

Primates of the Grensgebergte and Kasikasima Region of Southeastern Suriname

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Chapter 13

Primates of the Grensgebergte and Kasikasima region of Southeastern Suriname

Arioene Vreedzaam

SUMMARY

Six of the eight primate species known from Suriname were recorded during the RAP survey. These included the black spider monkey (*Ateles paniscus*), red howling monkey (*Alouatta macconnelli*), bearded saki (*Chiropotes sagulatus*), brown capuchin (*Cebus paella*), squirrel monkey (*Saimiri sciureus*), and golden handed tamarin (*Saguinus midas*). The large bodied species (black spider monkey, red howling monkey) were present in relative abundance indicating sustainable hunting practices by local communities. Lack of records of the white faced saki and wedge capped capuchin do not necessarily mean that they are not present. These species are quite difficult to spot due to rarity and elusiveness. From a conservation perspective both sites can be considered to have healthy populations of monkey species.

INTRODUCTION

The greatest floristic diversity is found in tropical regions, particularly in the forests of Western Amazonia and Borneo (Wright 2002). Within these areas plants and animals engage in varying degrees of interaction which impact seed dispersal, seedling recruitment, and ultimately the maintenance of rainforest tree diversity. In terms of fruiting tree diversity, birds, bats, rodents, and primates play a key role in maintaining this diversity.

In the forests of Suriname, frugivorous primates are regarded as primary seed dispersers for many fruit bearing tree species: black spider monkeys, red howling monkeys, and capuchins disperse a wide array of seeds from various species. Seed predators (white-faced saki, bearded saki) on the other hand, consume a wide variety of seeds from different plants which reduces the predator load on any one plant (Norconk et al. 1998). Additionally, there is evidence that seed predators enhance seed germination by removing pericarp or seed coating (Norconk et al. 1998).

Assessment of the primate diversity in the Grensgebergte and Kasikasima regions is essential, especially considering the fact that large bodied primate species (black spider monkey, red howling monkey, brown capuchin, bearded saki) form an important part of the diet of the local communities, the Trio and Wayana people. The presence of these primate species is not only an indicator of forest health, but also indicates sustainable extraction practices by local communities.

METHODS

At both sites, the Juuru Camp and Kasikasima, transects were utilized to conduct primate surveys. When the weather permitted, surveys were conducted in the morning and afternoon whereby audio and/or visual cues were used to record the presence of primate species. The following data were collected during each survey: species, audio and/or visual detection of species, observer to animal distance, animal to trail distance, time of recording, and GPS point. Additional behavioral data were also collected regarding animal reaction to the observer.

At the Juuru Camp I used three transects to conduct surveys: from base camp to the Northeast up and over the nearest hill, from the top of the hill down the slope to the North, and the Brazil trail which heads to the South. The total distance of all trails is 5.14 kilometers. Aside from the Brazil trail, all trails ran over very uneven hilly terrain and through varying forest types. Along parts of these trails elevation change was quite drastic, going from 277 m to 538 meters.

At the Kasikasima site three trails were also utilized for surveys: from base camp to the METS tourist lodge (North), from base camp towards the METS tourist trail (West), and from the METS tourist trail to and up the Kasikasima Mountain (Southwest). The total distance of all trails is 6.9 kilometers.

RESULTS

Table 13.1 presents a list of the primate species recorded during the RAP survey. Six of the eight primate species known from Suriname were recorded during the survey.

Juuru Camp site

Five of the eight Suriname monkey species were recorded: the black spider monkey, red howling monkey, brown capuchin, squirrel monkey, and the golden handed tamarin. In terms of visual encounter frequency, the golden handed tamarin and the squirrel monkey had a higher encounter frequency than the other three monkey species. Black spider monkeys and red howling monkeys were more often heard than seen, while the brown capuchin monkeys were encountered briefly on two occasions.

Kasikasima site

Species recorded at the river camp site were the black spider monkey, red howling monkey, bearded saki, brown capuchin, and the golden handed tamarin. Along the foot of Kasikasima Mountain black spider monkeys, red howling monkeys, and golden handed tamarins were spotted.

The white faced saki and the wedge capped capuchin were not spotted at either site.

Table 13.1. The eight primate species known from Suriname, with records of those documented during the RAP survey.

Common Name	Species	Juuru Camp	Kasikasima site
black spider monkey	<i>Ateles paniscus</i>	x	x
red howling monkey	<i>Alouatta maconnelli</i>	x	x
bearded saki	<i>Chiropotes sagulatus</i>		x
white faced saki	<i>Pithecia pithecia</i>		
brown capuchin	<i>Cebus apella</i>	x	x
wedge capped capuchin	<i>Cebus olivaceus</i>		
squirrel monkey	<i>Saimiri sciureus</i>	x	
golden handed tamarin	<i>Saguinus midas</i>	x	x

CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following statements can be made regarding primate conservation in the Grensgebergte and Kasikasima Mountain areas:

- Preliminary results indicate that the large bodied species (black spider monkey, red howling monkey) are present in relative abundance. They were either spotted or heard on a regular basis at both sites. Since these two species are the most hunted by local communities (pers. comm.), this indicates sustainable hunting practices by these communities.
- The absence of the bearded saki, white faced saki, and wedge capped capuchin at the Grensgebergte site does not necessarily mean that they are not present. These three species are quite difficult to spot due to rarity and elusiveness. The bearded saki however, was spotted once at the Kasikasima site. More data need to be collected regarding these “missing” species.
- Absence of the squirrel monkey (a common monkey species) at the Kasikasima site is a result of the lack of suitable habitat for this species. They prefer liana forest and low riverine forest types, both of which were not present at the Kasikasima site.
- From a conservation perspective both sites can be considered to have healthy populations of monkey species.

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