



# Saving the World's Most Peaceful Primate: The Northern Muriqui Monkey

Field Study: Behavior, Ecology & Population Demography

**Summary:** Dr. Karen B. Strier, an international authority on the endangered northern muriqui monkey, represented WINGS on a bold journey to Southeast Brazil in Spring 2016 to expand on her 33 years of research focused on saving this critically endangered species. During the three-week expedition, Dr. Strier, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and her team surveyed outlying, regenerating pockets of forest off of the Caratinga forest reserve that she has been observing since 1982. A key goal was to evaluate these fragments as suitable habitats for developing new muriqui populations. It was observed that, in fact, a subset of the remaining 355 monkeys has disappeared, which Strier suspects is indicative of a new colony developing north of the reserve. The team has therefore mapped out a plan to search for these muriquis, which, if found, will represent groundbreaking advances for the conservation and growth of the world's most peaceful primate.



WINGS Flag Carrier Dr. Karen Strier during helicopter tour of forests in Ibitipoca Resere

## THE EXPEDITION

The northern muriqui monkey (*Brachyteles hypoxanthus*) lives in exceptionally peaceful, egalitarian societies, with independent females and tolerant, promiscuous mating habits that have earned them the nickname of “hippie” monkeys. Yet, their future is threatened by hunting and habitat loss, both of which have reduced their numbers.

The first part of this expedition began upon arrival at the Reserva do Ibitipoca in Minas Gerais.



Only two male muriquis remain in this private reserve, the last survivors of a large population that once inhabited the region.

After analyzing the rates of regeneration of the forest, we were able to estimate how much suitable muriqui habitat there will be in a decade. We determined that the forest fragment that the two males inhabit is large enough to support a small group of muriqui over the short term.

From the Ibitipoca Reserve, I traveled back to Rio and flew to Vitoria, where I met with colleagues and started the journey to the Reserva Particular Patrimônio Natural (RPPN) Feliciano Miguel Abdala. This 1,000 hectare privately-owned natural heritage reserve in Caratinga is one of the last remaining strongholds for northern muriquis. I have been studying the muriquis here since 1982.

This forest now supports more than 350 muriquis, representing more than one-third of the entire species. The success of the muriquis in this population is essential to the survival of this species.



## WHO

Dr. Karen B. Strier

## WHAT

To expand the long-term population recovery program for the northern muriqui population

## WHEN

23 May - 14 June 2016

## WHERE

Reserva Particular do Patrimônio Natural - Feliciano Miguel Abdala (RPPN-FMA), Caratinga, Minas Gerais, Brazil, and Reserva do Ibitipoca, Lima Duarte, Minas Gerais, Brazil

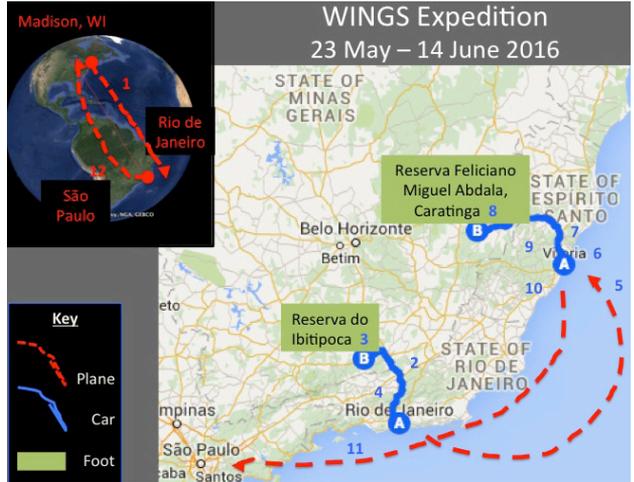
## WHY

Conservation and management of this critically endangered species



L to R: Brittany Berger (coordinator of environmental activities at the reserve), Dr. Karen Strier (WINGS Flag Carrier), Renato Machado (owner and visionary of Ibitipoca Reserve)

Both the muriqui population and the forest here have grown over the years, but a subset of monkeys from one of the newly formed groups has recently gone missing. They might have died, but we suspect they may have left the Reserve to colonize one of the regenerating forest patches to the north. We mapped out a plan to search for these muriquis, which, if found, will open exciting new research opportunities and represent a huge advance for the conservation and future management of this amazing species.



### EXPEDITION GOALS

In the first part of the expedition at the Reserva do Ibitipoca, my goal was to assess the potential of these forests to sustain a larger population of muriquis in the future. In the second part of the expedition, I returned to the RPPN Feliciano Miguel Abdala Reserve, near Caratinga, which has hosted the longest ongoing field study of the northern muriqui, now in its 33rd year. The goals of this expedition consisted of essential planning of upcoming surveys around the forest fragment, while still maintaining the long-term study of the population within the Reserve. It takes a team to accomplish this, and three new Brazilian students joined the team and

learned to become proficient in the project's protocols for demographic monitoring and behavioral sampling.

To the north of this reserve we also planned our strategy to search for a subgroup of muriquis that is suspected of having begun to colonize new habitat. The expedition team and I worked to evaluate the potential of the reserve to support the recovery of its muriqui population.



View of forests beyond the RPPN Feliciano Miguel Abdala, surveying to the north of the Jão area in anticipation of upcoming search for muriquis missing from the study population



## CHALLENGES FACED

The northern muriqui monkey is one of the most critically endangered primates on earth. Fewer than 1,000 individuals are known to survive in only a dozen remaining fragments of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest.

The greatest immediate challenges for the Caratinga muriquis are the need for more forest as their population continues to grow and access to permanent water to sustain them during years of low rainfall. Establishing connectivity between forest fragments that have both food and year-round water for the muriquis is critical to the long-term resilience of this population.

## EXPEDITION RESULTS

The population growth and forest regeneration at the RPPN Feliciano Miguel Abdala provides a model for the positive impact of conservation on population and habitat recovery. By applying what we've learned, we hope to stimulate the recovery of other muriqui populations such as the one at Reserva do Ibitipoca.

Following the muriquis' peaceful example, close collaborations among a large number of dedicated students and colleagues have been key to our successful research and conservation programs. Working with more than 60 Brazilian students and colleagues, we have made significant discoveries about the behavioral ecology, reproductive biology and life histories of muriquis that have changed the way we view other primates, including ourselves.

*“Time in the forest with my students and the muriquis is always magical. It is a thrill to see the oldest monkeys, some of which I have known since my first visit here more than 3 decades ago and which are now in their 40s.”*



## ABOUT THE FLAG CARRIER

Karen B. Strier (Vilas Research Professor and Irven DeVore Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin – Madison) is an international authority on the critically endangered northern muriqui monkey, which she has been studying in the Brazilian Atlantic forest since 1982. Her pioneering field research has led to significant scientific discoveries that advance our comparative understanding of primates and have been essential to the development of informed conservation programs for muriquis. She has received numerous honors from universities and from national and international scientific societies for her accomplishments at the intersection of science and conservation, and for her contributions to the non-invasive research and conservation of the northern muriqui and its habitat.



L to R: Nicole Fontes Losano, Luana Vinhas Muniz Santos, José Gustavo Vieira Adler, Leticia Almeida Moura, Karen Strier, Naíla Fernandes Ferreira, Pedro Paulo Rezende Alves, Nayore Takamiya, Andréia Maria da Silva

### *Team Leader*

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### EXPEDITION TEAM

*2016-17 Brazilian Students of the Long-Term Muriqui Project of Caratinga:*

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Luana Vinhas Muniz Santos

Nicole Fontes Losano

Nayore Takamiya

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