

White-lipped peccary trails lead to archeological discovery in Brazil

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This is a drawing of a large cat and prey. A team of researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society and a local partner NGO, Instituto Quinta do Sol, discovered ancient cave drawings made by hunter-gatherer societies thousands of years ago while conducting a survey for white-lipped peccaries in Brazil. Credit: Liana Joseph/WCS

While tracking white-lipped peccaries and gathering environmental data in forests that link Brazil's Pantanal and Cerrado biomes, a team of researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society and a local partner

NGO, Instituto Quinta do Sol, discovered ancient cave drawings made by hunter-gatherer societies thousands of years ago.

The [drawings](#) are the subject of a recently published study by archeologists Rodrigo Luis Simas de Aguiar and Keny Marques Lima in the journal *Revista Clio Arqueológica* (see link below). The diversity of the renderings, according to the authors, adds significantly to our knowledge of rock art from the Cerrado plateau region that borders the Pantanal.

"Our work with the Wildlife Conservation Society focuses on promoting sustainable land use practices that help protect important wildlife species and the wild places where they live," said Dr. Alexine Keuroghlian, researcher with WCS's Brazil Program. "Since we often work in remote locations, we sometimes make surprising discoveries, in this case, one that appears to be important for our understanding of human cultural history in the region."

The discovery was made on Brazil's Cerrado plateau in 2009, when Keuroghlian and her team were conducting surveys of white-lipped peccaries, herd-forming pig-like animals that travel long distances and are environmental indicators of healthy forests. The peccaries are vulnerable to human activities, such as deforestation and hunting, and are disappearing from large swaths of their former range from southern Mexico to northern Argentina. While following signals from radio-collared white-lipped peccaries and the foraging trails of peccary herds, the team encountered a series of prominent sandstone formations with caves containing drawings of animals and geometric figures.



This is a drawing of a human-like figure and symbols. A team of researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society and a local partner NGO, Instituto Quinta do Sol, discovered ancient cave drawings made by hunter-gatherer societies thousands of years ago while conducting a survey for white-lipped peccaries in Brazil. Credit: Alexine Keuroghlian/WCS

Keuroghlian contacted Aguiar, a regional specialist in cave drawings who determined that the drawings were made between 4,000-10,000 years ago by hunter-gatherer societies that either occupied the caves, or used them specifically for their artistic activities. The style of some drawings, Aguiar noted, was consistent with what archeologists call the Planalto (central Brazilian plateau) tradition, while others, surprisingly, were more similar to Nordeste (northeastern Brazil) or Agreste (forest to arid-land transition in NE Brazil) style drawings. The drawings depict an assemblage of animals including armadillos, deer, large cats, birds, and

reptiles, as well as human-like figures and geometric symbols. Oddly, the subject of the WCS surveys in the area—peccaries—are absent from the illustrations. Aguiar hopes to conduct cave floor excavations and geological dating at the sites in order to fully interpret the drawings.



This is a drawing of an assortment of animals. A team of researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society and a local partner NGO, Instituto Quinta do Sol, discovered ancient cave drawings made by hunter-gatherer societies thousands of years ago while conducting a survey for white-lipped peccaries in Brazil. Credit: Alexine Keuroghlian/WCS

"These discoveries of cave drawings emphasize the importance of protecting the Cerrado and Pantanal ecosystems, both for their cultural and natural heritage," said Dr. Julie Kunen, Director of WCS's Latin

America and the Caribbean Program and an expert on Mayan archeology. "We hope to partner with local landowners to protect these cave sites, as well as the forests that surround them, so that the cultural heritage and wildlife depicted in the drawings are preserved for future generations."

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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