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NOTE

DISTRIBUTION AND CONSERVATION STATUS OF THE GIANT ANTEATER (*MYRMECOPHAGA TRIDACTYLA*) IN HONDURAS

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ABSTRACT—Reports of the giant anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) in Central America, and specifically in Honduras, are sporadic and typically of just one individual. During a 3.5-year (2001–2005) Honduran Program of Biological Monitoring, four new reports of the giant anteater were made in protected areas located in the Honduran Mosquitia in the departments of Gracias a Dios and Olancho with the most sightings made in the proposed protected area of Rus Rus. Three additional reports independent of the Honduran Program of Biological Monitoring are documented herein as well; these reports also are from the protected area of Rus Rus. We conclude that the giant anteater probably has been extirpated from the Caribbean region of Honduras, but remains present in the Honduran Mosquitia in the departments of Gracias a Dios and Olancho.

RESUMEN—Reportes del oso hormiguero gigante (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) en América Central y específicamente en Honduras son esporádicos y típicamente de un solo individuo. Durante el Programa Hondureño de Monitoreo Biológico de 3.5 años (2001–2005), cuatro nuevos reportes del oso hormiguero gigante fueron documentados en áreas protegidas de la Mosquitia hondureña en los departamentos de Gracias a Dios y Olancho con la mayoría de los avistamientos hechos en un área propuesta para protección, Rus Rus. También están documentados en esta nota tres reportes adicionales independientes del Programa Hondureño de Monitoreo Biológico; estos reportes son también del área protegida de Rus Rus. Concluimos que el oso hormiguero gigante probablemente ha sido extirpado de la región del Caribe de Honduras, pero todavía se encuentra presente en la Mosquitia hondureña en los departamentos de Gracias a Dios y Olancho.

The giant anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) has a distribution that extends from southern Belize through Central and South America with the southernmost distribution in Bolivia, northern Argentina, and Uruguay (Hall, 1981; Emmons and Feer, 1997; Reid, 1997; McCain, 2001). Although the distribution of this species is broad, reports of sightings are sporadic and usually of one individual (e.g., Costa Rica, Timm et al., 1989; Panama, Reid, 1997; Honduras, this study. Some authors suggest that the species has been extirpated from Mesoamerica (e.g., Timm and La Val, 2000). However, large areas of Central America, such as the Honduran and Nicaraguan Mosquitia, have been poorly surveyed.

Reports of the giant anteater were collected as a part of a larger study, the Honduran Program of Biological Monitoring, which took place in Honduras during December 2001–June 2005, and in which specific protected areas of Honduras were monitored for terrestrial mammals. Sightings of giant anteaters from this study were supplemented with records from published literature. With this information we infer the distribution and conservation status of the giant anteater in Honduras.

Monitoring took place in 24 protected areas in the departments of Atlántida, Colón, Gracias a Dios, Olancho, Santa Bárbara, Yoro, Comayagua, Francisco Morazán, and El Paraíso. Transects

TABLE 1—Occurrence of the giant anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) in Honduras, including the department, locality where the report originated, its latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates, and the source of the report.

Department	Locality	Latitude and longitude	Source
Gracias a Dios	Las Marías	15°41′49″N, 84°49′53″W	McCain, 2001
Atlántida	San Alejo	15°43′56″N, 87°34′55″W	Marineros and Martínez, 1998
Colón	Santa Rosa de Aguán	15°56′47″N, 85°40′53″W	Marineros and Martínez, 1998
Colón	Isletas	15°36′17″N, 86°12′29″W	Marineros and Martínez, 1998
Olancho	Susmay	14°56′56″N, 86°05′14″W	Marineros and Martínez, 1998
Gracias a Dios	Las Marías	15°41′49″N, 84°49′53″W	Marineros and Martínez, 1998
Gracias a Dios	Mocabila (Tusi-cocal)	15°50′39″N, 84°33′00″W	Marineros and Martínez, 1998
Gracias a Dios	Krautara	15°01′17″N, 84°54′03″W	Marineros and Martínez, 1998
Gracias a Dios	Krausirpe	15°02′38″N, 84°52′17″W	Marineros and Martínez, 1998
Olancho	Patuca National Park	14°34′51″N, 85°06′54″W	Herein
Gracias a Dios	Rus Rus	14°57′08″N, 84°30′26″W	Herein
Gracias a Dios	Rus Rus	14°57′09″N, 84°30′46″W	Herein
Gracias a Dios	Tapalwas	14°53′56″N, 84°31′43″W	Herein
Gracias a Dios	Tapalwas	14°54′02″N, 84°31′38″W	T. Manzanarez and J. Hernandez, pers. comm
Gracias a Dios	Auka	14°57′16″N, 84°24′49″W	T. Manzanarez, pers. comm
Gracias a Dios	Tapalwas	14°53′19″N, 84°31′42″W	T. Manzanarez, pers. comm

were established in each protected area according to size of the area and number of available parataxonomists (local field specialists trained by professional biologists in collecting data; Janzen et al., 1993; Basset et al., 2000). Lengths of transects were 3–18 km. Each transect was surveyed once a month (occasionally twice) during the study. The following data were obtained: species, distance of sighting from transect, number of individuals seen, geographic location, name of nearest village, type of sighting (direct, tracks, fur, bones, etc.). Marineros and Martínez (1998) was used to identify taxa to species. Local parataxonomists were trained in identification, collection of data, and identification of evidence.

Four giant anteaters were reported during the Honduran Program of Biological Monitoring (Table 1). Although the Honduran Program of Biological Monitoring had wide coverage, reports of the giant anteater came only from the Honduran Mosquitia with two reports in the area of Rus Rus, one from Patuca National Park, and one from Tapalwas. McCain (2001) reported the first sighting of the giant anteater in Honduras at Las Marías at the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve in 1996. Marineros and Martínez (1998) reported several sightings in the departments of Atlántida, Colón, Olancho, and Gracias a Dios. An additional three reports come from La Mosquitia: a sighting in 2004 from Auka, a sighting in 2007 from Tapalwas (T. Manzanarez, pers. comm.), and T. Manzanarez and J. Hernandez (pers. comm.) reported seeing tracks in Tapalwas in 2008.

After thoroughly surveying much of Honduras including the western mountains, the central region, the Honduras-Guatemala border, the Pacific Slope, and some areas along the Nicaraguan border, Goodwin (1942) stated that it was possible that the giant anteater occurred in Honduras, although he reported no encounters during his study. Marineros and Martínez (1998) reported the distributional range to include the Honduran Mosquitia and parts of the Honduran Caribbean coast. Nevertheless, based on the results of the Honduran Program of Biological Monitoring, we conclude that the giant anteater may have been eradicated from the Honduran Caribbean and the species in Honduras is now only in La Mosquitia in the departments of Olancho and Gracias a Dios.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (2004), the status of conservation of the species is considered vulnerable. In Honduras, the species is considered endangered (Administración Forestal del Estado, Corporación Hondureña de Desarrollo Forestal, in litt.); its main threats being loss of habitat and hunting. Although they are not hunted for meat or fur, giant anteaters are killed because of the danger

they represent to hunting dogs (Koster, 2008), and some younger hunters are fearful of the species (T. Manzanares, pers. comm.). In spite of the fact that the giant anteater is considered endangered in Honduras, and that it may already be extirpated from other Central American countries, no management efforts have been made for the conservation of the species in Honduras. This investigation contributes new information on the distribution of the species throughout the country, but the ecology, demography, and population biology of the giant anteater remain to be investigated. This report also demonstrates the significance of the Honduran Mosquitia as an area for conservation.

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