

Conservation news

New northern miqui group discovered in Brazil's Caparaó National Park

In the course of survey work to assess the population viability of the northern miqui in one of this primate's last remaining strongholds, a team supported by the Conservation Leadership Programme (CLP) has discovered a new group of this Critically Endangered species. The miqui, or woolly spider monkey, is the largest New World primate. It was recognized as two distinct species—the northern miqui *Brachyteles hypoxanthus* and its southern counterpart *B. arachnoides*—in the late 1980s.

Endemic to eastern Brazil's Atlantic Forest, the northern miqui is one of the world's most threatened primates. It was once widely distributed throughout this region but hunting and habitat destruction have taken a heavy toll. The species is now confined to a handful of isolated fragments of forest, each harbouring small subpopulations with limited and declining genetic diversity (see also *Oryx*, 2009, 43, 254–257). The entire wild population is believed to number <1,000 individuals.

Caparaó National Park is an important location for conservation of the northern miqui but until recently there was a lack of detailed information about the population and the threats to its survival. The CLP-funded team has already started to gather essential data on the distribution, density and status of this Critically Endangered species. The team's research is also contributing to the implementation of the targets proposed in the National Miqui Action Plan.

The presence of an entirely new group on the west side of the Park is an unexpected bonus. The group was found in December 2015 in an area of the Park where northern miquis had never been recorded before. This previously unknown subpopulation is even more significant because of its size. The team counted at least 50 individuals, including seven juveniles and five infants. The discovery of such a large and healthy additional group is a boost for conservation of the northern miqui and provides a strong foundation for the implementation of a long-term research programme at Caparaó National Park.

The project has also paved the way for additional primate research in the Park. In addition to helping the team with fieldwork related to the northern miqui project itself, students from the Carangola campus of Minas Gerais State University are also embarking on studies of their own that will help to focus more attention on the Park's wider primate community. Other threatened primates were also recorded during the survey in the Park, including the Endangered buffy-headed marmoset *Callithrix flaviceps*, the Near Threatened black-fronted titi *Callicebus nigrifrons* and black-horned capuchin *Sapajus nigritus*.

This year the team aims to expand its field research into other areas of the Park, and is planning to develop education and awareness activities that help engage local communities, tourists and policy makers in miqui conservation. By harnessing the potential of this charismatic monkey as a flagship species the team hopes to encourage the local community to take pride in the Park's unique biodiversity and play an active role in its protection.

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Life after COP21: what does the Paris Agreement mean for forests and biodiversity conservation?

In Paris, 2015 finished with the achievement of an historic agreement between 195 countries to tackle the threat—and reality—of climate change. The main objective of the so-called Paris Agreement is to keep global temperature rises below 2°C while at the same time making significant efforts to limit the rise to no more than 1.5°. The Agreement will formally enter into force after 55 countries, accounting for at least 55% of global emissions, submit their greenhouse gas emissions reduction plans to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The Paris Agreement has a special significance for global forests and efforts to conserve biodiversity. By providing a framework to reward countries both for reductions in deforestation and expansion of sustainable forest management practices, the Paris Agreement finally recognizes the critical role that forests and biodiversity play in global efforts to reduce emissions—detail that was deliberately omitted from the Kyoto Protocol. This recognition will enable forests to play a central role in national strategies to tackle climate change. This momentum around the importance of forests and tackling drivers of deforestation has already led to an unprecedented level of international support to curb deforestation globally. For example, at the Paris conference Norway, Germany and the UK announced a combined commitment of USD 5 billion for efforts to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+).

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) sees these developments as heralding a significant new era of opportunity in efforts to reduce deforestation, conserve biodiversity and improve community livelihoods. The organization is supporting a number of community-based REDD+ pilot projects in countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam and Liberia, which are working to safeguard biodiversity and community well-being at the local level and drive sustainable natural resource management at the wider landscape level.

These pilot REDD+ projects are designed to provide access to a range of benefits that, combined, will create a resilient and sustainable model to finance climate, conservation and community development outcomes in a landscape. Conservation goals remain at the core of project design, and benefits derived from reducing carbon emissions are performance-based, contingent upon meeting agreed conservation objectives.

A key example of FFI's work in this context is the Wonegizi REDD+ pilot project in Zorzor District, Lofa County, Liberia. Here FFI is facilitating development of a participatory land-use plan, which covers Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area and the eleven communities that live within or just outside the forest. Local people and the government will act as co-managers of the soon to be gazetted 37,000 ha protected area. The REDD+ project is working to reduce agricultural drivers of deforestation by supporting the transition to more sustainable agricultural practices, as well as conserving the habitat of threatened species such as the western chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes verus*, forest elephant *Loxodonta africana cyclotis*, pygmy hippo *Hexaprotodon liberiensis*, sooty mangabey *Cercocebus atys* and white-necked rockfowl *Picathartes gymnocephalus*.

The importance of the Wonegizi REDD+ pilot has been recently recognized in the form of a NOK 40 million (c. USD 5 million) grant from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. Fauna & Flora International, with government counterparts from the Forest Development Authority, and local NGO partners Skills and Agricultural Development Services will continue efforts to secure benefit rights for local communities, operationalize forest management and protection through REDD+, and begin a programme to develop and diversify local, sustainable livelihoods over the next 5 years.

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New Ramsar Site designation secures future of Myanmar's largest lake

In February 2016 the Myanmar Government and the Ramsar Secretariat announced the designation of Indawgyi Lake as a Ramsar Site, marking the government's

commitment to conserving this special area. Located in northern Myanmar, Indawgyi Lake and its surrounding wetlands regularly support at least 20,000 migratory and resident water birds. These include > 5,000 purple swamp-hen *Porphyrio porphyrio*; > 3,000 tufted *Aythya fuligula* and ferruginous *Aythya nyroca* ducks; > 2,000 lesser whistling ducks *Dendrocygna javanica*; and many other storks, geese, ducks, waders and gulls. A resident flagship species is the sarus crane *Grus antigone*, which provides a highlight for bird watchers.

The wetlands also provide habitat for other globally important freshwater species, including five species of globally threatened turtles and tortoises: the Myanmar peacock soft-shell turtle *Nilssonina formosa*, yellow tortoise *Indotestudo elongata* and Asian brown tortoise *Manouria emys*, all of which are categorized as Endangered, and the South Asian box turtle *Cuora amboinensis* and Asiatic softshell turtle *Amyda cartilaginea*, both of which are categorized as Vulnerable. Indawgyi also has high fish diversity, with 93 recorded species, including seven that were described only recently. Alongside its wildlife, c. 30,000 people live in the Indawgyi basin, most of whom depend on the lake to earn a living through fishing, rice farming, livestock grazing, and extracting products from the surrounding forest.

The addition of Indawgyi Lake to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance not only showcases how critical this site is for biodiversity and ecosystem services, but also highlights the need to ensure that the lake is managed carefully by the people who depend on it. Since 2010 Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has been working in partnership with local communities, the Forest Department and the Department of Fisheries to address unsustainable practices such as overfishing in the lake and fuelwood extraction in the surrounding forests. Fuelwood extraction and consumption have been reduced through fuel-efficient stoves and community forestry.

To improve fisheries management, local communities have participated in the designation of fish conservation zones to protect fish breeding and nursery grounds. The Department of Fisheries has recently approved nine community-managed fish conservation zones, including a no-take zone around Shwe Myint Zu Pagoda, an iconic cultural building on the western side of the lake. Indawgyi's outstanding cultural and natural heritage is also attracting an increasing number of tourists. To ensure tourism is sustainable and benefits local people, FFI has launched a community-based ecotourism initiative that offers new adventures such as kayaking, cycling and trekking, all of which provide jobs for local youth.

Designation of Indawgyi Lake as a Ramsar Site will ensure the long-term conservation and wise use of what is Myanmar's most important wetland and only second Ramsar Site. The government is also committed to designating additional Ramsar Sites to create a national network of