

Monte Pascoal— indigenous rights and conservation in conflict

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Monte Pascoal National Park contains an important remnant of Brazil's threatened Atlantic forest. It may not survive for much longer, however, because the park's fate is in the hands of two government agencies with conflicting objectives—one concerned with conserving species in the parks and the other concerned with the rights of indigenous people to those resources. Although the Pataxo Indians lived in these forests in the past without destroying their resource base, modern pressures have altered their ability to do so. If nothing is done, the forest as a home for threatened plants and animals and as a source of resources for people, will be lost.

On Easter Sunday in the year 1500 Cabral and his sailors were the first Europeans to discover Brazil. 'On this day at the vesper hours we caught sight of land, that is, first of a large mountain, very high and round, and of other lower lands to the south of it, and of flat land, with great groves of



The peak of Monte Pascoal (Kent Redford).

trees. To this high mountain the captain gave the name of Monte Pascoal (Easter Mountain)' (Caminha, 1967).

Monte Pascoal is also the name of a Brazilian national park, which encompasses this famous 536-m mountain. This park, in the Brazilian state of Bahia (16°45'–16°55'S and 39°08'–39°30'W), is located in the Brazilian Atlantic forest. This is the most threatened ecosystem in Latin America with less than 5 per cent of the original forest cover remaining (Fonseca, 1985). Monte Pascoal park is one of the best pieces of lowland Atlantic forest left (R. A. Mittermeier, pers. comm.). It contains a great diversity of ecosystems ranging from mangroves to 40-m-tall tropical forest and is one of only two Brazilian national parks that extend to the ocean. It is one of the largest of the parks protecting Atlantic forest and its populations of endangered species range from orchids to primates. It contains many valuable timber species also. However Monte Pascoal is a park in the process of being destroyed.

The park was established in 1961 with an area of 225 sq km (Padua, 1983). At that time both Pataxo Indians and non-Indians inhabited the land. The non-Indians were removed and in the 1970s FUNAI, the Brazilian Indian Agency, began to take measures to declare the area as Indian lands. As a consequence, IBDF, the Brazilian agency responsible for forests and national parks, removed the remaining Pataxo from the park (Seeger, 1982). The Pataxo population in the surrounding area increased to about 1800 (CEDI, 1982) and many people, both Pataxo and claiming to be Pataxo, came to the area demanding land. As a result of this pressure, 85 sq km of the park were turned over to the Pataxo in about 1979 (Noticias Populares, 1983; Padua, 1983). This land, largely forested at the time it was turned over to the Indians, is now completely cut over, much of it abandoned pasture. The Pataxo have stated that this land was largely unsuitable for agriculture (CEDI, 1984) and one leader says that his tribe is living in absolute misery with children dying of hunger (CEDI, 1983). The Pataxo are demanding that the remaining 140 sq km still protected in the park be turned over to them (CEDI, 1986).

In fact, the park is providing little protection for its



Entrance to the park with Pataxo Indians selling artefacts (Kent Redford).

forests and animals. During a recent visit to the park I saw areas that had been cleared for gardens and evidence of hunting. Mangrove forests have been burned in order to facilitate the collection of crustaceans for sale. The five park guards are unable to keep Indians from entering the park to extract timber. I was told of the cutting of a large jacaranda tree, the valuable timber of which would be worth about US\$20,000, only 800 m from the park headquarters. A lot of trees are also cut for fence posts and removed using rubber-wheeled hand carts. In a recent article the park director claimed that by providing chain saws, local lumber merchants encouraged both the clearing of the original parcel of land given to the Pataxo and the cutting of timber in the park (O Liberal, 1987).

The conflict between the Brazilian forestry and park agency, IBDF, and the Pataxo is a complex one and pits two Brazilian bureaucracies against

Oryx Vol 23 No 1, January 1989

one another. In 1984 FUNAI and IBDF announced that they would form a permanent committee to study areas under the jurisdiction of both agencies (CEDI, 1984). The problem is a difficult one, since the Brazilian constitution guarantees Indians the use of natural resources, yet the law prohibits the use of natural resources within national parks (Azevedo, 1987).

As anthropologists have pointed out, the area of Monte Pascoal has been occupied by Pataxo since at least 1892 according to a census in that year (Agostinho, 1980) and probably for hundreds of years before that (Hemming, 1987). The forest provided a sustainable livelihood for the Pataxo for centuries. Yet the experience with the portion of the park already turned over to the Pataxo indicates that if the rest of the park were given to them, it would probably be deforested within a decade and would not provide the long-term subsistence needs of the Pataxo. Under current conditions deforestation of all land is a virtual certainty because of the involvement of local lumber merchants and the pressures that

are brought to bear on Indian groups to change their patterns of natural resource harvesting.

This situation also exists in other parks, for example Araguaia National Park, where non-Indians, prohibited from hunting protected species such as giant river turtles, encourage Karaja Indians to hunt such animals for resale (Seeger, 1982). Nor is this situation limited to Latin America, but is found, and will continue to be found, throughout the world.

The belief that 'at the local level, resident native peoples maintain resource use within ecological limits' (Brownrigg, 1985) has resulted in the inclusion of populations of many native peoples in areas set aside primarily for biological conservation. Yet, as illustrated by the situation at Monte Pascoal, their current relations with the broader socioeconomic context does not allow native peoples to act like precontact 'ecosystem man' (e.g. Redford and Robinson, 1985). As Seeger (1982) pointed out: '. . . native American



Forest clearing surrounding Monte Pascoal National Park (Kent Redford).

societies alter themselves far more than the animal populations, and attempts to provide for both in the same, or in limited adjacent territories, are often based on erroneous logic, or no logic at all.'

Monte Pascoal is an important park for Brazil for it preserves an important historical monument. It is one of the few national parks frequently visited by Brazilian tourists and could serve as a very useful place to educate large numbers of people in the importance of biological conservation. These tourists also purchase many artefacts manufactured by the Pataxo, a source of much needed cash. Without the park there would be no tourists and yet another source of income for the Pataxo would disappear.

The forests and animals of Monte Pascoal National Park are in grave danger of being destroyed. With them would go an important source of subsistence for the Pataxo. Economic pressures on natural resources in Brazil are enormous and unless active measures are taken all that will remain of the original forest sighted by Cabral will be fence posts in a sea of deserted scrub. Also remaining will be malnourished Pataxo and rich lumber merchants.

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