

## PRESENCE OF THE MURIQUI (*BRACHYTELES HYPOXANTHUS*) IN A RURAL PROPERTY IN THE VICINITY OF THE AUGUSTO RUSCHI BIOLOGICAL RESERVE, SANTA TERESA, ESPÍRITO SANTO

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### Abstract

This note reports on three sightings, in 2005, of mureiquis in a forest on private land to the north of the Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve. The forest there is dense montane evergreen forest. The sightings were of four, three and four individuals respectively, one of them including a female with an infant. We emphasize the importance of maintaining forest patches on private land and their role in enhancing the survival of populations of threatened species in small protected areas such as the Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve.

**Key words** – mureiqui, *Brachyteles*, Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve, Atlantic forest, Espírito Santo

The occurrence of the mureiqui in the montane region of the state of Espírito Santo was documented by Aguirre (1971), who registered their presence in five municipalities, including Santa Teresa, for which he estimated a population of about 150 to 180 individuals in and around the Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve (originally called Nova Lombardia). Over the last two decades it has been possible to record only about 10 individuals in the biological reserve (Mittermeier *et al.*, 1987; Pinto *et al.*, 1993), along with unconfirmed reports from park guards of the continued presence of mureiquis in a private property just to the north (Mendes and Chiarello, 1993).

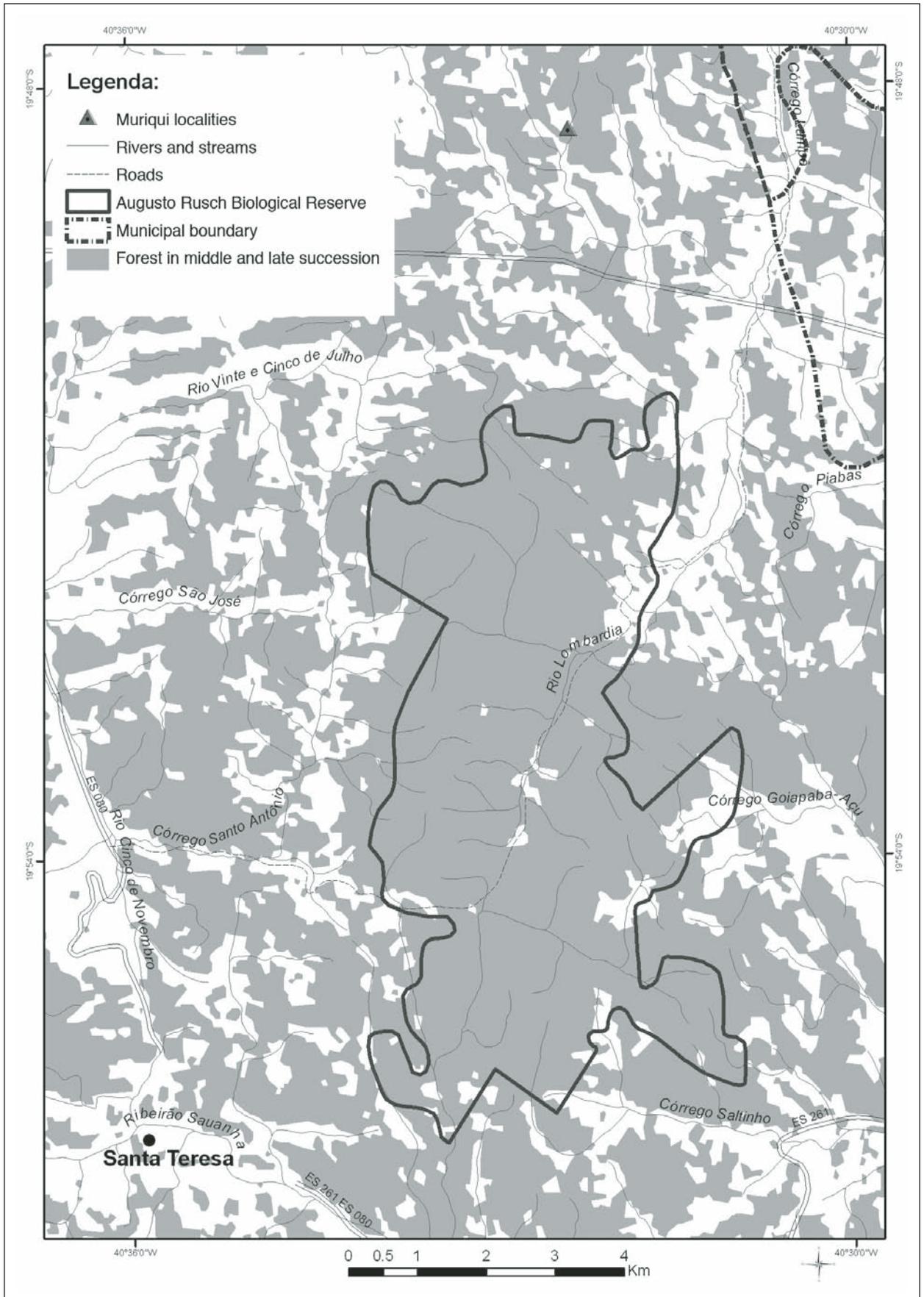
The Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve is a federal protected area of 3,573 ha of dense montane evergreen forest. The relief is of steep mountain slopes and valleys at altitudes ranging from 780 to 1,050 m (IPEMA, 2005). About 280 families live in the vicinity, their livelihoods dependent on plantations of coffee, banana, and eucalyptus. There are a number of forest patches on these private properties. Many of them, of small to medium size, are still well preserved and extend to the biological reserve, and are important as such for the conservation of the local wildlife.

In this note we report on the occurrence of *Brachyteles hypoxanthus* in a forest on private land to the north of the Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve. They were seen three times on a forested slope on the property of Sr. Nelson Furlani, in a location called Alto Santo Antônio. The forest there has a number of small streams which converge to form a waterfall, the Cachoeira do Stork, flowing into the Rio Lombardia, one of the main tributaries of the Rio Piraquê-Açu. The sightings of the mureiquis were all within

two kilometers of the coordinates 19°49'S and 40°32'W (Fig. 1).

The first time they were seen was in the afternoon of 17 February 2005, during fieldwork for the project "Planning Sustainable Landscapes in the Central Corridor of the Atlantic Forest" (*Planejando Paisagens Sustentáveis no Corredor Central da Mata Atlântica*). They were on a slope leading to a forested valley bottom. An individual was heard calling and four mureiquis were then seen in the canopy at around 15 m. They remained there for four minutes before they saw the observers and fled to the top of the hill where the forest was denser. The second record was in the morning of 19 February 2005, about 300 m from where they had been seen two days earlier, in a tree of about 17 m. On this occasion, it was possible to identify a male, a female with an infant, and two others. The male was very agitated giving alarm calls, and rapidly moved away (A. C. Cornélio, pers. comm.). The third occasion was in the morning of 25 August 2005 during a bird census. A group of three individuals was spotted in the canopy of a tree on the slope across a small valley. They continued feeding quietly, apparently unworried by the presence of the observers.

The local farmers reported seeing these mureiquis quite frequently, always in small groups of three or four, feeding and moving through the trees along the mountain slopes. Two of our sightings were documented: the first with a tape recording of the alarm call ("mpg" file), and the third by photographs. The photographs and the mpg file are in the possession of the first author. These records emphasize the importance of conserving the forest patches on the private lands around the Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve.



**Figure 1.** Location of the records of muriquis (*Brachyteles hypoxanthus*) to the north of the Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve, Santa Teresa, Espírito Santo.

They evidently serve as refuges for remnant populations of threatened species such as the murequi, and contribute significantly to the conservation potential of such relatively small reserves as that of Augusto Ruschi. Maintaining and increasing the connectivity of these forest patches, especially with the larger forest of the biological reserve, is vital to avoid the isolation of their populations and their inevitable resulting extirpation. The discovery of these murequis also underlines the need to carry out research and wildlife surveys on private lands as a complementary strategy to the creation of public protected areas.

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