

OBITUARY

Liza Maria Veiga (October 31, 1963 – October 27, 2012)

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I first met Liza Veiga sometime around the turn of the century when she dropped in to my office in Belém, in the eastern Amazon basin, for a chat. As fellow British expats in a far-flung corner of the globe, we bonded right away, and remained close friends for the rest of her tragically short life. She went straight to the point, and explained that she wanted to study monkeys, do her doctorate, and would I supervise her?

I was a little skeptical at first, after all, she had graduated in Business Economics, and had a masters degree in International Development, which were hardly the best qualifications for a career in Primatology. But the doctorate program was in Experimental Psychology, and I decided that, if the worst came to the worst, she could always change her project to something more in line with her previous experience. I soon discovered, however, that she had not just wheezed in on a wing and a prayer, not least because that was simply not her way of doing things. She had worked for DFID (the British equivalent of USAid) at the University of East Anglia for a couple of years, where she had spent time with primatologist Carlos Peres and his research team, and had taken the opportunity to absorb all she could about this line of research. It was another couple of years before she moved to Belém with her Brazilian husband, Iran, but one of the first things she did after arriving was to track me down at the Federal University of Pará.

It immediately became clear that she had read up on all things primatological, and was there to impress me with her potential, rather than just chat about her prospects. Before long, I discovered that Liza's background in business management was a bonus rather than drawback because she was the most meticulous and highly organized student I am ever likely to have. If I asked her to check up on a species, for example, she would arrive at the department the next day with a complete dossier, the topics indexed in an alphabetical order. I shudder to imagine what she must have thought of my desk, piled high with half-finished manuscripts and overdue reports, but I am sure she understood that not everyone was quite as methodical as she was.

Liza approached her doctoral research with the dedication and attention to detail that was her philosophy of life. She was willing to endure all manner of hardship to get her data collected, but there were limits. After months of relentless fieldwork, her feet were horribly blistered, her back was playing up, and she was nearing physical exhaustion, but I still had my work cut out to convince her that she could take a couple of months off without jeopardizing her project. She need not have worried, her comprehensive study of the endangered black cuxiú, *Chiropotes satanas*, is a detailed catalog of its behavior and ecology, which will provide a work of reference for the species for many years to come.

Not one to rest on her laurels, Liza went almost directly from her dissertation defense (2006) to the Goeldi Museum in Belém, to take up a management position in the TEAM (Tropical Ecology, Assessment and Management) program which, among other things, gave her the opportunity to continue and expand her research on the primates of the southeastern Amazon basin. She had soon accumulated a remarkable array of responsibilities, working as an environmental consultant and serving on numerous committees in the IUCN (primate specialist groups, global mammal assessment, species survival commission) and Brazilian government bodies (IBAMA, ICMBio). She was also a member of the executive committee of the Brazilian Primatology Society and an editor of *Neotropical Primates*. But perhaps one of her most notable achievements during this period was the production of no less than 57 species accounts for the IUCN Red Data Book of 2008, including all of the pitheciid taxa recognized at that time. In most cases, she was the first author.

In the meantime, Liza flourished as an academic, and she was not just a participant, but a prime mover, an organizer of initiatives. She was a regular at the Brazilian and International primatology

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congresses, and it was at one of these events that the idea for the Pitheciine Action Group came up in conversations with Adrian Barnett and Marilyn Norconk. This group is still incipient, but it is a model of enterprise and cooperation, and its development has borne all the hallmarks of Liza's tireless dedication. We all hope that the group will continue to do her proud for many years to come.

Liza even found time to publish a dozen papers and almost as many book chapters, and was the principal driving force behind the production of the definitive book on pitheciid biology—*Evolutionary Biology and Conservation of Titis, Sakis, and Uacaris*—that involves almost a hundred authors. Sadly, she was literally putting the finishing touches to this monumental volume when she left us. But it is in press, and I think it will stand as a fitting memorial to her professional prowess.

Of all her achievements, I think Liza would have been most proud of her contribution to the next generation of primatologists. In a few short years, she had gone from being an economist and business manager to a postdoc in the Zoology Department at the Goeldi Museum, coordinator of numerous conservation projects, and professor in the graduate program.

She supervised almost 20 undergraduate research projects in the space of 4 years, and had taken on a handful of masters students, but she often complained to me about not having any doctoral students, and I could only advise her to be patient. She had established a new study site, in the southern Amazon basin, where her students were studying cuxiús (*Chiropotes albinasus*) and spider monkeys (*Ateles marginatus*) in pristine forest, and she was eager to include more species, and involve more students.

Liza was due to present her latest findings at the 24th IPS Congress in Cancún, but sadly, she cancelled at the last minute, and most of us never saw her again. To say that she will be sorely missed would be an understatement, because her many academic accomplishments pale in the light of her personal achievements. She was a trustworthy colleague and faithful friend, and an incredibly unselfish person who always preferred to share and help rather than make demands. Liza's legacy is an inspiration to us all, and we can only hope that we can continue her work with at least half her dedication, and help ensure the survival of the primates and the forests she loved so much, for many generations to come.