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REACTION OF WILD EMPEROR TAMARINS TO THE PRESENCE OF A SNAKE

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Predation on callitrichines is rarely observed in the wild. Reports of predation by snakes include, for example, those by Heymann (1987) and Correa and Coutinho (1997). Other predators include raptors, tayras, and ocelots (see Caine, 1993; Ferrari and Lopes Ferrari, 1990). Since predation on these primates is not commonly witnessed by researchers in the wild, anecdotal accounts may be useful to evaluate its role in callitrichine social evolution (see Caine, 1993) as well as its impact on population density. In this paper we report on the reaction of a black-chinned emperor tamarin (*Saguinus imperator imperator*) group on the proximity of a snake.

The incident (observed by the first author, C.A.N.) occurred on 24 September, 1997, during a study on the cognitive aspects of foraging decisions in *S. i. imperator*, *S. fuscicollis weddelli*, and *Callicebus cupreus cupreus* at the Zoobotanical Park of the Federal University of Acre (UFAC), Brazil (9°56'30"-9°57'19"S, 67°52'08"-67°53'00"; 100 ha), Rio Branco, state of Acre, Brazil. At 1209 h, an emperor tamarin group composed of four individuals (one adult male - AMA, one adult female - PNK, and two immature males - BRA and LAR) arrived at feeding station A. Each feeding station (totalling four) was composed of eight visually identical feeding platforms (FP) distributed in a circular arrangement. At 1214 h, following BRA and PNK, respectively, AMA and LAR were feeding on bananas at FP1 and FP7 when a snake (probably a *Bothrops* sp. measuring approximately 1.2 m) climbed up FP2 and remained curled on the top. FP2 was approximately 4.6 m distant from FP1, and 10.7 m distant from FP7 (Fig. 1). At 1216 h, AMA saw the snake from FP1 and left the platform, emitted an alarm call from an adjoining tree, and abandoned the feeding station, followed by all other group members. LAR could not see the snake from FP7 because there were two trees between it and FP 2 (Fig. 1). About one minute after the tamarins had left the feeding station, the snake went to the ground and disappeared into the vegetation.

This single observation of an interaction between a potential predator and the tamarins was made during approximately 4,000 hours of daily monitoring of the feeding stations from September 1997 through January 1998.



Figure 1. Partial view of the feeding station showing the first author close to the platform 1 (A). Feeding platforms 2 (B) and 7 (C) are also shown.

During this time two stable social groups and several solitary emperor tamarins visited the feeding stations 986 times, involving more than 145 hours of observations. Whether this case represents a predation attempt or not, is impossible to affirm. However, the reaction of the tamarins would indicate it was.

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