

XENARTHANS IN RIPARIAN AREAS OF PASTURES FROM SOUTHEASTERN BRAZIL

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RESUMO

Alteration of natural environments in the Anthropocene and the resulting loss of biodiversity are the major constraints for wildlife conservation worldwide. The region most severely altered by anthropogenic processes in Brazil is its southeastern portion, where intense agricultural colonization has suppressed especially most of the Atlantic Forest thereat, as well as most of the Cerrado vegetation. In that sense, monitoring anthropized landscapes may provide information on the dynamics taking place between the native fauna and the new human-induced aspects of its habitat, thus enabling us to establish conservation strategies for its new populations. Thus, we present here a data survey of the reports of xenarthrans over two years and six months of fauna monitoring in northwestern Rio de Janeiro state. The survey took place predominantly on pastoral landscapes with rural residences, a riparian corridor with canopy areas, a secondary forest fragment, and a highway that cuts off the connectivity among the last remnants of herbaceous vegetation in the region. We performed direct and indirect active searches using camera traps along the riparian corridor. Camera trap surveys were performed on a quarterly basis with a 72-h exposure, which represented 18 samplings over two years and six months, thus totalizing 1296 h of camera trapping. Searches were carried out during the installation and removal of cameras, being estimated in 8 h per sampling, totalizing 144 h of soil and canopy observation. Armadillo trails were present in 33.33% of the indirect active field searches, being represented by footprints and excavations along the riparian zone, denoting *Dasypus novemcinctus* due to the short width and long depth of samples. Additionally, on the pasture hills we found the carcass of a southern tamandua bearing injury marks which were probably made by domestic dogs. Dog footprints were found in 80.55% of searches. In the direct active searches we recorded *T. tetradactyla* at day rest twice over two years (2018 and 2019), coincidentally in the same month (October) and on the same *Ficus* sp. specimen, which had a 7.5-m circumference, being recorded with a manual camera in a continuous canopy segment of the riparian zone. This fact reveals the importance of centenary trees for the species ecology in these environments. Despite the long sampling period, camera traps recorded a single Xenarthra species (nine-banded armadillo, *D. novemcinctus*) in only two events, in contrast with four mesocarnivore species that were frequently recorded: crab-eating fox, otter, crab-eating raccoon, and domestic dog. Under original conditions of forest connectivity, this environment would have sloths and other armadillo species (*Cabassous tatouay*, *D. septemcinctus*).

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We conclude that the low frequency and diversity of xenarthrans in this environment (especially the absence of *Euphractus sexcinctus*, a species of probable occurrence in highly altered areas) may be related to the constant presence of free-living domestic dogs in riparian zones and to the ever-present pressure of poorly implemented agriculture in the region. The latter factor implicates the non-protection of Permanent Preservation Areas of streams thereat, which constitute wildlife corridors that are essential for biodiversity conservation in the area.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Anthropic grasslands, *Canis lupus familiaris*, Defaunation, Mesopredator release