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Biogeography of Amazonian floodplains and the ecological and social impacts of damming Amazonian rivers

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Abstract

Amazonian floodplains sustain unique ecosystems with a complex biogeographical history intrinsically related to the evolution of Amazonian drainage system and the annual flooding pulse. The uniqueness of these ecosystems, which are directly impacted by the construction of dams that disrupt the flood pulse, is often ignored both in studies about Amazonian ecology and evolution and in dam impact assessment and monitoring. Combining knowledge from different research fields, including evolutionary biology, ecology and geology, and working in partnership with local indigenous and traditional communities directly affected by dams, we investigate the evolution of seasonally flooded ecosystems and their associated avifauna. We also monitor the impacts of large dams already operating in large Amazonian tributaries, especially the Belo Monte hydroelectric complex in the Xingu River. Our research aims to provide more realistic assessments of the impacts of large dams in Amazonian rivers and provide recommendations about how to better evaluate and characterize their combined impacts, including the impacts on local peoples' modes of life and use of natural resources.



Biography

Camila Ribas is a senior scientist, professor and curator at the National Institute for Amazonian Research (INPA) in Manaus, Brazil. She has a doctorate in Genetics and Evolutionary Biology from the University of São Paulo, Brazil. Her research focuses on Amazonian biogeography and conservation, investigating the relationships between biological diversification and the current and past landscapes shaped by the evolution of the large Amazonian rivers. Recent research has targeted the most threatened regions and ecosystems within Amazonia, generating knowledge that can be readily applied in impact assessments and conservation, as well as in understanding the origins and maintenance of Amazonian mega diversity.

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