

## Variegated or Brown Spider Monkey

*Ateles hybridus* I. Geoffroy, 1829

Colombia, Venezuela

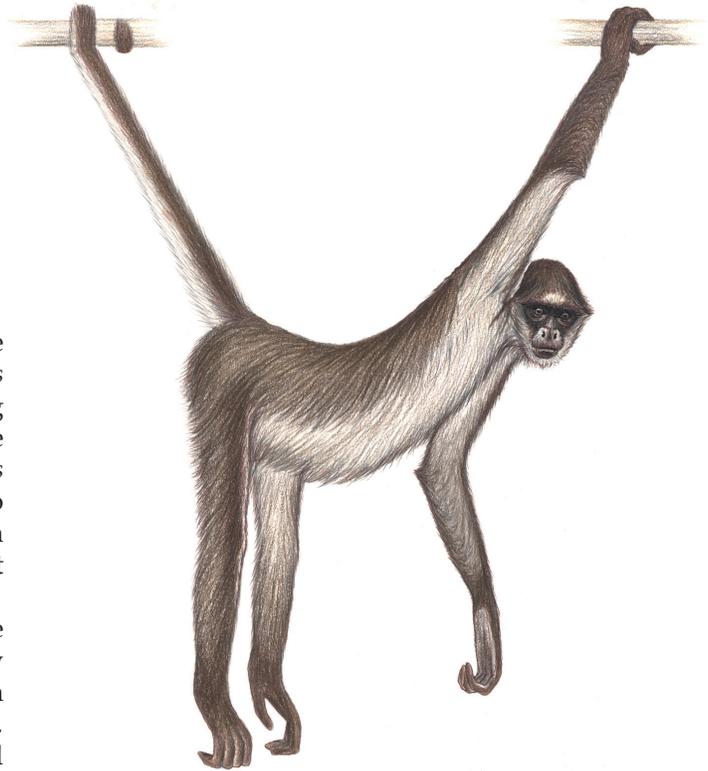
(2004, 2006, 2008)

Erwin Palacios, Alba Lucia Morales-Jiménez  
& Bernardo Urbani

There are two recognized subspecies of the variegated or brown spider monkey. *Ateles hybridus brunneus* Gray, 1870 is restricted to Colombia, occurring between the lower Ríos Cauca and Magdalena in the Departments of Bolívar, Antioquia and Caldas. *Ateles h. hybridus* occurs east from the right bank of the Río Magdalena extending into western Venezuela. Both subspecies are Critically Endangered due to habitat loss, hunting and the pet trade.

The large size, slow reproductive rate (single offspring at 3-4 year intervals) and generally low population densities of spider monkeys make them especially vulnerable to hunting. Historically, *A. hybridus* has suffered from habitat destruction, and only 0.67% of the current remaining range of *A. hybridus* is protected; most has been converted to farms for agriculture and cattle.

*Ateles h. brunneus* has a small geographic range in a region where forest loss, degradation and fragmentation is widespread. Currently, the remaining populations are surrounded by human populations, compounding the already high level of threat. Only 9% of their potential range remains as continuous forest. This subspecies has been identified in different areas of the Antioquia department, such as: Segovia, Remedios, Maceo, Yondó, Puerto Berrio, and Zaragoza. However, the habitat destruction and hunting pressure over this species has provoked possible local extinctions. Between 2007 and 2008, surveys in this Department yielded some possible areas where this species no longer exists (for example, Vereda El Brazil, Corregimiento La Sierra). Surveys have been conducted to determine the density of this subspecies in the municipality of Maceo. In 2006 one group of eight individuals were found in this area, and by 2008 just four individuals were spotted in the same area, after five months of surveys. A refuge remains, however, in the Serranía San Lucas in southern Bolívar, and in some parts of Nechí, identified as important areas for the establishment of national parks. A protected area is highly necessary for this subspecies that also would include two other threatened endemic primates, the white-footed tamarin, *Saguinus leucopus*, and the woolly monkey, *Lagothrix lugens*.



*Ateles h. hybridus* is extremely endangered due to habitat destruction in both Colombia and Venezuela. The lowland forest of the state of Zulia and the piedmont of the Perijá Mountains are heavily destroyed from expansionist cattle-ranching activities. Within the Perijá Mountains only 30% of the forest is relatively well preserved and protected. The rest is affected by rapid human expansion and land clearing, poor protection and increasing fragmentation, putting potential corridors at risk in most of its extent. Also in the Perijá Mountains, brown spider monkeys seem to be favorite game. In central Venezuela, some areas that had populations in 2001 were resurveyed in 2007 without successful sightings; most of the areas were already covered by secondary vegetation. The lowland forests from the eastern part of the Andean Mountains, San Camilo and Ticoporo, are under severe logging pressure.

*Ateles hybridus* can be found in at least six zoos in Colombia, presenting problems of surplus animals and consanguinity. This species is suffering also from the pet trade; about 20 confiscated individuals are currently in residence in four rescue centers and need to be relocated. There is an urgent need for surveys to establish areas with populations of this species and to propose conservation measures. An *ex situ* breeding program is also necessary to maintain healthy and viable captive populations.

## References

- Collins, A. C. 1999. Species status of the Colombian spider monkey *Ateles belzebuth hybridus*. *Neotropical Primates* 7: 39–41.
- Congdon, E. R. 1996. A preliminary study of distribution, habitat use, and activity patterns of primates within Caparo Forestry Reserve, Venezuela. Report, Cleveland Metro Park Zoo/University of the Andes-Mérida/PROFAUNA/MARNR. Caracas, Venezuela.
- Cordero-Rodríguez, G. A. and H. J. Biorde F. 2001. Distribution and conservation of the spider monkey (*Ateles hybridus*) in the coastal range of northern Venezuela. *Neotropical Primates* 9: 8–11.
- Defler, T. R. 2003. *Primates de Colombia*. Conservación Internacional, Serie de Guías Tropicales de Campo, Conservación Internacional Colombia, Bogotá.
- Defler, T. R., A. L. Morales-Jiménez and J. V. Rodríguez-Mahecha. 2006. Brown spider monkey *Ateles hybridus brunneus* Gray, 1872. In: *Primates in peril: the world's 25 most endangered primates 2004–2006*, R. A. Mittermeier, C. B. Valladares-Padua, A. B. Rylands, A. A. Eudey, T. M. Butynski, J. U. Ganzhorn, R. Kormos and S. Walker (eds.), pp.10, 25. *Primate Conservation* (20): 1–28.
- Duque, D. 2007. Abundancia y distribución del mono araña *Ateles hybridus* en una región del sur-este del Parque Nacional el Ávila. Report to Provita/Programa IEA, Caracas, Venezuela.
- Hernández-Camacho, J. I. and R. W. Cooper. 1976. The nonhuman primates of Colombia. In: *Neotropical Primates Field Studies and Conservation*, R. W. Thorington Jr. and P. G. Heltne, (eds.), pp. 35–69. National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC.
- Linares, O. 1998. *Mamíferos de Venezuela*. BP Venezuela/Sociedad Conservacionista Audubon de Venezuela, Caracas, Venezuela.
- Lizarralde, M. 2002. Ethnoecology of monkeys among the Barí of Venezuela: perception, use and conservation. In: *Primates Face to Face: Conservation Implications of Human and Nonhuman Primate Interconnections*, A Fuentes and L. D. Wolfe (eds.), pp.85–100. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Mondolfi, E. and J. F. Eisenberg. 1979. New records of *Ateles belzebuth hybridus* in northern Venezuela. In: *Vertebrate Ecology in the Northern Neotropics*, J. F. Eisenberg (ed.), pp.93–96. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC.
- Morales-Jiménez, A. L., K. A. I. Nekaris, J. Lee and S. Thompson. 2004. Modelling distributions for Colombian spider monkeys (*Ateles* spp.) to find priority areas for conservation. *Primate Eye*, 22-23. Abstract.
- Palacios, E. and A. L. Morales-Jiménez. 2007. Variegated or brown spider monkey *Ateles hybridus* I. Geoffroy, 1829. In: *Primates in peril: the world's 25 most endangered primates, 2006–2008*, R. A. Mittermeier *et al.* (eds.), pp.19-20, 31. *Primate Conservation* (22): 1–40.
- Portillo-Quintero, C. and Y. Velásquez. 2006. Disponibilidad y estado del hábitat de tres especies de primates amenazadas de extinción en la Sierra de Perijá: Generación de información biogeográfica base para el diseño de proyectos de investigación para la conservación (*Ateles hybridus*, *Cebus albifrons* y *Aotus trivirgatus*). Report to Provita/Programa IEA. Caracas, Venezuela.
- Rodríguez, J. P. and F. Rojas-Suárez. 1995. *Libro Rojo de la Fauna Venezolana*. Provita/Fundación Polar/Wildlife Conservation Society/Profauna (MARNR)/UICN. Caracas, Venezuela.
- Sanchez-Londoño, J. D. 2007. Presencia actual de las especies de primates de la jurisdicción de Corantioquia y sus amenazas potenciales (I fase) Medellín, Corantioquia.
- Scott, N. J., T. T. Struhsaker, K. Glander and H. Chirivi. 1976. Primates and their habitats in northern Colombia with recommendations for future management and research. In: *First Inter-American Conference on Conservation and Utilization of American Nonhuman Primates in Biomedical Research, Scientific Publication* (317), pp.30–50. Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Washington, DC.
- Venezuela, MARNR. 2001. *Estrategia Nacional sobre Diversidad Biológica y su Plan de Acción*. Oficina Nacional de Diversidad Biológica, Ministerio del Ambiente y de los Recursos Naturales Renovables (MARNR), Caracas, Venezuela.