund, the Brazilian Conservation Foundation and the Federal University of Minas Gerais have initiated a campaign which includes a film, "The Cry of the Muriqui," to increase international awareness of the plight of this uniquely Brazilian species. For further information, contact the Public Information Department, World Wildlife Fund, 1601 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.

To the Readers:

It has been exciting working with the *Endangered Species Technical Bulletin* materials over the past several months in preparation for this issue. This endeavor to make the Bulletin available on a subscription basis will require the cooperation of interested readers, contributors of information and our staff at the Wildland Management Center. The subscription rate, \$12.00, has been set as low as possible to reach the broadest readership and still provide for a quality publication.

We have mailed this first reprint issue to over 2,000 individuals and offices. It will take 2,000 subscriptions to make continued publication possible. Funds from the World Wildlife Fund-U.S. have made it possible for us to republish the Bulletin and Insert for three months without additional funding. This will give us the valuable time required to build a solid base of subscribers. You can now receive the Bulletin on a regular basis plus use the Bulletin Insert as a forum for sharing information on endangered species. If you know of others who might be interested in subscribing to the Bulletin, please send us their names and addresses.

Richard Block
Insert Editor



Technical Bulletin Insert

A forum for information
exchange on
endangered species from

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