

New localities of *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758), Giant Anteater (Myrmecophagidae), in the southern region of Minas Gerais state, Brazil
Novas localidades de *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758), tamanduá-bandeira (Myrmecophagidae), na região sul do estado de Minas Gerais, Brasil

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Abstract: *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758), species commonly known as the giant anteater, has had its geographic distribution reduced due to several factors (natural and anthropogenic environmental changes, low reproductive rate, resource depletion, conflicts and hunting). The species is currently classified as 'Vulnerable' at local, national and global levels. This study reports two new records of *M. tridactyla* in southern Minas Gerais, Brazil, in the municipalities of Lavras and Santo Antônio do Amparo, with a six-month interval between sightings. These records, obtained through direct observation and camera traps, identify new occurrence locations for the species and reinforce the need for further studies and targeted conservation initiatives.

Keywords: Endangered species. Mammal. Xenarthra. Geographic distribution.

Resumo: *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758), espécie comumente conhecida como tamanduá-bandeira, teve sua distribuição geográfica reduzida devido a diversos fatores (alterações ambientais naturais e antropogênicas, baixa taxa reprodutiva, esgotamento de recursos, conflitos e caça). A espécie está atualmente classificada como 'vulnerável' em níveis local, nacional e global. Este estudo relata dois novos registros de *M. tridactyla* no sul de Minas Gerais, Brasil, nos municípios de Lavras e Santo Antônio do Amparo, com um intervalo de seis meses entre os avistamentos. Esses registros, obtidos por meio de observação direta e armadilhas fotográficas, identificam novas ocorrências da espécie e reforçam a necessidade de mais estudos e iniciativas de conservação direcionadas.

Palavras-chave: Espécie ameaçada de extinção. Mamífero. Xenarthra. Distribuição geográfica.

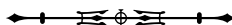
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INTRODUCTION

The Giant Anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*, Linnaeus, 1758) is a species that, along with the genus *Tamandua* (Linnaeus, 1758), forms the family Myrmecophagidae, primarily characterized by the absence of teeth. The species originally had a distinct geographic distribution from its current one, ranging from southern Belize and Guatemala to northern Argentina (Wetzel, 1982, 1985). It was also found across all six biomes in Brazil: Amazon, *Cerrado*, *Caatinga*, *Pantanal*, *Pampas* (IBGE, 2019).

Due to the ongoing reduction of its natural habitat, *M. tridactyla* is now listed as an endangered species in the 'Vulnerable' category at regional (Minas Gerais state, Brazil; COPAM, 2010), national (Brazil; MMA, 2022), and global scales (Miranda et al., 2025). Surveys conducted by ICMBio indicate probable extinction of the species in the *Pampas*, near extinction in the Atlantic Forest, and a drastic population decline in the *Cerrado*, being the region with the lowest genetic diversity (Miranda et al., 2022 and references therein). Although studies on mammal fauna are regularly conducted in Minas Gerais (Eduardo & Passamani, 2009; Silva & Passamani, 2009; Machado et al., 2015, 2016, 2017), there were no sightings in the southern part of Minas Gerais until 2016, with the first record being in the Serra da Boa Esperança State Park (PESBE) (Moura et al., 2017).

Recent surveys have recorded the species in two new locations: Lavras and Santo Antônio do Amparo, both municipalities located in southern Minas Gerais. No other records of *M. tridactyla* had been documented in southern Minas Gerais since 2016 until now. This manuscript aims to present these two new locations of the species in southern Minas Gerais, aiming to contribute to future studies related to the conservation biology and protection of the species.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The records were made in the municipalities of Santo Antônio do Amparo (20° 56' 45" S, 44° 55' 08" W) and Lavras (21° 14' 45" S, 44° 59' 59" W) in the southern part of the state of Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil (Figure 1).

These municipalities are located in an ecotonal region between the Atlantic Forest and *Cerrado* biomes, with the landscape composed of semi-deciduous seasonal forest fragments, riparian forests, cloud forests, *Cerrado sensu stricto*, high-altitude grasslands, and rocky fields (Dalanesi et al., 2004; Scolforo & Carvalho, 2006). The climate classification of the southern region of the state of Minas Gerais is predominantly a humid subtropical climate influenced by monsoons (Cwa), characterized by dry, cold winters and hot, humid summers. In higher-altitude areas, the climate shifts to a highland subtropical climate (Cwb), with dry winters and mild summers, according to the Köppen climate classification (Alvares et al., 2013). The records were obtained during fauna studies using camera traps and direct observation.

RESULTS

On November 18, 2023, an individual of the species was captured on a camera trap at one of the study sites on Fazenda da Lagoa, a property of the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA), in Santo Antônio do Amparo, Minas Gerais. Additionally, as part of the same study, a visual record of a specimen of *M. tridactyla* was made on June 15, 2024, at the Lavras Parque I Condominium in the municipality of Lavras, Minas Gerais (Figure 1). The sighting was reported by the condominium's security guard during a daytime patrol around 9:30 am, and the species was confirmed by one of the authors. The sex of the individual was not identified.

DISCUSSION

The southern region of Minas Gerais is well studied in terms of mammalogy (Eduardo & Passamani, 2009; Silva & Passamani, 2009; Machado et al., 2015, 2016, 2017). However, to date, there has been only one recorded sighting of *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* in the area (Moura et al., 2017). Recent records obtained through camera traps (Figure 2) and visual sightings indicate two new localities in southern Minas Gerais.

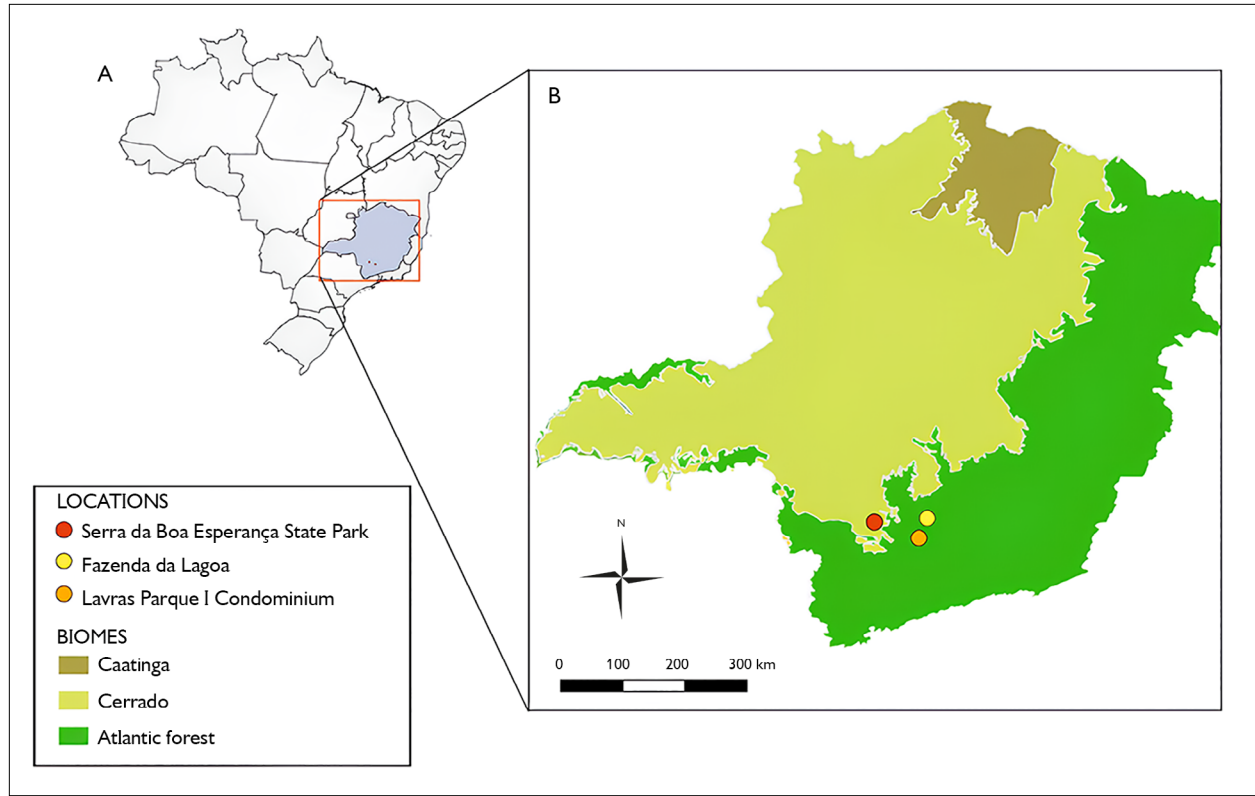


Figure 1. Map showing the locations of *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* records in the southern region of Minas Gerais. Map: Dunia Lasmar (2025).



Figure 2. *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* captured through a camera trap at Fazenda da Lagoa (UFLA), Santo Antônio do Amparo, Minas Gerais. Photo: Aloysio Souza de Moura (2025).

These two new records occurred in a period of only six months and, as the crow flies, are less than 100 km from the Serra da Boa Esperança State Park, where the first sighting of *M. tridactyla* was reported in southern Minas Gerais (Moura et al., 2017). Both locations are separated by 39 km. The proximity of the locations and the similarity of the landscape (*Cerrado*/Atlantic Forest ecotone) may have been factors that favored the appearance of the individual and the records. As discussed by Miranda et al. (2022), the species appears to have historically expanded its demographic distribution in the *Cerrado* and *Pantanal*, proving to be more adapted to the conditions of these biomes.

Previous studies indicate that the species is threatened mainly by habitat loss due to the road network, agriculture, and fires, among other factors (Miranda et al., 2015). *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* is currently regionally extinct in several parts of southeastern Brazil, such as Espírito Santo (Passamani & Mendes, 2007) and possibly Rio de Janeiro (Bergallo et al., 2000), making it dependent on protected areas for its survival, particularly in anthropogenic landscapes (Versiani et al., 2021).

The spatial proximity of the observed records suggests a potential population expansion of the species in the region, which may be directly related to the environmental conditions found in this ecotonal habitat, which resembles locations with high population densities of *M. tridactyla*, such as Serra da Canastra National Park (Shaw et al., 1985). Recent studies indicate an adaptation of the species to fragmented and modified landscapes (Santos et al., 2019; Miranda et al., 2022), demonstrating its resilience and possible exploration of new areas.

In this context, identifying and reporting new localities where *M. tridactyla* is present becomes even more relevant. These records provide crucial information that can be used to guide and support formulating public policies and conservation strategies. With a more detailed understanding of the species' distribution patterns, it is possible to make more assertive and effective decisions to protect habitats, especially in regions where the species

shows signs of expansion. Thus, conservation of these environments can be better achieved, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the species population in the area.

This study presented two new localities for *Myrmecophaga tridactyla*, in the south of Minas Gerais state, southeastern Brazil. Given the current conservation status of the species, new records in regions not previously observed are extremely important for understanding its distribution and adaptation to environmental disturbances. Thus, these data can assist in future studies.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

D. Lasmar contributed to project management, investigation and writing (original draft, revision and editing); A. S. Moura contributed to project management, funding acquisition, methodology and writing (original draft); F. S. Machado contributed to investigation, methodology and writing (original draft); A. C. S. Zanzini contributed to funding acquisition and writing (original draft); L. A. Melo contributed to funding acquisition, investigation and writing (original draft); and M. A. L. Fontes contributed to funding acquisition, supervision and investigation.

