Diversity profiles of medium and large-size mammals in an Atlantic Forest remnant: seasonal and spatial patterns

Luana Burg Mayer, Breno Mellado, Carlos Ramon Ruiz-Miranda, Marcelo R. Nogueira e Leandro R. Monteiro

Mammal populations are declining due to habitat fragmentation and loss. The loss of these animals in tropical forests promotes extensive changes in forest dynamics, threatening the maintenance of these ecosystems and the ecosystem services they provide. However, protected areas can maintain these populations at viable numbers and reduce their risk of extinction. The present work represents, to date, the longest mammal survey performed in a protected area in Rio de Janeiro. Here, we assess the diversity profiles, community composition, and seasonal variation of medium and large-sized mammals, as well as spatial differences related to habitat use of different vegetation profiles within the União Biological Reserve (RBU) in Rio de Janeiro. With an effort of 5,023 camera trap days, we registered 1,889 independent records of 20 species, with an additional 13 species recorded through direct observation. There was no difference in the seasonal diversity profiles of mammal communities. The diversity in submontane areas was consistently larger than in lowland ones, but the number of records was higher in lowland areas. The diversity profiles decrease when more weight is given to the common species. The reserve is the protected area with the third highest mammal richness in the state of Rio de Janeiro and harbors 11 threatened mammals. Although habitat loss and fragmentation cause lasting impacts on biodiversity habitat patches could still support high diversity. Protected areas such as RBU, that are close to larger areas of forest that are still relatively well preserved could serve as stepping stones and are paramount to maintaining diversity in already deforested and defaunated biomes such as the Brazilian Atlantic Forest. This study shows the importance of small protected areas for the conservation of mammalian diversity in a fragmented anthropogenic landscape.

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