

Canary in a coal mine

Reconnecting Brazil's Atlantic Forest

As early-morning sunlight scatters through the forest canopy, three pairs of eyes peer out of a sheltered tree hollow. It is a young Golden Lion Tamarin and her litter: twin babies who are finally old enough to start exploring their lush tropical surroundings – the Brazilian Atlantic Forest.

These little primate infants will soon learn to forage for fruit and hunt insects in their group's territory. Since they feed on a wide variety of wild fruits, they play a key role in the ecosystem by dispersing plant species throughout the rainforest.

In this way, the Golden Lion Tamarin not only depends on a diverse population of plant species for its own nutrition, but also contributes to the continued flourishing of those same plants. This symbiotic relationship lets the ginger primate serve as the canary in the coal mine for researchers and conservationists: If the Golden Lion Tamarin thrives, so does the larger ecosystem.

The extreme segmentation of the Atlantic Forest (see button below) is perhaps the greatest threat to the survival of the Golden Lion Tamarin – and of the rainforest as a whole. With geographic isolation it becomes difficult to maintain a gene pool diverse enough to ensure survival. This is why it is essential to protect, connect, and restore critical fragments of the Atlantic Forest.

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Programme

Ecological restoration in the Atlantic Forest, Brazil.

Goal

Purchase 236-hectare of degraded Atlantic Forest (Fazenda Igarapé), turn the area into a fully protected reserve, restore and reforest the land, and connect it to the adjacent patch of forest -- thereby creating a connected forest area of 10,000 hectares. This will create a biodiverse and vibrant habitat for the the Golden Lion Tamarin – a crucial step towards the survival of this endangered species.

Partner

Associação Mico-Leão Dourado (AML D).





The Atlantic Forest of Brazil

Along the southern coastline of Brazil, the Atlantic Forest stretches across thousands of kilometers. This vast tropical forest ecosystem once covered more than a million square kilometers of which today a mere 5% remains. It has become a fragmented and fragile ecosystem – but one of tremendous importance. It is home to a treasure trove of biodiversity. Of the 24,000 species that have survived there, an estimated 9,500 are not found anywhere else on earth. And 60% of Brazil's endangered species are found in the Atlantic Forest.



A wildlife bridge

To help reconnect “forest islands” and ensure a sustainable future for biodiversity, DOB Ecology has partnered with the Associação Mico-Leão Dourado (‘Golden Lion Tamarin Association’ or AMLD). AMLD has joined forces with a variety of government agencies, NGOs, zoos, local communities and individuals to create an integrated approach to landscape management and nature conservation. Their ongoing reforestation efforts have recently resulted in the realization of the first innovative wildlife bridge in Brazil, a strip of forest built as a corridor over the highway, as a road crossing for Golden Lion Tamarin.



A new place to meet, learn and research

The acquisition of the land has also enabled AMLD to have its own new headquarters, ending its dependency on the Government for office space. And it is much more than an office. It has become a community center and training facility – educating school children, welcoming visitors, and enabling researchers. There, AMLD also trains local families in growing and producing native Atlantic Forest seedlings, to plant in the forest restoration areas. These families are now able to make a living from this production. The aim is to further unite isolated forest remnants and form continuous, protected living areas for all creatures of the amazing Atlantic Forest.



[Watch National Geographic’s video about the project](#)