

Project Update: January 2012

Through the study of ecological processes involved in the regeneration of canopy trees, this project had the broad goal of supporting the conservation of the Atlantic Forest and one of its endemic primate species, the Muriquis (*Brachyteles arachnoides*). Over the following months different reasons forced me to change my project, so I decided to suspend the use of this grant until I had established a new action plan. I am writing to report the work that I have done with your support, explain the reasons that made me change my initial project and have your feedback on my new objectives before moving forward. My personal and professional goal is the same as before, the conservation of the Atlantic Forest, but now I am working closer to my local collaborator, the NGO Pró-Muriqui, to reach this goal.

DEVELOPED ACTIVITIES

After the first visit to my field site, Carlos Botelho State Park (PECB), I learned that early in the year an unusual hailstorm had compromised the fruit production of many trees in the region, including my focal species. With the assistance of a student associated to the NGO Pró-Muriqui, I searched for trees that had more fruits in different sites of the forest. In these sites we did not know the typical behavior and routes of the Muriquis like we did in PECB, but probably because the amount of fruits was also lower than the average, we were unable to record the monkey's activity. Still, using rope techniques we were able to test different settings and strategies to place the cameras in the canopy of the forest and have them working properly.

With a local field assistant, I also mapped and measured all the trees of my focal species within an area of 40 ha in the study site of my local collaborator, totaling 153 adult individuals. The Muriquis from this site have been habituated to the presence of researchers, allowing the NGO Pró-Muriqui to continue a 20 years project through the recollection of long-term movement and behavioural data of Muriquis in continuous forest. The location and size of the trees that we found were useful information to their work, since these trees are an important food source to the Muriquis, and thus were shared with the NGO Pró-Muriqui.

Finally, I joined a botanical field class about Lauraceae (the family of my focal tree species, *Cryptocarya mandioccana*), that thought me to identify seedlings and juveniles of the species. This class was an important step to define the logistics and sampling effort of the project, since it is known that this family is one of the hardest to be identified till the species level. The field assistants that I met were trained to identify adult trees of my species, but not younger individuals.

CONFLICTS AND DECISIONS

At the time that my local collaborator and I had agreed on my field strategy, we learned that another researcher had recently submitted a project to the same Park where I intended to work, to study the same Muriqui groups that my collaborator had been working with for more than 20 years, and that overlapped many of my initial objectives. We were surprised by this news, especially because similar projects cannot get working permits for the same area. Since this situation is not beneficial for science or scientists, my PhD advisor and I spent the last semester of 2011 debating about the possible changes to my project that would

prevent it from overlapping this other project. We tried to collaborate or at least clarify our situation to the other research group to avoid future conflicts, but as a consequence to their negative response my advisor believed that I should no longer work with this system or in this region.

As mentioned in my RSG project, working in the Atlantic Forest has always been a priority for me. For this reason, and because I feel strongly committed with the conservation effort of my local collaborator, the NGO Pró-Muriqui, in the end of 2011 I made the difficult decision of leaving the PhD Program from Tulane University. I am now back to Brazil and willing to keep working with Pró-Muriqui.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The NGO Pró-Muriqui was set up in 2000 by Dr Maurício Talebi, with the purpose of ensuring continuation to a research and conservation project for the southern Muriquis (*Brachyteles arachnoides*), that had been initiated in 1986. It is the only organization in the country that studies the southern Muriquis, and that studies Muriquis in continuous forest. In 2005, through a collaborative work with federal agencies and other primatologists that work with the northern Muriqui (*Brachyteles hipoxantus*), Dr Talebi got engaged in the development of the National Action Plan (PAN) for the research and conservation of both Muriqui species. In 2010 this group finished delineating the PAN Muriqui, which should be implemented until the end of 2015. Their first objective is to perform population surveys throughout the Atlantic Forest, to collect and update demographic and geographic data about Muriquis, but considering the extreme deforestation pressure that the Atlantic Forest has been suffering (less than 7% still remains) it was decided that gathering these information for the southern Muriqui was a national priority. This strategy reinforces the conservation of the last and largest continuous area of the Atlantic Forest, one of the top conservation hot spots in the world, where it is estimated that the largest Muriquis population still lives.

PROPOSAL

Researchers are currently looking for funding for the PAN Muriqui, so I have discussed with Dr. Talebi the possibility of using the rest of my RSGF grant to support their work. I still have more than half of the RSG grant, which would be enough to support the following activities planned for this year:

- Three population surveys (cost of gas, food and field assistants).
- Advertising campaign (printing posters, with the RSGF logo).
- Environmental education activities (under development by an educational NGO and a master student associated to the NGO Pró-Muriqui).

Even though my broad goal is the same, I realise that this plan involves many changes from my initial project. Nevertheless, after a year of collaboration with the NGO Pró-Muriqui I am positive and enthusiastic about the fact that the PAN Muriqui will have a much stronger impact on the conservation of Muriquis and their habitat than my previous objectives. Therefore, I believe Rufford Small Grant Foundation would only benefit from this opportunity.

Most documents about the PAN Muriqui are only available in Portuguese (links below), but if it is of your interest, I can send more detailed information.

LINKS

NGO Pró-Muriqui:

<http://www.promuriqui.org.br/site/en/>

PAN Muriqui Executive plan_summary:

www.dialogoflorestal.org.br/download.php?codigoArquivo=239

PAN Muriqui Executive plan_Book:

http://www.icmbio.gov.br/portal/images/stories/docs-plano-de-acao/pan-muriqui/livro_muriqui_web.pdf

