

Travels in northeastern Brazil: Unfolding the reptile fauna of Lencois Maranhenses

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This is a gorgeous freshwater lagoon in the Lençóis Maranhenses National Park, Maranhão, northeastern Brazil. Credit: Dr. Jivanildo Miranda

In order to be effective, a Conservation Unit must have available a list of the species that live within it. They also should have detailed information about the distribution of species among the available habitats. It would be difficult to correctly plan the conservation actions and/or monitoring programs without some minimal knowledge about the species (who are the object of those measures). "This is why our study is so important to the park", said Dr. Miranda from [Universidade Federal do Maranhão](http://www.ufma.br) (CCAA/UFMA), leading author of the article, published in the open access journal www.pensoft.net/journals/zookeys/>Zookeys.

In Lençóis Maranhenses National Park 42 species of reptiles were found. Approximately 80% of them live only in [restinga](#) habitats, which

comprise about 20% of the area currently protected by the park. Restingas have been strongly disturbed by the clandestine openings of paths created to transport tourists to the dunes in the park, using off-road vehicles. This problem is more severe during the [rainy season](#) when paths become muddy quickly, and new ones are continuously opening. This could be extremely harmful to those habitats because their poor soil might severely limit natural recomposition.



This is an unpaved road in restinga habitats, home of most reptile species in the Lençóis Maranhenses National Park, Maranhão, northeastern Brazil. Credit: Dr. Jivanildo Miranda

"We recorded endangered species in Lençóis Maranhenses; particularly [sea turtles](#) located in the beach habitats. No one has any idea about the animal activity there! Are they spawning? It's very likely, but we don't have any data! It would be very important to study and monitor those species in the 70 km of beaches of the Lençóis Maranhenses National Park" adds Dr. Miranda.

Another [turtle species](#), which deserves attention in Lençóis Maranhenses, is the Brazilian Slider Turtle, which has a limited [geographic distribution](#) in the coast of Maranhão, northeastern Brazil.

This turtle is used as a source of food by the extremely poor inhabitants of Lençóis Maranhenses and surrounding areas.



These are two individuals of *Trachemys adiutrix*, the Brazilian Slider Turtle, which has a restricted geographic distribution in the coast of Maranhão, northeastern Brazil. Credit: Dr. Jivanildo Miranda

"We believe that it would be helpful to promote awareness campaigns to help the conservation of that species, but it is equally important to provide alternatives to the people that live there. These [inhabitants](#), for example, could be placed into the tourism business by providing training courses. They could work as tourist guides, waiters, or cooks. This would not only improve their economic capacity, but also free them of the need to use the Brazilian Slider Turtle as a food item. The efforts for conservation will only be successful with a joint effort of scientists, policymakers and society. We have to talk to one another and look for solutions together", concluded Dr. Miranda.

More information: Miranda JP, Costa JCL, Rocha CFD (2012) Reptiles from Lençóis Maranhenses National Park, Maranhão, northeastern Brazil. ZooKeys 246: 51. [doi: 10.3897/zookeys.246.2593](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.246.2593)

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