

DIET COMPOSITION OF THE MANNED SLOTH (*BRADYPUS TORQUATUS*) IN ITS NORTHERN DISTRIBUTION

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RESUMO

The knowledge of a species feeding ecology, such as the diet composition and selection, allow us to understand requirements of habitat, resources and nutrients, and is fundamental to the embasement of conservation actions and programs. The manned sloth (*Bradypus torquatus*) is an arboreal and strict folivore mammal, classified as “vulnerable” to extinction. Despite this status, there are few data about the feeding ecology of this species in the scientific literature, especially for individuals located in the north portion of its distribution. The objective of this study is to evaluate the diet composition of manned sloths of northern Bahia, as part of a project initiated by the Tamandua Institute in partnership with UESC. Eight individuals are being monitored in a forest fragment at Reserva Sapiranga, Mata de São João, BA. The individuals have been located on a daily basis during three months and the trees used by them are sampled for identification. In addition to the trees which consumption was visually confirmed, trees used repeatedly (\geq three times) and those which the permanence of an individual lasted two or more consecutive days, are included in the analyses. The relative frequency of usage of each plant taxa was calculated by dividing the number of times the taxa was used by the total number of sloth locations, multiplied by 100. Additionally, the trees consumed by the sloths (tracked animals or opportunistically observed) were marked and identified. Until this moment (two and a half months of monitoring), the sloths were located 469 times, resulting in 244 marked trees, of which 171 were identified to family or genera level. Forty nine morphotypes, in the level of genus or family were identified, varying between 12 and 17 per individual. *Ficus* (relative frequency = 19.2%) and *Tapirira* (8.8%) genera and the families Moraceae (27.2%) and Anacardiaceae (13.8%) were predominantly used. One *Ficus* morphotype and one *Tapirira* morphotype were used by a large number of animals, however the remaining morphotypes used varied between the individuals. Our preliminary results show that a wide variety of plant species are consumed locally. Although two morphotypes are common in the diet of most sloths, each individual tends to concentrate its diet in a specific group of plants. This brings more evidence of a trend theorized in the literature: that the manned sloth is specialist at the individual level and generalista at the populational level. The continuation of this study will allow a better understanding of this and other questions related to the feeding ecology of this species.

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