

Setting the stage for future research and conservation activities on GHLTs

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On December 7 and 8, 2011, the State University of Santa Cruz (UESC) was the scene for an encounter of golden-headed lion tamarin (GHLT) researchers and conservationists, on the occasion of the symposium, entitled 'Golden-Headed Lion Tamarin Research in 21st Century: Recent Advances and Potential Areas of Future Research'. Our aim was to bring together researchers, conservation practitioners and students and allow them to present their recent work, enabling the dissemination of information to the global GHLT community, summarizing recent advances in research, highlighting gaps in our knowledge of GHLT biology, ecology and conservation, and fostering discussions that focused on filling these knowledge gaps, promoting collaboration. Since the discovery of the species in 1820, several important and distinct actions have occurred, resulting in an ever growing scientific data base on a variety of aspects of the biology and ecology of the species. Several conservation measures, including the creation of conservation units and social programs have also been implemented, contributing towards improving the species' conservation status. Through this symposium, we hoped to promote the exchange of existing information, and contribute towards a better synchronization of individual and institutional research efforts, as a first step towards more efficient conservation efforts for GHLTs and their habitat.

30 participants from 12 institutions in Brazil, Belgium and the USA participated. Just the fact that, for the first time, we succeeded in joining the majority of GHLT researchers in one room thinking together on GHLTs can be considered a success in itself.

The two-day symposium was structured to allow for a day of research presentations and a day of discussions. During 16 presentations spread over day one and the morning of day 2, participants presented the major findings of their recently concluded or ongoing research programs. Topics included the ecology and behaviour of GHLTs in various habitat types, genetic structure and health of GHLT populations, and the implications of forest fragmentation/connectivity and climate change for the species.

Following the presentations on day two, participants summarized existing knowledge on GHLT biology, ecology and conservation based on past research programs/publications and the information presented at the symposium, evaluating the relative amount of knowledge available and defining those categories that were deemed important but relatively knowledge-deficient. This evaluation was restricted to categories of research that pertain in one way or another to achieving in situ conservation of the species. Following this general exercise, we worked in break-out groups to discuss our opinions of the currently most significant research gaps and worked on further defining them. Participants in each group identified what they considered the top five major gaps in GHLT research and knowledge, and a spokesperson from each group presented results back in a plenary session. These results were compiled across groups to highlight priority areas, thus resulting in a list of 8 research topics considered priority for future research:

Ecology/biology, health status, and genetic differentiation of western populations, and their implications for management;

- GHLTs and Cabruca Agroforest
- GHLT Dispersal and Survival in a Fragmented Landscape
- A new census of the current GHLT distribution
- GHLTs in Unknown Habitat Types (restinga, high altitude forest, or other agro-forestry systems).
- Threat Impact Analysis (e.g. forest loss and fragmentation, climate change)
- Environmental Services provided by GHLTs (e.g. seed dispersal)
- Environmental Education (e.g. perceptions of local people towards GHLTs)

The symposium was concluded with a discussion of how we can improve communication between researchers and stakeholders in order to disseminate the results of our research to achieve more efficient conservation of the species. We also discussed how we, as a community of GHLT researchers, can facilitate the closure of the major remaining research gaps.

Being able to synthesize what type of research has been conducted on GHLTs, and identifying the gaps in our knowledge on GHLT biology, ecology and conservation was a major success of this symposium. The resulting overview of both existing knowledge and knowledge gaps will serve as a guideline for the development of future research projects that wish to ultimately contribute to the development of conservation action for the species. It is our hope that we will be able to organize another symposium within two years from now to summarize new findings achieved since then, and measure our progress towards filling in the research gaps as we identified them in this symposium.

Equally important, all participants showed and/or renewed their commitment on behalf of GHLTs conservation. One of the next steps will involve reaching out to other stakeholders involved with conservation of the Atlantic Forest and GHLTs. It is important that the research results presented during this, and possibly following symposia, become available to the wider public and particularly to federal and non-governmental institutions and civil society in a format that allows for the consideration of them into any type of activities that affect the conservation of GHLTs and the landscape in which they reside.

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Flipchart on knowledge gaps Copyright Kristel



Nima Raghunatan presenting results



People gathering for meeting

Photos: Kristel de Vleeschouwer