

Protection for biodiversity

Biota-Pará Project draws up list of species threatened with extinction

Published in April 2003

The biodiversity of the state of Pará is starting to be assessed by Conservation International of Brazil and the Emílio Goeldi Museum of Pará. This diagnosis, baptized as Biota-Pará Project, has the objective of assisting political decisions on conservation and the use of biodiversity in the region. The survey will be concluded in four years and has a total budget of R\$ 1.3 million.

The first product of this research, which should be made public before the end of this year, is a list of endangered species. Ten researchers are now gathering information on the geographical and ecological distribution, behavior and population densities of each one of the candidate species, using as a basis studies, consultations of reference works and syntheses of field studies not yet published. "In a second stage, some 50 researchers will be doing a critical analysis of this list of species that are candidates for extinction during a workshop, to draw up the final list", says José Maria Cardoso da Silva, the director for the Amazon of Conservation International of Brazil. Among the species currently found in Pará and which are on the official list of Brazilian animals threatened with extinction are the golden parakeet, the scarlet ibis, the hyacinth macaw, the black-tailed marmoset, and the white-nosed saki, amongst others. The list of threatened species, the first to be drawn up in the state, is one of the basic instruments provided for in Law 6462 of July 4, 2002, which makes provisions for the State Forest Policy.

The second product of Biota-Pará will be a diagnosis of the biodiversity of the Belém Endemism Center – so denominated for sheltering endemic species that do not occur in any other region of the planet –, located at the far east of the Amazon biome, incorporating all the forests and associated ecosystems to the east of the Tocantins River and the whole of Amazon in the state of Ma-





Project wants to save the scarlet ibis (*left page*) and the golden parakeet (*above*)

ranhão. The region is regarded as the most cleared sector of the whole of Brazilian Amazon, on account of the advance of farming and cattle raising, the high population density, and the action of lumbermen and settlers. "Some 60% of its forests have already been cleared, and the few trees that are left remain under great pressure", observes Ima Célia Vieira, the coordinator of Research and Postgraduate Studies at the Emílio Goeldi Museum. Recent studies have indicated, for example, that of the 531 species of birds recorded in the region, about 166, or 22%, were threatened with extinction.

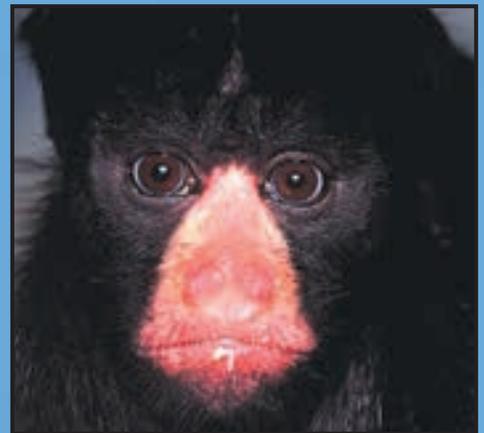
Conservation plan - Pará has over 1.25 million square kilometers of area. About 16% – which is the equivalent of the state of Paraná – are areas of forests and fields that have now been altered by human activity. The annual rate of forest clearing between 1998 and 2000 was 6,700 square kilometers, according to data from the National Institute for Space Research (Inpe). "The situation of the biota of the Belém Endemism Center is similar to the situation of the biota of the Atlantic Rain Forest. Unless something is done urgently, we may have a mass extinction, the first of this kind to hit Amazonia since the entry of man into the region", warns Cardoso da Silva.

When the diagnosis of biodiversity is concluded, the Emílio Goeldi Museum and Conservation International of Brazil intend to draw up – together with other organizations, the state and municipal governments, indigenous leaderships and local communities – a conservation plan for the region. These actions will begin to be defined at a meeting scheduled for August this year, and they should include measures like the implementation of ecological corridors, by means of the creation of private reserves and the restoration of the forests in critical areas that are currently degraded.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY FABIO COLOMBINI

The black-tailed marmoset, a rare species at the Belém Endemism Center



The white-nosed saki and the hyacinth macaw: two victims of forest clearing

