

12 new species discovered in Brazil

29 April 2008

Researchers discovered a legless lizard and a tiny woodpecker along with 12 other suspected new species in Brazil's Cerrado, one of the world's 34 biodiversity conservation hotspots.

The Cerrado's wooded grassland once covered an area half the size of Europe, but is now being converted to cropland and ranchland at twice the rate of the neighboring Amazon rainforest, resulting in the loss of native vegetation and unique species.

An expedition comprising scientists from Conservation International (CI) and Brazilian universities found 14 species believed new to science – eight fish, three reptiles, one amphibian, one mammal, and one bird – in and around the Serra Geral do Tocantins Ecological Station, a 716,000-hectare (1,769,274-acre) protected area that is the Cerrado's second largest.

The lizard, of the *Bachia* genus, resembles a snake due to its lack of legs and pointed snout, which help it move across the predominantly sandy soil formed by the natural erosion of the escarpments of the Serra Geral. Other suspected new species include a dwarf woodpecker (genus *Picumnus*) and horned toad (genus *Proceratophrys*).

"It's very exciting to find new species and data on the richness, abundance, and distribution of wildlife in one of the most extensive, complex, and unknown regions of the Cerrado," said CI biologist Cristiano Nogueira, the expedition leader. "Protected areas such as the Ecological Station are home to some of the last remaining healthy ecosystems in a region increasingly threatened by urban growth and mechanized agriculture."

The team also recorded several threatened species such as the hyacinth macaw, marsh deer, three-banded armadillo (*tatu-bola*), the Brazilian merganser, and the dwarf tinamou among more than 440 species of vertebrates documented during the 29-day field expedition.

Comprising 21 percent of Brazil, the Cerrado is the most extensive woodland-savanna in South America. Large mammals such as the giant anteater, giant armadillo, jaguar and maned wolf struggle to survive in the fast-changing habitat also known as Brazil's breadbasket.

The expedition included 26 researchers from the University of São Paulo and its Museum of Zoology; the federal universities of São Carlos and Tocantins; and CI-Brazil. It was funded by the O Boticário Foundation for Conservation of Nature, with the support of the NGO Pequi–Pesquisa e Conservação do Cerrado (Research & Conservation of the Cerrado).

"The geographic distribution of some of the species registered is restricted to the area of the ecological station; thus their survival depends on the good management of the protected area and its immediate surroundings," said Luís Fabio Silveira, of the Department of Zoology of the University of São Paulo. "From the survey we can obtain data concerning the anatomy, reproductive biology, life cycle, and distribution of the species, all of which help us in future conservation programs."

Final results of the study, including the formal description of new species, will be used to support the development of a management plan for the Ecological Station, which was created in 2001.

"We need to know our protected areas better, especially the ecological stations whose principal objective is to generate scientific knowledge of Brazilian biodiversity, so little studied and already so severely threatened," Nogueira said.

"Unfortunately, extensive areas of the Cerrado, like the Ecological Station, are becoming increasingly rare, thus making the data collected even more important. Above all, it is necessary to know to conserve."

Source: Conservation International

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