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Distribution and conservation status of the giant anteater *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* (Xenarthra, Myrmecophagidae) in Costa Rica

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Introduction

The distribution of the giant anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla* Linnaeus, 1758) goes from south Belize through Central and South America, to northern Argentina. TRare recent studies confirmed the occurrence of *M. tridactyla* in Panama, Nicaragua and Honduras. The giant anteater is considered one of the least known mammals and one of the most endangered species in Central America. Currently listed as threatened in almost all regional and national Red Lists categories. In Costa Rica, its distribution range extends from the lower areas of the Pacific and Caribbean coast (to 500 m.a.s.l).

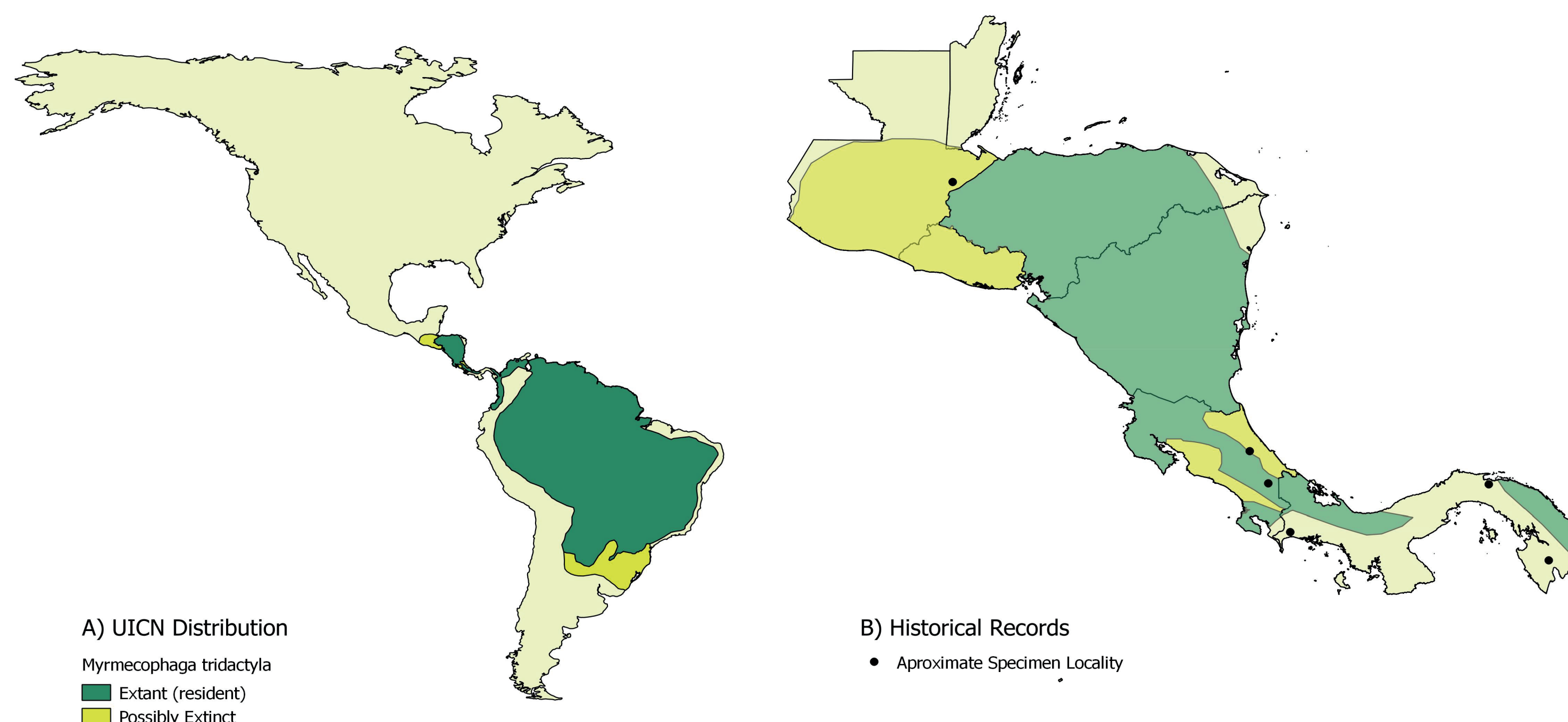


Fig.1. A) UICN distribution and B) main points of historical records in Mesoamerica.



Fig. 2. Last official register of *M. tridactyla* in Costa Rica.(2005).



Fig. 3. Historical pictures of *M. tridactyla* in Costa Rica close to the rural areas (1985).

Materials and methods

The aim of this research was to gather information about historical and current registers of *M. tridactyla* to determinate its distribution and evaluate its conservation status in the country. A database was created with historical and recent records of *M. tridactyla* for Costa Rica, from the years 1869 to 2014 (Figure 1). The information collected included literature review, search in museum collections and interviews with scientists, officials of protected areas and poachers.



Results

Costa Rica has 44 registers of *M. tridactyla* from 32 localities during the period of time considered. According with the methodology and an exhaustive revision of the different information sources, the registers are distributed as follow:

- 26 literature review
- 9 interviews
- 9 museum collections

The Fig. 2 shows the last official picture of *M. tridactyla* for Costa Rica. In the Fig. 3 is a historical sequence of official pictures that confirm the presence of *M. tridactyla* close to the different communities in Costa Rica during the 80's.

Discussion

Available information suggests that this species was never common in the country. Since the last records are of isolated individuals in areas of dense forest cover, this species seems to have a restricted distribution. Therefore *M. tridactyla* is regarded as an extremely rare and endangered species.