ANTI-PREDATOR BEHAVIOR OF COIMBRA-FILHO'S TITI MONKEYS (CALLICEBUS COIMBRAI)

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Abstract

Predation pressure has an important role in shaping the behavioral, ecological and social patterns of primates. In this study, we describe two types of anti-predator behavior performed by Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys (*Callicebus coimbrai*), and compare our reports with the anti-predator strategies adopted by other Neotropical primates. The reports were performed on a small and isolated Atlantic forest fragment (14 ha) located in a highly-fragmented landscape in north-eastern Brazil. Although the titi monkey group was systematically monitored (July/2009 - August/2012: 1,513 hours) over the years, the events were recorded *ab libitum* method. Four events of anti-predator behavior were reported: three were in response to a medium-sized arboreal primate, the yellow-breasted capuchin monkey (*Sapajus xanthosternos*), and one in response to a large bird, the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*). When in the presence of *S. xanthosternos*, the titi monkeys emitted a quiet alert vocalization and descended to the dense undergrowth in order to avoid predation. On the other hand, when the titi monkeys were exploiting fleshy fruit on a tree, they verified the presence of an individual of *C. aura* and jumped to the ground. Both types of anti-predator behavior had been previously described for Neotropical primates. The anti-predator behaviors performed by the titi monkeys can contribute to the understanding of the adaptive processes of these poorly studied primates in fragmented habitats. Moreover, the passive behavior and the habitat characteristics may be an important aspect in the choice of strategy to be used, since the habitat provided adequate refuges and allowed the titi monkeys to seek an alternative escape route.

Key Words: Atlantic Forest, Sapajus xanthosternos, Cathartes aura, anti-predator strategy

Resumo

A pressão da predação tem um papel importante nos padrões comportamentais, ecológicos e sociais dos primatas. Neste estudo, descrevemos dois tipos de comportamento anti-predadores realizados por indivíduos de um grupo de Guigó-de--Coimbra-Filho (Callicebus coimbrai) e comparamos nossos registros com as estratégias anti-predadores adoptadas por outros primatas neotropicais. Os registros foram realizados em um pequeno e isolado fragmento de Mata Atlântica localizado em uma paisagem altamente fragmentada na região nordeste do Brasil. Embora o grupo tenha sido sistematicamente monitorado (julho/2009 – agosto/2012: 1,513 horas) ao longo dos anos, os eventos foram registrados de forma ab libitum. Foram relatados quatro eventos de comportamento anti-predador: três foram em resposta a um primata arborícola de tamanho médio, o macaco-prego-do-peito-amarelo (Sapajus xanthosternos), e um em resposta a uma ave de grande porte, o urubu--de-cabeça-vermelha (*Cathartes aura*). Quando na presença de *S. xanthosternos*, os guigós emitiram vocalização de alerta e desceram até o sub-bosque denso a fim de evitar a predação. Por outro lado, quando os guigós estavam consumindo frutos, eles verificaram a presença de um indivíduo de C. aura e pularam para o chão. Ambos tipos de comportamentos anti-predator já tinham sido previamente descritos para primatas Neotropicais. Os comportamentos anti-predadores realizados pelos guigós podem contribuir para a compreensão dos processos adaptativos destes primatas pobremente estudados em áreas fragmentadas. Além do mais, o comportamento passivo e as características do seu hábitat podem ser um aspecto importante na escolha de estratégia a ser utilizada, uma vez que proporcionavam refúgios adequados e permitiam que os guigós buscassem uma rota de fuga alternativa.

Palavras-chave: Mata Atlântica, Sapajus xanthosternos, Cathartes aura, estratégia anti-predador

Introduction

It is extremely difficult to document predation on primate species due to the low occurrence of events, the difficulty in observing quick predatory attacks, the nocturnal habits of many predators (owls and leopards), the effect of the presence of human observers to inhibit predation bouts, and therefore the large amount of time and energy needed to obtain these reports (Isbell, 1994). However, predation pressure has an important role in the behavioral, ecological and social patterns of primates (van Schaik, 1983; Cheney and Wrangham, 1987; Stanford, 2002). This pressure results in specific behavioral responses linked to different types of predators and prey (Ferrari, 2009). Predators or potential predators of primates include hawks (Heymann, 1990; Sherman, 1991; Julliot, 1994; Gilbert, 2000; Vasquez and Heymann, 2001; Defler, 2004), felids (Olmos, 1993; Novak et al., 2005; Ludwig et al., 2007), other primate species (Sampaio and Ferrari, 2005), and even snakes (Heymann, 1987; Corrêa and Coutinho, 1997; Teixeira et al., 2016). In order to avoid predation, the behavioral response of primates can vary between active (i.e., mobbing, monitoring or alarm calling) and passive (i.e., avoiding, hiding or fleeing) behaviors (Ferrari, 2009).

Anti-predator strategies can be strongly linked to predator type (Edmunds, 1974; Table 1). Practically all predators (or potential predators) of primates demonstrate solitary foraging behavior (Ferrari, 2009). Terrestrial predators such as mammalian carnivores can either engage in astonishing high-speed pursuits in open habitats or can stalk, ambush and pounce to overpower prey (Macdonald et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2013). On the other hand, aerial predators (raptors) tend to use active search or sit-and-wait strategies to pursue and capture prey (see Tables 1 and 2 in Jaksic and Carothers, 1985). Moreover, arboreal predators (primates) seem to have used a "surprise attack or ambush" strategy to capture a small-bodied primate (Albuquerque et al., 2014).

Active anti-predator behaviors may be used to communicate the presence of such surprise-effect dependent predators (terrestrial predators) to conspecifics. In the presence of terrestrial predators, primate behavior can vary between mobbing (Brachyteles hypoxanthus: Dias and Strier, 2002; Cacajao calvus: Bowler, 2007), ascending up trees (B. hypoxanthus: Mendes, 1997), approaching and mobbing (Callicebus nigrifrons: Cäsar et al., 2012), or producing alarm calls (Chiropotes utahicki: Ferrari et al., 2004). In terms of aerial predators, primates can adopt a combined active/passive anti-predation strategy aiming to avoid predation. When under attack from aerial predators, primates variously produce loud calls and descend within the forest canopy (Alouatta clamitans: Miranda et al., 2006), hide and remain vigilant (A. palliata: Gil-da-Costa et al., 2003; Callithrix jacchus: Bezerra and Souto, 2008), demonstrate mobbing behaviors (Saimiri oerstedii: Boinski 1987), or display piloerection (Plecturocebus cupreus: Dolotovskaya et al., 2019). When potential arboreal predators are noticed, primates can flee quickly and hide in vine tangles (Plecturocebus cupreus: Dolotovskaya et al., 2019), or moving rapidly, produce alarm call and mobbing vocalizations (Callithrix jacchus: Albuquerque et al., 2014). Thus, the anti-predator strategy adopted will depend on the context of each predation event as well as the primate species involved.

Primates that display passive anti-predator behaviors tend to present cryptic pelage coloration, live in small family groups and maintain strong social structures (Ferrari, 2009; Dolotovskaya et al., 2019). Owl monkeys (Aotus) and titi monkeys (Callicebus, Cheracebus and Plecturocebus) are Neotropical primates that possess all these features (Norconk, 2011). Titi monkeys (sensu Byrne et al., 2016) are small-bodied primates (ca. 2 kg) distributed widely across diverse habitats in South America (Bicca-Marques and Heymann, 2013). They live in small groups comprising a monogamous breeding pair with one to three offspring (Bicca-Marques and Heymann, 2013). They are primarily frugivorous, exploiting alternative food resources such as new leaves and invertebrates during periods of lower fruit availability (Caselli & Setz, 2011; DeLuycker, 2011; Souza-Alves et al., 2011) and use low and middle forest strata (Heiduck, 2002; Chagas and Ferrari, 2010). Owing to behavioral and morphological characteristics (shiny and cryptic pelage), titi monkeys have demonstrated efficient passive anti-predator strategies (Ferrari, 2009).

Here we described two types of anti-predator behavior performed by Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys (Callicebus coimbrai) inhabiting a small Atlantic forest fragment in north-eastern Brazil, and we compare them to the anti-predator strategies adopted by other Neotropical primates. Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys are a highly frugivorous species; they live in small groups, use low and middle forest strata, inhabit disturbed sites, demonstrate an income breeding strategy, and use the forest floor frequently (Chagas and Ferrari, 2010; Chagas and Ferrari, 2011; Souza-Alves et al., 2011, Souza-Alves et al., 2019), all features that put them at a high risk of predation (Ferrari, 2009). As such, we expected that Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys would demonstrate different anti-predator behaviors when facing terrestrial, arboreal and aerial potential predators living in fragmented habitats.

Methods and Study Site

Our study took place in a small Atlantic forest fragment (14 ha) at Fazenda Trapsa (11°12' S, 37°14' W), located in the municipality of Itaporanga d'Ajuda, state of Sergipe, north-eastern Brazil. The site is embedded in a mosaic of eight forest fragments varying in their forest structure, size, shape and degree of conservation (Chagas and Ferrari, 2011). The study site is characterized by small trees (mean = 8.3 m) with basal area of 39.5 m², high density of lianas (940 ind/ha) and is classified as being in an early stage of regeneration (Souza-Alves et al., 2018). The predominant botanical families are Fabaceae, Myrtaceae, and Sapotaceae (Souza-Alves et al., 2014). Monthly rainfall level (mm) was collected at the meteorological station of RPPN Caju - Embrapa Sergipe, located 1 km from the study area. During the 11-year period from 2000-2011 the annual mean of rainfall recorded there was 120.9 mm (Semarh, 2017). Köppen's classification characterizes the regional climate as As (Tropical zone with dry summer: Alvares et al., 2013).

At the time of the study, the Coimbra-Filho's titi group comprised four individuals, with one monogamous breeding pair, a juvenile and an infant (Souza-Alves, 2010). The subjects were previously well-habituated to human presence (Souza-Alves and Ferrari, 2010). Observations described here were obtained during the behavioral and ecological monitoring of this titi group through scan sampling for five days per month (see Souza-Alves, 2013 for more details). Unusual behaviors, such as anti-predator behavior performed by individuals, were reported using an *ad libitum* method (Altmann, 1974). When in the presence of the predator, we recorded the time of day, predator taxon, and titi monkey behavior during and after the encounter. Here we present data related to anti-predator strategies.

Results

The Coimbra-Filho's titi monkey focal group was observed from July 2009 to August 2012, for a total of 1,513 hours. Four events of anti-predator behavior were reported; three of these were in response to a medium-sized arboreal primate, the yellow-breasted capuchin monkey (*Sapajus xanthosternos*), and one towards a large-sized bird, the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*).

The first event took place in July 2009, at approximately 6:30 am, when the Coimbra-Filho's titi group was at one of their sleeping trees (ca. 1 m), Licania littoralis (Chrysobalanaceae). A group of Sapajus xanthosternos composed of 18 to 19 individuals approached quickly and extremely noisily. These factors allowed the members of Coimbra-Filho's titi group to leave the sleeping site quickly. The titi monkeys moved to another tree in order to facilitate their observation of the capuchin monkeys, and one individual emitted a quiet call to alert the group. On the same day around 10:45 am, the capuchin monkeys were foraging and walking towards the titi monkey group. This advance triggered the titi monkeys to quickly and quietly descend from their current location (at 12 m height) to approximately 3 m, where they remained and kept silent and still. All four of the titi monkeys remained stationary and quiet for 15 to 20 minutes to avoid detection before returning to their activities. Throughout this day, however, the group of titi monkeys monitored the capuchin monkey group and sought to perform their activities with caution, keeping close together and scanning the area due to the continued presence of the capuchin monkeys.

The second event occurred on May 2011 at 12:00 pm. Three members of the titi monkey group were eating fleshy fruits on the *Tapirira guianensis* tree (Anacardiaceae) at -15 m height and perceived the approach of the capuchin monkey group. All the titi monkeys descended to the understory (*ca.* 3 m) and hid in the vine tangles. The third event was reported on February 2010 at 10:00 am when

the adult male of the focal titi monkey group visually noticed the capuchin monkeys and began moving rapidly between trees in the opposite direction. The researchers did not hear any alarm call from this individual to alert the other members of titi group, but the other members followed this individual to avoid interaction with the capuchin group. The titi breeding pair ran in one direction and lay at rest 6 m from the ground until the capuchin monkey group had passed. In contrast, the infant titi moved in the opposite direction of the titi breeding pair and eventually came close to a capuchin monkey. The infant titi sighted a capuchin 3 m away and stopped. The capuchin monkey looked at the infant and continued on his route, then the infant titi moved towards the breeding pair where they remained until after the capuchin monkeys left the quadrant, at which time the titi monkeys resumed their usual activities. The titi monkeys also left and did not return to this location until the end of the day.

The last anti-predator strategy event was reported in October 2009, at approximately 09:40 am. A turkey vulture flew near three members of the Coimbra-Filho's titi group. One adult and the infant were at a height of between 7 and 9 m, feeding on *Xylopia frutescens* seeds (Annonaceae). The subadult was at a height between 2 and 3 m feeding on young leaves of unidentified vines. Noticing the turkey vulture flying over the tree canopy, the titi monkeys jumped to the ground, stood still for 1 to 2 min and emitted an alert vocalization (quiet call). The individuals looked up in an attempt to observe the vulture and see if it had left the area. When on the ground, the titi monkeys were at distances of between 1 and 2 m from the human observer, without showing any concern. After departure of the vulture, the individuals returned to their normal activities.

Discussion

Our results demonstrate that, like other Neotropical primates, Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys respond differently when threatened by an arboreal versus an aerial potential predator (Table 1). When exposed to a potential arboreal predator (Sapajus xanthosternos), the titi monkey group tended to descend to lower forest strata (understory), hide in vine tangles, remain still and give quiet alarms. They remained in the understory to perform all their daily activities. Robust capuchins are known to prey on titi monkeys (see Sampaio & Ferrari, 2005 - Sapajus apella) as well as on common marmosets (see Albuquerque et al. 2014 - Sapajus xanthosternos). In contrast, in the presence of a potential aerial predator (Cathartes aura), the titis fled to the forest floor in order to avoid predation. Although some other studies have verified primate anti-predation behavior in the presence of vultures, there are no reports of vulture predation on live primates (Gleason & Norconk, 2002; Suscke et al., 2017).

Type of predator	Species	Anti-predator response	Source
Aerial	Alouatta clamitans	Descend trees	Miranda et al. (2006)
	Alouatta palliata	Hide	McKinney (2009)
		Hide/Vigilant	Gil-da-Costa et al. (2003)
	Brachyteles hypoxanthus	Infant ran	Dias and Strier (2002)
	Cacajao calvus	Look up and alert	Bowler (2007)
	Callicebus coimbrai	Looking up and jumping down from trees	Present study
	Callicebus nigrifrons	Hide/descend trees	Cäsar et al. (2012a, b)
	Callithrix jacchus	Hide	Bezerra and Souto (2008)
	Cebus capucinus	Scan the sky/descend trees	Fitchel et al. (2005), Gros-Louis et al. (2008), Digweed et al. (2005)
	Plecturocebus cupreus	Piloerection/hide	Dolotovskaya et al. (2019)
Terrestrial	Brachyteles hypoxanthus	Ascend trees	Mendes (1997)
	Callithrix jacchus	Stay motionless	Bezerra and Souto (2008)
	Cebus capucinus	Ascend trees	Fitchel et al. (2005), Gros-Louis et al. (2008), Digweed <i>et al.</i> (2005)
	Plecturocebus cupreus	Piloerection/hide	Dolotovskaya et al. (2019)
	Plecturocebus discolor	Call/hide/piloerection	De Luna et al. (2010)
Arboreal	Callicebus coimbrai	Hide	Present study
	Callithrix jacchus	Alarm and mobbing calls/moving	Albuquerque et al. (2014)
	Plecturocebus cupreus	Flee and hide	Dolotovskaya et al. (2019)
	Plecturocebus moloch	Call/agitated	Sampaio and Ferrari (2005)

Table 1. Overview of response of the passive anti-predator behavior from Neotropical primates.

Both types of anti-predator behavior were previously observed in other titi monkeys (*Callicebus nigrifrons, Plecturocebus cupreus*, and *P. discolor*) when in the presence of eagles and tayras (De Luna et al., 2010; Cäsar et al., 2012) and capuchin monkeys (Dolotovskaya et al., 2019). When in the presence of an aerial predator, red titi monkey (*P. cupreus*) individuals have been found to emit alarm vocalizations, display piloerection, and move to denser parts of the tree crown (Dolotovskaya et al., 2019). On the other hand, *Callicebus nigrifrons* individuals have been observed to move to protected areas and "freeze" (Cäsar et al., 2013).

Neotropical primates often use lower and denser forest vegetation in order to hide from and avoid potential arboreal predators. These sites appear to be an optimal refuge chosen by primates. Cryptic pelage coloration and the small size of Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys has likely favored flight behaviors and increased their ability to hide from capuchin monkeys to avoid predation. Similar passive anti-predator behavior has been verified for other titi monkey species. For example, *Plecturocebus discolor* in equatorial Amazonia hid in vine tangles in more than half of its encounters with tayras (De Luna et al., 2010), and *P. cupreus* hid in vine tangles to avoid encountering tayras, squirrel monkeys and capuchin monkeys at the Estación Biológica Quebrada Blanco, north-eastern Peruvian Amazon (Dolotovskaya et al., 2019). Several anti-predator strategies against aerial predators have been reported for Neotropical primates, including alarm calls, freezing or taking cover instantaneously (Ferrari, 2009). Brown howler monkeys (*Alouatta guariba clamitans*) have been observed to descend to the understory and remain silent and motionless when under attack from a black-hawk eagle (*Spizaetus tyrannus*) (Miranda et al., 2006). An adult *Plecturocebus cupreus* male emitted alarm calls and moved to a denser part of the forest in the presence of a juvenile grey-headed kite (*Leptodon cayanensis*) (Dolotovskaya et al., 2019). Similarly, sakis (*Pithecia aequatorialis*) have been shown to give alarm calls for 10 minutes and drop to lower branches due to the presence of an unknown bird species (De Luna et al., 2010).

Escaping to the ground seems to be a common behavioral activity of Neotropical primates in the presence of a potential aerial predator. Most of species tend to descend to the lower forest strata with the aim of hiding. Under predation pressure from a turkey vulture, common marmosets (*Callithrix jacchus*) emitted alarm vocalizations, hid under leaves, and descended to the forest ground (Lyra-Neves et al., 2007). *Callithrix* parents also transferred their infants from their back to their ventral region while descending and hiding (Lyra-Neves et al., 2007). A novel anti-predator strategy by *Saguinus mystax* and *Leontocebus fuscicollis* is to fall down out of trees after observing aerial predators (Heymann, 1990).

At our study site, jumping to the ground may be a risky escape alternative for Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys, due to presence of a large terrestrial predator (*Puma concolor*: Chagas et al., 2010). However, risk of being predated by a puma – these felids present an ambush strategy – probably is lower than being predated by raptors. It is likely that the vegetation structure of the forest fragment (edge forest, discontinuous canopy) and the structure of the feeding tree (open canopy, low leaves, thin and long branches) "forced" the titi monkeys to jump to the ground. Their cryptic pelage coloration reduces the probability of being found in suitable hiding places (vine tangles). However, in open areas the same pelage can facilitate localization of titis by potential predators.

Unlike Plecturocebus cupreus individuals, who did not emit alarm calls during encounters with capuchin monkeys (Dolotovskaya et al., 2019), Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys emitted an alarm vocalization at least once in this study to alert the other individuals to the presence of a potential predator. Titi monkeys are known for emitting different types of alarm calls when in the presence of aerial and terrestrial predators (Cäsar and Zuberbuhler, 2012; Cäsar et al., 2013) and alarm calls were emitted by individuals of Callicebus nigrifrons groups when observing capuchin monkeys (Cäsar et al., 2012). Emitting loud alarm calls in the presence of an arboreal predator will likely increase the chances of a predator finding their potential prey. However, quiet calls will favor intra-group communication in order to coordinate the escape. In this event, Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys appeared to emit an alarm (short and highpitched: Cäsar et al., 2012) call solely to get the attention of other group individuals, signaling them to flee and hide. This allowed for the group to move together to a suitable area to avoid predation.

Anti-predator behaviors performed by Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys can contribute to the understanding of adaptive processes of these understudied primates in fragmented forest areas. In this study, Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys used different strategies to avoid predators and potential predators. Their cryptic behavior aided in their escape from capuchin monkeys, however, they were required to choose an alternative escape route when under the predation pressure of a potential aerial predator. An active anti-predator strategy, such as emitting quiet alarm calls, was used only to bring the small group together. Coimbra-Filho's titi monkeys usually adopted passive anti-predator strategies, and the characteristics of their habitat seemed to be an important aspect in their choice of strategy, as it provided suitable hiding places and allowed the titi monkeys to search for an alternative escape route.

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