

Project Update: March 2024

Project 36296-1 - Influence of landscape and local-scale livestock management on dung beetle assemblages at the semiarid of Brazil and its consequences on environmental services

Since the inception of our project, we have successfully conducted dung beetle sampling, performed ecosystem services experiments, collected data on local management practices and environmental conditions, produced informational folders for ranch owners, engaged with smallholder farms, delivered lectures to students, trained local youth in biodiversity conservation, published some of our results as scientific research, and shared our activities on social media. We will now share the results of these efforts under the following topics:

Dung beetle sampling

We conducted a systematic sampling in 21 ranches and 10 dry forest fragments of Caatinga biome.



Figure 1a - Collecting fresh cow dung for pitfall baiting and **Figure 1b** - Installing pitfall traps in livestock pastures.





Figure 2 a, b, and c - Pitfall traps baited installed for dung beetle sampling. **Figure 2b** pitfall traps after 24 hours.



Figure 3. An example of one of the sampled livestock pastures in the Raso da Catarina ecoregion.





Figure 4. This is a dense fragment of the Caatinga biome, characterized by a prevalence of Cactaceae plants. Signs of livestock use can be detected in this fragment.















Figures 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The Raso da Catarina scarab project team opened trails for the installation of transects used for dung beetle sampling in forest fragments and livestock pastures of the Caatinga biome.







Figure 10a and 10b. During the project's field campaigns, we noticed the practice of slash-and-burn being used in the properties.



Environmental data collection

We collected environmental data such as plant species remained in the livestock pasture, cow density per hectare, use of chemicals, and cow diet supplementation.



Figure 11. Examples of supplementary feed used by smallholder farmers for their cow herd.



Figure 12. Detecting dung beetle activity in cow dung of livestock pastures by searching for fresh cow dung in the ranches.





Figure 13. We sampled the herbaceous soil coverage using a one-meter square PVC frame. We measured and quantified the height and species of herbaceous plants, as well as the prevalent species of grass used for livestock.

Ecosystem services data collection



Figure 14. An experimental mesocosm arena was set up to measure the ecosystem services provided by dung beetles in livestock pastures. The disturbed soil clearly highlights the beetles' bioturbation activity and the cycling of cow dung after just 24 hours.



Dung beetle mounting and identification

We have sampled an enormous quantity of dung beetle individuals from the pastures and dry forest fragment of Caatinga. More than 40.000 specimens of beetles were sampled. Currently, the species are being identified and counted to estimate the diversity in each sampled area. A replica of each species will be retained in the three entomological collections partner of the project.





Figure 15. (above) screening a pitfall sample using a stereomicroscope Leica and Petri dish. (below) Mounting and pinning dung beetle from the project for identification.



Environmental education



Figure 16. Students visited the Entomological lab where they were introduced to the collection and the world of beetles (specially dung beetles), including their ecosystem services. Additionally, we presented our project to them.



Figure 17. The smallholder farmers engaged with us during the dung beetle sampling. We discussed the practices and ecosystem services provided by the dung beetles.





Figure 18. Mr. 'Seu Bricio', a smallholder farmer, shared his story with us. He discussed his management practices and experiences, and how the environment has changed since he started livestock farming.



We distributed informational folders to smallholder farmers in rural communities.

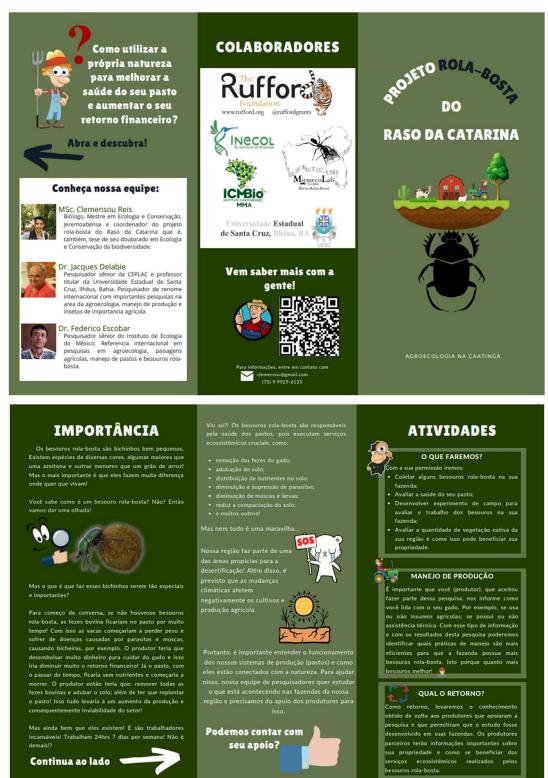


Figure 19. We shared folder materials with smallholder farmers to increase their awareness.



Scientific publication

Agrotrópica 35(2,3): 169 - 172. Centro de Pesquisas do Cacau, Ilhéus, Bahia, Brasil



NOTA CIENTÍFICA

IMPACTO DA INTRODUÇÃO DO ROLA-BOSTA AFRICANO, *Digitonthophagus gazella* (Fabricius, 1787) (COLEOPTERA: SCARABAEIDAE: SCARABAEINAE), EM USOS DA TERRA NA CAATINGA DO NORDESTE DA BAHIA, BRASIL

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Os besouros rola-bosta são importantes na reciclagem de nutrientes e purificação do solo ao fracionar e enterrar fezes de mamíferos. O rola-bosta africano, *Digitonthophagus gazella* foi introduzido no Brasil para auxiliar no controle da mosca-dos-chifres. Foram comparadas populações resultantes da sua introdução em três ambientes do semiárido, sendo dois destinados à pecuária. Foram coletados 783 espécimenes de Scarabaeinae, sendo 322 indivíduos de *D. gazela*. Pasto Manejado e Pasto Sujo favorecem esta espécie, enquanto que a Caatinga Arbórea conserva mais espécies nativas. Confirma-se que *D. gazella* é um importante promotor da ciclagem de nutrientes e controle biológico que beneficia a pecuária.

Palavras-chave: pecuária, serviços ecossistêmicos, semiárido, agroecologia.

Impact of the introduction of the african dung-beetle, *Digitonthophagus gazella* (Fabricius, 1787) (Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae: Scarabaeinae), on land uses in the Caatinga of Northeast Bahia, Brazil. Dung beetles are relevant in recycling nutrients and purifying soil by breaking up and burying mammal feces. The African dung-beetle, *Digitonthophagus gazella*, was introduced in Brazil to help control the horn fly. Populations descending from their introduction in three semi-arid environments were compared, two of which used for livestock farming. 783 specimens of Scarabaeinae were collected, including 322 individuals of *D. gazella*. Managed Pasture and Dirty Pasture favor this species, while the Arborous Caatinga preserves more native species. We confirm that *D. gazella* is a prime promoter of nutrient cycling and biological control that benefits livestock farming.

Key words: livestock, ecosystem services, tropical dry forest, agroecology.

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169

Figure 20. We have published an article in Agrotrópica, a journal of the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture. This study is one of several that we plan to publish in the coming months. Our research highlights the habitat use and preference of an African species of dung beetle that has been introduced to Brazil, and we evaluated it in the region where our project is based. Available at ResearchGate Link.



Project presentation



Figure 21. Our scientific initiation student (Iasmim Silva Queiroz) presenting part of the results of our project at the scientific initiation week of CEPEC-CEPLAC - Ministry of Agriculture.



Social networking activity

We are disseminating information about our project on social media, specifically through our Instagram account (@rolabostacaatinga). Here, we share updates from our fieldwork campaigns and provide information about dung beetles and the ecosystem services they offer. We are in the process of preparing many other visual materials to share. These materials will highlight our actions and emphasize the importance of preserving the biodiversity of the Caatinga.

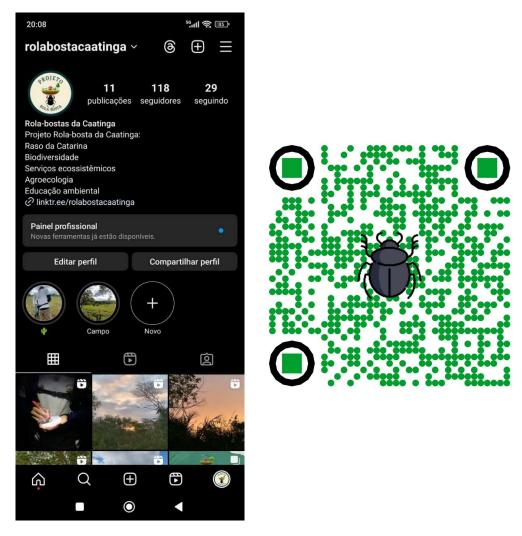


Figure 22. Instagram page of our project (@rolabostacaatinga) and QR code to access the page.