

**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION**

## **A Decade of Sorting Out Monkey Business: Researcher Describes Five New Species of Amazonian Saki Monkeys**

*Four named after senior primatologists including Conservation International President Dr. Russell A. Mittermeier and Senior Researcher Dr. Anthony B. Rylands*

**Hanoi, Vietnam/Arlington, Va., USA (August 26, 2014)** – A major revision of the taxonomy of the saki monkeys of South America (genus *Pithecia*) was announced at the [25<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Primatological Society](#) in Hanoi. For many years, it was believed that there were just five species of sakis, but this study revealed the existence of 16 – five of them new to science. Three species recognized were previously considered to be subspecies, and another three, already described, were previously thought to be just variants. The study was printed in the summer issue of [Neotropical Primates](#), a journal run by the [IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group](#) and [Conservation International](#), with support from the Margot Marsh Biodiversity Foundation, and is the largest revision for any Neotropical primate genus in more than half a century.

**Dr. Laura K. Marsh**, the director and co-founder of the Global Conservation Institute, carried out the study – 10 years of research involving the examination of specimens in 36 museums in 17 countries in North America, South America, Europe and Japan.

“I began to suspect there might be more species of saki monkeys when I was doing field research in Ecuador,” Marsh said. “The more I saw, the more I realized that scientists had been confused in their evaluation of the diversity of sakis for over two centuries.”

“Saki monkeys, like many rain forest primates, are excellent indicators for the health of tropical forest systems,” said **Russell A. Mittermeier, President of Conservation International, long-time Chairman of the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group**, for whom one of the new species, *Pithecia mittermeieri*, is named. “This revision of the genus shows clearly how little we still know about the diversity of the natural world that surrounds us and upon which we ourselves depend so much.”

Primates are major components of tropical rain forest systems, and are of great importance as seed dispersers, predators, and sometimes even as prey. Healthy primate communities are vital for the health of the tropical forests.

The five new species are found in Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia—three of them are endemic to Brazil and one to Peru. Saki monkeys are distributed throughout the Amazon Basin and throughout the Guiana Shield. They are elusive and little studied in the wild, and our understanding of their conservation status is minimal.

“The range of the saki monkeys covers a big chunk of Amazonia, including the Guiana Shield and Amazon Basin, which harbor some of the last truly intact wilderness areas,” Mittermeier added. “They are also regions where Conservation International has worked for decades protecting reservoirs of natural capital – fresh water, forest carbon, soils, medicinal plants, food, fibers, and other essential services for local people.

These monkeys are often hunted for food, even though their elusive behavior makes them difficult to find. The revision of saki monkeys is particularly timely with the heavy attention that was given to the emergence of primate-focused ecotourism at the International Primatological Society meeting. According to **Mittermeier**: “These animals are becoming increasingly important in the economies of local communities for ecotourism, based on the model of bird-watching and bird life-listing that has become a multi-billion dollar industry worldwide.”

“In the 1980s, people believed that there were about 180 species of primates worldwide. Thanks to the dedication and skill of researchers such as Laura Marsh, today we have a clearer understanding of the diversity of the mammalian Order that gave rise to our own – 496 species, and counting. Besides being vital for their conservation and survival, the revised scientific description of these sakis is a major step in our understanding of primate diversity in Amazonia and worldwide,” said **Dr. Anthony B. Rylands, Senior Researcher at Conservation International and Deputy-Chair of the Primate Specialist Group**, for whom *Pithecia rylandsi* was named.

This revision increases the number of primates in Brazil to 145; the highest diversity for any single nation. Eight species of sakis, two of them endemic, occur in Peru. With 56 primates, Peru is now sixth on the world list of countries with diverse primate faunas.

Two other species were named after senior figures in the primatological community: **Alcides Pissinatti, veterinary scientist, and co-founder and director of the Rio de Janeiro Primate Center** in Brazil; and **José de Souza e Silva-Júnior (“Cazuza”), one of Brazil’s leading primate taxonomists and currently Curator of Mammals at the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi in Belém, Brazil**. The fifth was named for the remarkable and courageous [Isabel Gramesón Godin](#), considered “the first woman of the Amazon,” who

lived in Colonial Peru (now Ecuador) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was the lone survivor of a grueling, 42-person, 3,000-mile expedition from her city in the Andes, all the way across the Amazon basin to French Guiana.

###

Read: A Taxonomic Revision of the Saki Monkeys, *Pithecia* Desmarest, 1804

- [Part 1](#)
- [Part 2](#)

Photographs available for media with proper credit are available here:

<http://bit.ly/1rAEfrf>

For further information, please contact:

- Kevin Connor, Media Manager, Conservation International  
[kconnor@conservation.org](mailto:kconnor@conservation.org) or 1-703-341-2405
- Dr. Laura K. Marsh, Director and co-founder of the Global Conservation Institute  
[lkmars@global-conservation.org](mailto:lkmars@global-conservation.org) or 1-505-470-3950
- Dr. Russell A. Mittermeier, President of Conservation International, long-time Chairman of the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group  
[rmittermeier@conservation.org](mailto:rmittermeier@conservation.org) or 1-202-203-9636
- Dr. Anthony B. Rylands, Senior Researcher at Conservation International and Deputy-Chair of the Primate Specialist Group  
[arylands@conservation.org](mailto:arylands@conservation.org) or 1-202-372-7874
- Dr. José de Souza e Silva-Júnior, Curator of Mammals, Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, Belém, Brazil  
[cazuza.junior@gmail.com](mailto:cazuza.junior@gmail.com) or +55-091-228-2341 x 60
- Dr Alcides Pissinatti, Director, Centro de Primatologia do Rio de Janeiro – CPRJ, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
[pissinatticprj@globo.com](mailto:pissinatticprj@globo.com) or +55-021-2632-8387

#### **About Dr. Laura K. Marsh**

Dr. Marsh is the director and co-founder of the Global Conservation Institute in the U.S. and a primate ecologist specializing in fragmented habitats. She is known for two volumes of the popular book *Primates in Fragments*. Her saki research was supported by a number of organizations and foundations, notably Conservation International's Primate Action Fund, the Margot Marsh Biodiversity Foundation, Primate Conservation, Inc., and the Global Conservation Institute.

#### **About Dr. Russell A. Mittermeier**

[Dr. Mittermeier](#) is the only working field biologist who is also president of a major international environmental organization, and he brings the daring and ingenuity that have served him so well in the field to his role at the helm of CI. Addressing a scientific convention, the board of a global conglomerate, or the crowds gathered for the opening of the Expedition Everest ride at Disney's Animal Kingdom, Russ is nothing short of a force of nature when it comes to inspiring crowds with his wild experiences and bold vision. The scientific community has honored Russ's conservation achievements by naming seven species after him, including two lemurs. He himself has described another nine species: six primates and three turtles.

#### **About Dr. Anthony B. Rylands**

[Dr. Rylands](#) is Senior Research Scientist at Conservation International, Washington, DC. He began his career in 1976, at the National Institute for Amazon Research (INPA) in Manaus, Brazil, earning his doctorate in 1982 on the behaviour and ecology of marmosets and lion tamarins at the University of Cambridge, UK. Former Professor of Vertebrate Zoology at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil, Rylands is a member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences and Deputy Chair of the IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group and has been working with Conservation International since 1993.

#### **About Conservation International (CI)**

Building upon a strong foundation of science, partnership and field demonstration, CI empowers societies to responsibly and sustainably care for nature, our global biodiversity for the well-being of people. Founded in 1987, CI is headquartered in the Washington, D.C. area and employs more than 800 staff in 30 countries on six continents, and has nearly 1,000 partners around the world. For more information, please visit our website at: [www.conservation.org/](http://www.conservation.org/) or visit us on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) and [Twitter](#).

#### **About *Neotropical Primates***

Begun in 1993 and published by Conservation International and the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group, *Neotropical Primates* is a journal and newsletter that aims to provide a basis for conservation information relating to the primates of the Neotropics. It welcomes texts on any aspect of primate conservation, including articles, thesis abstracts, news items, recent events, recent publications, primatological society information and suchlike. [www.primate-sg.org/neotropical\\_primates](http://www.primate-sg.org/neotropical_primates)