Book Review

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Evolutionary Biology and Conservation of Titis, Sakis and Uacaris

Cambridge Studies in Biological and Evolutionary Anthropology
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013
424 pp.; GBP 90.00 / USD 145.00
ISBN 978-0-521-88158-6

This impressive (and expensive) tome is a who's who of Pitheciid research. Everyone involved with the evolution, morphology, ecology, social dynamics and conservation of these primates is here! There are 101 contributors, some of whose contributions, including those of the first editor, are sadly posthumous. Nevertheless, they acted as inspirational mentors and founders of studies on these species. While 101 countries are not yet represented, there are many authors from a range of countries in a change from historical patterns of publication where US and EU scientists have dominated. The editors certainly deserve praise for having drawn in emerging as well as established scientists.

It would be fair to say that this group was poorly known by comparison to their atelid or cebid Neotropical relatives until now. While much indeed remains to be learned about the ecology and biology of this group, we now have in one volume a reference text of lasting value. I think the most important lesson from this volume can be summed up by the comment of Rosenberger and Tejedor: 'saki-uacaris are the living remnant of a large radiation at the centre of platyrrhine evolution' (p. 20). As such, a greater understanding of these primates can only contribute to our ecological and biological knowledge of the primates of the Neotropics more generally.

The chapters are short, dense and packed with illustrations, tables and data. Part I covers the fossil history (basically scanty), zoogeography and taxonomy, including much detailed resolution of genetics and morphology. Part II is comparative Pitheciid ecology, with chapters on seed predation, use of time and space, positional behaviour, group structures, and competition with other species. Most of these chapters synthesise across the different genera and species. Part III reviews case studies on ecology and behaviour – here is where we now can glean detailed data on the different taxa. Everything from scent-marking and vocal communication to pair social dynamics, food selection, to breeding strategies, is presented for different species in different localities. The final section, Part IV, is on the conservation of the Pitheciids and deals with regional threats in three chapters (the Guyana Shield, Brazil, and the remaining range countries) as well as common problems such as habitat fragmentation, community conservation initiatives and captive management. The book closes with a series of conservation fact sheets for regions and taxa, effectively a red data list with maps. These are incredibly useful for planning conservation strategies or assessing threats.

When Marcio Ayres was writing up his PhD at Cambridge and after his return to Brazil, he inspired primatologists with his own fascination about these then less-studied primates. Thirty years later, these taxa have come into their own and this book represents the dedication and hard work of many scientists over this period. The book may be better as a reference text than for teaching or reading for pleasure. Its price may make it difficult for most students to afford, but that it exists will make the job of the next generation of Pitheciid biologists much easier, if, of course, they manage to survive the Anthropocene.

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