

ILLEGAL SPORT HUNTING OF XENARTHRA SPECIES IN BRAZIL: AN ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK™ POSTS

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RESUMO

Sport hunting can negatively affect wild species if not properly regulated. In Brazil, sport hunting is likely to cause great impacts on wildlife populations, but since this activity is illegal in the country, obtaining data on this subject is challenging. In this study, we used an online social media platform, Facebook™, to uncover the distribution and impacts of illegal sport hunting of Xenarthra species in Brazil. We sampled five Facebook™ groups on which around 200,000 users constantly share their hunting activities, and obtained data on the number of individuals hunted per mammalian taxon and the localities of hunting events occurring during 2019 and 2020. We considered each post by a given member of the group portraying pictures of the hunting or consumption of a wild animal on each day as a unique hunting event. We recorded 967 hunting events of mammals from which 35.9% ($n = 347$) consisted of Xenarthra species. These hunting events were posted online by 295 different members and involved the killing of 407 specimens (1.17 ± 0.58 specimens/hunting event) of at least 10 Xenarthra species, representing 30.1% of all mammalian specimens hunted. Overall, 252 municipalities in all 26 states and six biomes of Brazil presented Xenarthra hunting events, the most frequent being the Amazon biome, followed by the Atlantic Forest, Cerrado, Caatinga, Pampas and Pantanal. The most prevalent order was Cingulata (8 species, 403 specimens); only three *Tamandua tetradactyla* specimens, and one *Bradypus variegatus* specimen were recorded within the Order Pilosa. Among those specimens for which the species was unequivocally identified ($n = 324$), the nine-banded armadillo *Dasypus novemcinctus* was the most targeted ($n = 259$ specimens, 79.9%), followed by the six-banded armadillo *Euphractus sexcinctus* ($n = 35$ specimens, 10.8%). In addition, we recorded one hunting event of the threatened giant armadillo *Priodontes maximus*. We showed that illegal sport hunting is widespread in Brazil and targets a wide range of species and large numbers of individuals of Xenarthra, especially armadillos, confirming findings from previous studies that indicated armadillos as a main target group in the country. Online social media has been increasingly used to share illegal activities worldwide, but these platforms are also useful as a source of information on neglected and secretive human behaviors such as sport hunting. Sport hunting in Brazil needs to be regulated and improvement of law enforcement and development of awareness campaigns should be prioritized to curb the impacts brought about by this activity. We claim that social media could be used to both obtain data on and promote campaigns against sport hunting of Xenarthra

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Armadillo, Hunting, Social media

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