

Brazilian researchers uncover six new species of silky anteater

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In a recent study published in *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society*, a team of Brazilian researchers discovered six new species of silky anteater, a mammal that lives in tropical rain forests of the Amazon region and Central America.

The new study combines genetic and anatomical data to review the classification of silky anteaters. Led by former Dr. Flávia Miranda, the team of researchers analyzed 33 samples of DNA and examined more than 280 specimens of this rare mammal in museums worldwide. The researchers discovered that what was formerly considered a single [species](#) *Cyclopes didactylus* is actually much more diverse genetically than previously thought. *Cyclopes didactylus* is in fact comprised of at least seven different species.

Besides *Cyclopes didactylus*, the common silky anteater, from the northern South America and northeastern Brazil, researchers revalidated three species from previous studies: Ida's silky anteater (*Cyclopes ida*), from the north of the Amazon River and left margin of the Negro River; Central American silky anteater (*Cyclopes dorsalis*), from Central America and Pacific coast of northern South America; and the Yungus silky anteater (*Cyclopes catellus*), from the Yungas of Bolivia.

Additionally, three other species were described as new, including Thomas' silky anteater (*Cyclopes thomasi*), in honor of Oldfield Thomas, a British naturalist who contributed to the knowledge about silky anteaters in the past. The two other [new species](#) are the Xingu silky

anteater (*Cyclopes xinguensis*), from the Xingu River in Brazil, and the red silky anteater (*Cyclopes rufus*), from Rondonia, also in Brazil, and with a fiery red coloration.

Silky anteaters are small nocturnal animals that live in the canopy of trees in tropical rain forest. They are some of the least studied anteaters.

"We spent many months during 19 expeditions along South America over 10 years, searching for the little anteater," said Miranda. Intensive museum and laboratory efforts were also fundamental for the discovery.

"Four years ago we described a new tapir species from Brazilian Amazon, and now we have six new species of silky anteater. There are probably many more new species waiting for description in museums and in the wild, and they may be extinct before we have the chance to know them," said Fabrício Santos, geneticist and one of the co-authors of the study.

These new species were just discovered, but their conservation status is already uncertain.

"Although silky anteaters in general are still widespread in the Amazon region, many of the new species may be under heavy pressure from deforestation, mining, and agriculture, among other threats", said Miranda, who is also head of the conservation NGO Projeto Tamandua, which is focused on conservation efforts for anteaters, sloths, and armadillos.

More information: Flávia R Miranda et al, Taxonomic review of the genus *Cyclopes* Gray, 1821 (Xenarthra: Pilosa), with the revalidation and description of new species, *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society* (2017). [DOI: 10.1093/zoolinnean/zlx079](https://doi.org/10.1093/zoolinnean/zlx079)

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