

WISSENSCHAFTLICHE KURZMITTEILUNGEN

Observations of *Speothos venaticus* (Canidae: Carnivora) in its natural habitat in Peruvian Amazonia

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The bush dog, *Speothos venaticus* (Lund, 1842) and the short-eared dog, *Atelocynus microtis* (Sclater, 1883), are the only representatives of the Family Canidae to inhabit tropical rainforest.

S. venaticus has a widespread distribution in neotropical forest (LINARES 1968; EISENBERG 1989; EMMONS 1990; WOZENCRAFT 1993). Little is known about bush dog ecology and population dynamics since this species has seldom been observed in its natural habitat.

S. venaticus inhabits a wide range of forest types (EISENBERG 1989), but is never found far from a water course or forest cover (PERES 1991). Bush dogs usually live in small groups of four to seven individuals (EMMONS 1990). These animals are thought to be strictly carnivorous (DEUTSCH 1983; PERES 1991).

Here, we report the sightings of *S. venaticus* made in the Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Communal Reserve and in the National Reserve of Pacaya-Samiria.

From July 1993 to September 1994, we sighted three groups of *Speothos venaticus*; two in the Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Communal Reserve and one in the National Reserve of Pacaya-Samiria. In the first sighting, in July 1993, we observed two adults and an infant crossing a creek on a fallen tree trunk. We lost sight of the bush dogs once they had entered dense vegetation upon crossing the creek. The second sighting occurred in October 1993, at which time, a group composed of four individuals was observed for 15 minutes. Two adults explored a roughly circular area with a diameter of approximately 60 m. Their rapid and quiet movements were accompanied by a constant sniffing of the forest floor and of the undersides of fallen trunks. This activity was interrupted by abrupt pauses during which the ears were pricked each time a noise was heard. Normal activity was also interrupted on two occasions when the whining of an infant bush dog was heard. The whining was emitted from beneath a pile of branches in the center of the area of adult activity. When the whines of the infant ceased, the adults continued to explore the area. When the whine of the infant was heard again, the adults went to the pile of branches and reappeared a few seconds later, followed by juvenile and an infant. It is inferred that the infant had been left in the care of the juvenile while the parents foraged in the surrounding area. An adult, possibly the male, then led the group away. The infant, the last in the line, whined continuously while following the other animals. The third sighting, on August 1994, occurred in the National Reserve of Pacaya-Samiria. Two adults and a juvenile were observed traveling in a line through "restinga". Having detected a human presence, the bush dogs froze and stared at the observers. They remained stationary for 35 seconds, until one adult set a urine scent mark. The group then moved away at moderate speed.

In addition to the three direct observations described, we found the carcass of an adult *S. venaticus*. The cause of death was indeterminable due to the advanced state of decomposition. It is possible that it had been killed by either *Felis concolor* or *Panthera onca*, since the tracks of a felid were abundant in the vicinity of the carcass.

We also found a den used by *S. venaticus*. The den was a large cavity in a fallen trunk. The walls of the cavity had been worn smooth, suggesting long term or frequent use as a den site. Both fresh and dried feces were found on one side of the trunk and in the surrounding area. The feces were examined in situ, and were found to contain mammalian hairs and avian feathers. The hairs of *Nasua nasua* and *Dasyprocta fuliginosa* were identified. Shorter hairs found may have belonged to *Myoprocta pratti* and *Proechimys* sp. The feathers were similar in colour to those of tinamous, terrestrial birds that are abundant in the area.

Following ENCARNACIÓN'S (1993) classification of forest types, the habitat of *S. venaticus* in the Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Communal Reserve corresponds to "bosque de colina" and "bosque de terraza". However, the distribution of *S. venaticus* within these habitat types does not appear to be uniform, otherwise we should have encountered other groups of bush dogs during the intense exploration carried out in an area of more than 300 km². It is thus believed that the distribution of *S. venaticus* depends upon as yet undetermined factors acting at a local level.

Within "bajial" forest the bush dogs were encountered in forest of subtype termed "restinga" (ENCARNACIÓN 1993). "Restinga" forest is seasonally flooded during the winter months. During this period, *S. venaticus* is thought either to retreat from the advancing waters or to remain isolated islands of higher ground in a manner similar to other sympatric terrestrial mammals (BODMER 1990).

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