

Territorialization of protected areas and human-wildlife conflict in the Brazilian Amazon: the case of the Amazon River dolphin

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With the assistance of the AAG Latin America Specialty Group Field Study Travel Award, I spent the summer of 2014 in Brazil primarily conducting pre-dissertation work on my project about socioeconomic and perceptual aspects of conservation of the Amazon river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*, locally known as the “boto”). Originally, my goal was to conduct and complete fieldwork and data collection over this time period, but changes to my proposed plan required additional, more extensive pre-dissertation research. While in Brazil, I spent approximately eight weeks in Belém, Pará; one in Santarém, Pará; and three in Manaus, Amazonas.

The first eight weeks of my time in Brazil were spent as a student in a summer Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) language intensive program at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) in Belém. While studying Portuguese at UFPA, I also networked with researchers working on projects related to the boto, but from a more ecological or biological perspective, as well as a social science researcher with the Mamirauá Institute (the non-profit research body of the Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve in Tefé, Amazonas). The goal was to develop a partnership that would combine ecological and natural science data with social science data, in order to achieve a more well-rounded and full-spectrum analysis of the myriad issues surrounding conservation of the boto. Additionally, because Belém is the state capital of Pará, many non-profit organizations are headquartered there, and I spoke with individuals from The Nature Conservancy and Imazon (Institute of Human and Environment in the Amazon) about my project and the possibility of collaboration. Unfortunately, no current projects directly involve the boto.

I traveled to Santarém from Belém with a research assistant and spent a week there familiarizing myself with the area and networking with graduate students and a professor from the Institute of Science and Technology of Water at the Federal University of Western Para (UFOPA). Their projects dealt with the sustainability of local fisheries, with an indirect focus on the subject of interference from, and direct killing of, botos. The professor has agreed to serve

as an on-the-ground advisor for my project when I return this coming summer. I spent time at the local fish market and spoke with fishers who are involved in projects at UFOPA, and based on our conversations, they will likely be participants in my own study. The direct killing of botos is an important focus of mine, and I learned that there are at least two fishers in Santarém who do indeed slaughter the dolphins for use as catfish bait.

Additionally, because my project has a focus on tourism, and dolphin tourism specifically, I explored the aspect of the tourism industry that centered on the botos, both in Santarém and Manaus. Tourism was my main focus in Manaus, and I spent three weeks there assessing the different ways that botos are presented, exploited, and consumed through tourism. I interacted with several tour operators and spoke with tourists and locals, and discovered interesting and differing perceptions of Amazonian identity. I also networked with faculty researchers at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), and identified a geographer who will be serving as my advisor while in Manaus.

Originally, my third field site was to be Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve. Based on the data I gathered doing pre-dissertation work, however, I decided to narrow the scope of my project to two primary field sites – Santarém and Manaus – and intend to expand the protected areas aspect of my project into Mamirauá and elsewhere after I complete the PhD program.

I am extremely grateful for the support of LASG, whose funds were used towards hiring a research assistant who helped with translations. I was able to cover all my assistant's expenses – air travel to and from the different cities, food, accommodations, and transportation.