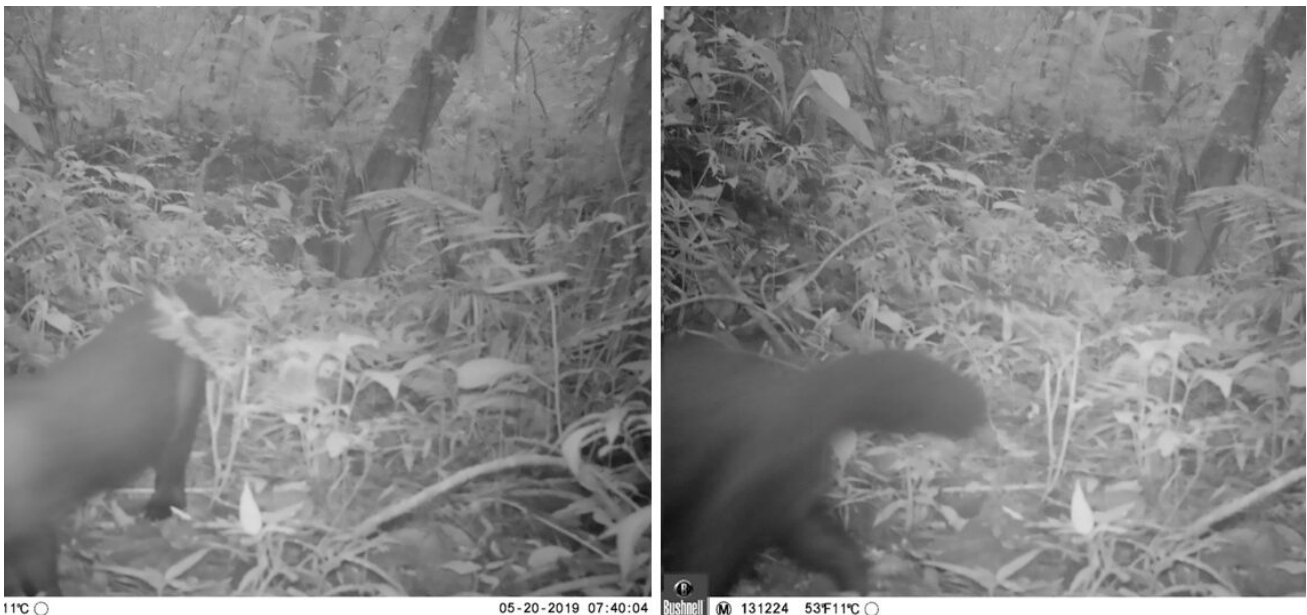


Who are you? Meet the elusive bush dog of the Atlantic Forest

By Alejandra Soto-Werschitz, 12th July 2023

The Brazilian Atlantic Forest is a biodiversity hotspot, home to an astounding variety of plants and animals that are found nowhere else on the planet: there are more than 8,000 endemic vascular plant species in this region, along with c. 140 species of birds, 95 reptile species and over 70 mammal species that only occur in this region. Unfortunately, the Atlantic Forest is also under enormous pressure from large-scale landscape transformation and habitat fragmentation, making the conservation of its fauna and flora a priority.

Our research focused on mammals in fragmented landscapes within the Atlantic Forest of Minas Gerais state in south-eastern Brazil. To gain insights into the mammalian diversity of these forest fragments, we placed camera traps in 22 forest patches for an average of 4 months each. When we examined the photographs the camera traps had captured, two stood out because of the unique characteristics of the animals pictured: they showed mammals with short, distinctly cone-shaped legs, stubby tails and elongated, thick, cylindrical bodies; quite unlike any other mammals that had been documented in this landscape before.



The two camera-trap photographs of the bush dog *Speothos venaticus* obtained on 20 May 2019 in the municipality of Santa Rita do Sapucaí, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil

We had a suspicion as to what these strange animals might be, but the camera-trap images were not very clear. So, to make sure we had not misidentified the mysterious creatures, we consulted a

number of mammal experts. To our delight, they confirmed that our pictures did indeed provide the first-ever record of the bush dog *Speothos venaticus* in the southern region of Minas Gerais. The species is categorized as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List, Vulnerable on the Brazilian National List and Critically Endangered in the Atlantic Forest, so this was an exciting discovery! Although the bush dog is widely distributed, it is rarely encountered in the wild. Because of its elusive nature, estimating its population size or trend is difficult. The fact that our camera traps yielded only two photographs of a bush dog over a total of 2,856 trap-days in various forest fragments emphasizes the species' rarity.

We hope that readers will be excited to learn about this new record of this fascinating social canid. Bush dogs are little known compared to other canines, and to effectively protect them, we need to learn more about their distribution, ecology and behaviour. Further monitoring in our study region is crucial to improve our understanding of this cryptic species and design effective conservation strategies.



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The bush dog *Speothos venaticus* in another region of the Atlantic Forest. Photo provided by Dr. Beatriz de Mello Beisiegel, Environmental analyst, Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation. Project: The jaguars of the Continuum of Paranaipacaba, Interales State Park.

The article '[First record of Bush Dog \(*Speothos venaticus*\) in the Atlantic Forest of Minas Gerais, Brazil](#)' is available open access in *Oryx—The International Journal of Conservation*.



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