

SHORT COMMUNICATION

New record of *Bothriopsis bilineata* (Wied, 1825) (Serpentes, Viperidae) in the Atlantic Forest of Minas Gerais, with a discussion on its conservation

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Abstract

This study details a new area of occurrence for *Bothriopsis bilineata* in the Atlantic Forest of the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. This is the most inland record for the species in southeastern Brazil and increases the species' known distribution by nearly 250 km to the West and 340 km to the South of the only other record in the state. The occurrence of this species in preserved fragments underlines the relevance for the conservation of large remnants of this habitat and to the urgency of including this snake in the state endangered-species list.

Keywords: *Bothriopsis bilineata*, Viperidae, geographic distribution, conservation, Atlantic Forest

Bothriopsis bilineata (Wied, 1825) (the two-striped forest pit viper) is an arboreal species which has a known distribution in the Amazonian Forest and in parts of the Atlantic Forests in the states of Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo, Bahia (Campbell & Lamar, 2004) and in northeastern Minas Gerais state (Feio & Caramaschi, 2002). The species is extremely rare in the Atlantic Forest, with records becoming increasingly uncommon, not only due to its arboreal habit and low densities, which hinder attempts to find it, but mainly to the destruction of its natural habitat (Campbell & Lamar, 2004). The deterioration of the Atlantic Forest in the state of Rio de Janeiro, associated with the species' low population densities lead it to be classified as "probably extinct" in the state official endangered-species list (Rocha et al., 2000). Considering the similar habitat destruction, a similar scenario can be extrapolated for the other states, which make up the distributional area of the species. The first record of *B. bilineata* in Minas Gerais occurred in September, 2000 in the Rio Jequitinhonha valley, in the Fazenda Alto Cariri (16°18'S, 39°59'W), municipality of Salto da Divisa, on the border between Minas Gerais and Bahia (Feio & Caramaschi,

2002). However, these authors already suggested that the distribution of *B. bilineata* could extend into the interior of Minas Gerais, and also proposed that the species should be included in the endangered species list for this state.

Here we report the finding of a specimen of this species in the Parque Estadual do Rio Doce, situated between 42°38'W and 48°28'W and 19°45'S and 19°30'S, in the municipality of Marliéria, Minas Gerais. This conservation area is the largest fragment of Atlantic Forest in the state, approximately 36,000 ha, and the vegetation in the area is composed of a mosaic of primary and secondary forests, the latter being the result of large fires that occurred during the 1960's (Gilhuis, 1986). The specimen of *B. bilineata* was recorded in September 15, 2005 during the day (approximately at 15:00). It was observed when falling from the canopy, more than 10 m height, in a forest fraction (19°40'57"S, 42°30'47"W) in advanced regeneration state. The specimen (Fig. 1) was approximately 50 cm long and was not collected.

This record extends the previously known distribution of *B. bilineata* by nearly 250 km to the west and 340 km to the south of its first record (Feio & Caramaschi, 2002) for the state of Minas Gerais (Fig. 2). In addition, this represents the most inland record for the entire Atlantic Forest biome, thereby reinforcing the proposal made by Feio & Caramaschi (2002) that the species should be included in the state endangered-species list.

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Figure 1 - Specimen of *B. bilineata* recorded in the Parque Estadual do Rio Doce, Minas Gerais (Photo: Luiz G. Dias)

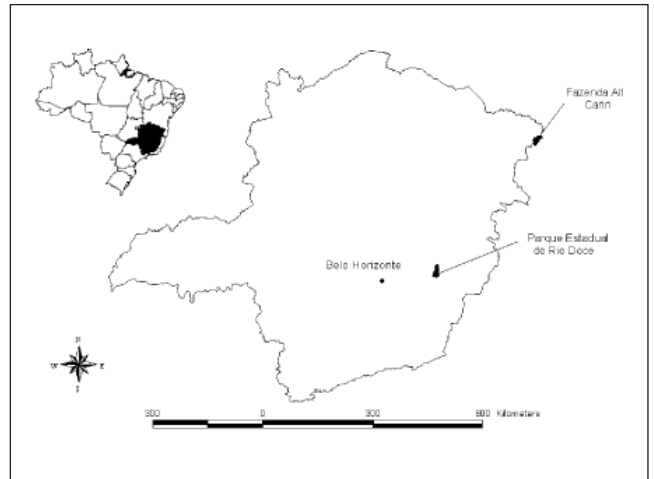


Figure 2 - Geographical records of *B. bilineata* in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Knowledge of the current distribution of *B. bilineata* will only be gained with the addition of canopy studies into the existing methodology for herpetological inventories. However, the species' low population density in the Atlantic Forest already appears to be proven by the scarcity of records and by the fact that even the most experienced local inhabitants in this domain do not recognize the species.

The occurrence of *B. bilineata* in the Parque do Rio Doce also highlights the importance of the area as priority for conserving the herpetological fauna of the state (Drummond et al., 2005). Given its size and vegetation, the park probably harbor an important population of this species.

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