



## The role of Local Ecological Knowledge on the Behavioral Ecology of mammals

Tamires Maria-Silva<sup>1\*</sup>, María Fernanda De la Fuente<sup>1,2</sup>, Antonio Souto<sup>3</sup> and Nicola Schiel<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

While the role of Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) is widely recognized for its dialogue and complement in ecology and conservation contexts, its role on the behavioral ecology of mammals is still unknown. With that in mind, we investigated LEK on the behavioral ecology of mammals, and which variables could influence such knowledge. The study was carried out in the municipality of Cabaceiras, state of Paraíba, Brazil. Data collection was divided into two stages: (i) free list (192 interviewees), to identify the mammals known in the region; (ii) and semi-structured interviews (150 interviewees). We found that conspicuous behaviors were significantly more familiar than cryptic ones, and higher LEK by residents with a rural occupation, who lives longer in the locality and encounters animals more frequently. Thus, when considering LEK on the behavioral ecology of mammals, it is important to recognize that its contribution occurs, to a greater degree, in relation to more visible behaviors and the informants more contact. LEK emerges as a complementary source of information, optimizing data collection efforts and strengthening the inclusion of local knowledge in conservation strategies. Furthermore, considering in the future bridging LEK and Behavioral Ecology of mammals would lead to a two-way street that can promote a more equitable approach between these two knowledge systems.

**Keywords:** Ethnozoology; Caatinga; Mammals; Free list; Local community..

1 Laboratory of Theoretical and Applied Ethology (LETA), Department of Biology, Federal Rural University of Pernambuco, Rua Dom Manoel de Medeiros, Dois Irmãos, 52171900 - Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil.

2 National Zoo of Chile (Parquemel), Pío Nono, 450 Recoleta, Santiago – Chile.

3 Laboratory of Ethology (LabEt), Department of Zoology, Federal University of Pernambuco, Cidade Universitária, 50670420 - Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil.

\* Corresponding author ✉. E-mail address: TMS ([tamires.msilva@ufrpe.br](mailto:tamires.msilva@ufrpe.br))

### SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

This study investigates the role of Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) in the behavioral ecology of mammals, an interface still underexplored in the scientific literature. By analyzing which behaviors are more commonly recognized by local populations and the factors that influence this knowledge (i.e., occupation, length of residence in the region, and frequency of wildlife encounters), the research highlights the potential of LEK as a complementary source of behavioral data. The findings reinforce the importance of incorporating local knowledge into conservation strategies reinforcing bridging LEK and behavioral ecology as a promising path toward more equitable and effective approaches to biodiversity conservation.

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history humans have developed a wide variety of ways to interact with animals (Alves 2012), which has allowed them to acquire a wealth of knowledge about the biology and ecology of species (Alves and Lopes 2018). This empirical knowledge, called Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK), can be obtained through everyday experiences and extensive and direct contact with nature (Berkes 1993). LEK has become a relevant source for the development of nature conservation, as it provides important data about different animal species (Lima *et al.* 2017; Simo *et al.* 2020; Borges *et al.* 2025). It is important to mention that, more and more researchers have discussed the epistemic relevance of LEK and exploring how it can dialogue and complement in ecology and conservation contexts (e.g., Albuquerque *et al.* 2021; Braga-Pereira *et al.* 2021; Torrents-Ticó *et al.* 2021; Borges *et al.* 2025). Furthermore, other researchers argue that LEK and other academic areas can mutually enrich each other and improve biodiversity management and conservation strategies (Alves and Lopes 2018; Albuquerque *et al.* 2021; Borges *et al.* 2025). The possible convergences and divergences between the provided information from these two types of knowledge and the possibility of using them as complementary knowledge have been discussed (Albuquerque *et al.* 2021; Torrents-Ticó *et al.* 2021). Some studies have addressed LEK in mammals regarding their abundance (carnivores: Torrents-Ticó *et al.* 2021; primates: Torres-Junior *et al.* 2016; Afriyie and Asare 2020; ungulates: Afriyie and Asare 2020), geographic distribution (primates: Freire-Filho *et al.* 2018), and population surveys (artiodactyls: Camino *et al.* 2020). However, to date, there are no studies that explore the LEK of the behavioral ecology of this animal group.

Behavioral Ecology is a field dedicated to the study of the relationships between behavior, ecology, and evolution of animals, including humans (Danchin *et al.* 2007). It can contribute with essential data for the conservation of animal species (Ritzel and Gallo 2020; Fashing *et al.* 2022; Marske *et al.* 2023) and has become increasingly relevant, especially in the context of studies concerning mammals (Ewart *et al.* 2024). This is probably because they are one of the animal groups most affected by anthropogenic impacts (Loiseau *et al.* 2020). In this context, LEK emerges as a complementary source of information, optimizing data collection efforts and strengthening the inclusion of local knowledge in conservation strategies. It would be interesting to investigate LEK regarding the behavioral ecology of mammals, and the variables which could influence such knowledge. Elucidating these points is important to further promote integrated forms of research and conservation.

Observation of animals in nature can depend both on the frequency with which behaviors occur and on individual experiences and length of contact with nature – factors that vary depending on the informant’s profile. For example, people are probably more familiar with basic ecological information and conspicuous behaviors (behaviors which are more visible and easily noticed) (Krebs and Davies 1996) than with more specific ecological information or cryptic behaviors (behaviors which are less visible and difficult to observe) (Krebs and Davies 1996). Also, it is suggested that variables related to the informant’s profile (e.g., age, time living in a region, occupation and frequency of encounter with species) enable greater contact with nature and thus promote greater LEK on local biodiversity (Sousa *et al.* 2014; Reibelt *et al.* 2017; Sampaio *et al.* 2018; Zhang *et al.* 2020). Turvey *et al.* (2016) found that residents who work in rural areas had greater knowledge and were more likely to identify the species they were studying (Hainan gibbon, *Nomascus hainanus*). It has also been observed that people who have lived longer in places close to natural areas have greater knowledge about the abundance of mammals compared to more recent residents (Afriyie and Asare 2020). In addition, older people who live in rural areas are generally those who have greater knowledge about natural resources compared to younger people, as they have been in contact with nature for a longer time (Torres-Avilez *et al.* 2018). Furthermore, in a study on perception and local knowledge about a lemur species (Primates, *Hapalemur alaotrensis*), Reibelt *et al.* (2017) observed that the frequency of encounters that people had with these animals influenced their knowledge about the physical characteristics and species distribution.

Given the above, we intend to evaluate Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) regarding the behavioral ecology of mammals, and which variables influence this knowledge. We hypothesize that LEK on the behavioral ecology of mammals is influenced by the characteristics of the animals’ behavior (i.e., conspicuous or cryptic behaviors) (H1). Given that conspicuous behavioral characteristics, as opposed to cryptic ones, are more visible and easily noticed, we expect that people will have (i) greater knowledge about conspicuous mammal behaviors (e.g., activity period, social organization, where they live, resting environment, and feeding habits) to the detriment of cryptic behaviors (e.g., time of year they have offspring, how many times a year they have offspring, number of offspring, and parental care). We also hypothesize that LEK on the behavioral ecology of mammals is influenced by the informant’s profile (H2). Thus, we expect that: (i) older people; (ii) people who perform rural activities; (iii) people who have lived in the area for a longer time; and (iv) people who encounter the species more fre-

quently have greater knowledge about the behavioral ecology of mammals in the region.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Study area

The study was conducted in the communities of Ribeira and Sítio Alto da Boa Vista inserted in the municipality of Cabaceiras, State of Paraíba, Brazil (7° 29' 21" S, 36° 17' 18" W) (Figure 1). The municipality of Cabaceiras has 469,171 km<sup>2</sup> and its population is estimated at 5,537 inhabitants (IBGE 2022). The main economic activities are: livestock, especially goat farming (IBGE 2022) leather industry, in which the municipality stands out for developing goat leather crafts and leather tanning.

### Study subjects

A census was conducted with residents aged 18 or over for this study, with the aim of covering the entire population of both communities (Albuquerque *et al.* 2014). The community of Ribeira is composed of approximately 45 families with 157 adults ( $\geq 18$  years), and the community of Sítio Alto da Boa Vista has around 30 families with approximately 83 adults (information provided by the District's Family Health Unit), totaling 240 adult residents. Of these, 192 residents agreed to participate in the application of free lists and 150 residents in the semi-structured interviews (for more details see: data collection). Of the 150 residents interviewed, the ages ranged from 19 to 90 years (mean =  $47.1 \pm 17.0$ ), with 92 women (61%) and 58 men (39%). Regarding occupation, 29 (19%) work in rural areas, and 121 (81%) work in non-rural areas (e.g., commerce, crafts, public service). The length of residence the interviewees had lived in the study region varied between 2 and 83 years (mean =  $43.1 \pm 20.4$ ) (For more details see Table 1).

Regarding the interviewees occupation associated with length of residence, among the 29 respondents who were engaged in rural activity, 17 were concentrated in the age range of residents with 40 to 60 years

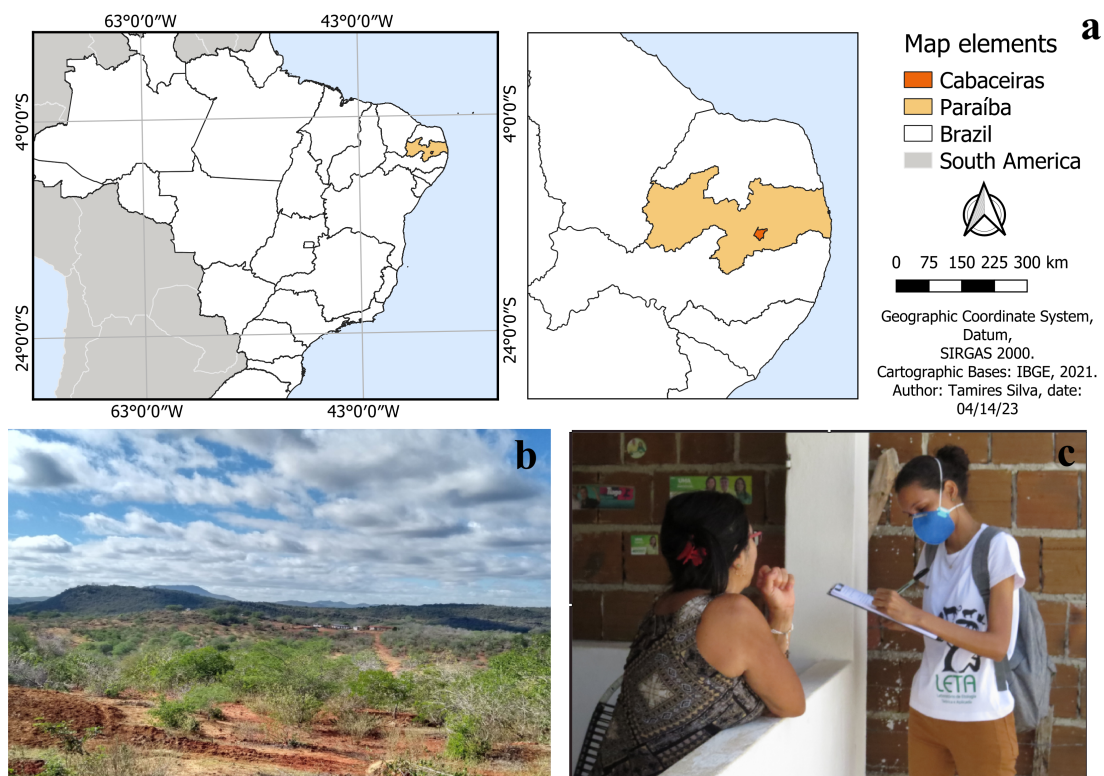
(Figure 2). The graph shows the distribution of residents according to their length of residence (Figure 2).

Those who agreed to participate in the study received an Informed Consent Form before each interview, containing information about the purpose and nature of the study. The signatures of the interviewees were requested for registration required by current legislation (Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council). This study was approved by the National Research Ethics Commission (CONEP) with a Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Consideration (Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appreciation CAAE) no. 53269621.8.0000.9547.

### Data collection

Data collection was conducted in two stages: (1) Application of free lists; (2) Structured interview on the behavioral ecology of the species. With the free list we aimed to identify the local mammal species known to the community. In this sense, the participants were invited to freely list the species of wild mammals that they knew from the region (i.e., Albuquerque *et al.* 2014). The following question was asked: "What wild animals with fur (mammals) do you know from this region?" Then, we performed the non-specific induction and rereading techniques to encourage the interviewees to recall more items (Albuquerque *et al.* 2014). In addition, an informal conversation was held with a resident considered by the community to have great knowledge of the local fauna in order to eliminate synonyms and ensure identification of the species mentioned in the lists (adapted from Chaves *et al.*, 2020), while published articles and books on the mammal species of the study region were also consulted (i.e., Alves *et al.* 2012; Passos-Filho *et al.* 2015). Items from the free list which could be considered idiosyncrasies (i.e., items cited by only one informant: Borgatti and Halgin 2013) were eliminated to select the species to be used in the semi-structured interviews on the behavioral ecology of animals. A total of 11 species of wild mammals were selected, distributed in nine families (Table 2).

Next, semi-structured interviews (Albuquerque *et al.* 2014) were conducted with the residents who participated in the first stage to access the LEK on the behavioral ecology of the selected species. The species were randomized in the R program so that each interview had a different sequence of species. Photographs of the species were used (colored images on a white background, all the same size, printed on A4 paper, enveloped in transparent plastic separately) during the dialogue to ensure greater reliability in the information exchange and identification of the species presented (Albuquerque *et al.* 2014). The interview form consisted of questions about the behavioral ecology of



**Figure 1.** a) Map of the study site indicating the location of the municipality of Cabaceiras in the state of Paraíba, Northeastern Brazil; b) Characterization of the Caatinga, the biome of the study region; c) Interview with a local resident of Cabaceiras.

each species, addressing the following aspects: questions about conspicuous behaviors (e.g., life habits, live in a group or not, living environment, resting environment, feeding habits); and questions about cryptic behaviors (e.g., time of year when they have offspring, how many times a year they have offspring, number of offspring born, who cares for them and how they care for them). Furthermore, the interviewees answered a question about their frequency of encountering each of the species.

### Statistical analysis

To verify the most well-known species in the community, we calculated the salience index of the items cited in the lists (Smith 1993; Chaves *et al.* 2019). The salience of the items was calculated using the *salience* function available in the script published by Chaves *et al.* (2019). This method integrates the frequency of citation and the position of items in individual lists, allowing the identification of the most cognitively relevant elements among the respondents. The most relevant species in the lists were those that presented the highest salience indices with a significant p-value ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) were chosen for the next stage of the study.

A Wilcoxon test was performed to test H1, as the data residuals did not present a normal distribution and did not show independence between the samples, since the interviewees answered about all behavioral aspects. The behavioral aspects studied were used as the predictor variable (classified as conspicuous or cryptic) and the informant's knowledge (frequency of "I know" responses given by the informants) was used as the response variable to perform the Wilcoxon test.

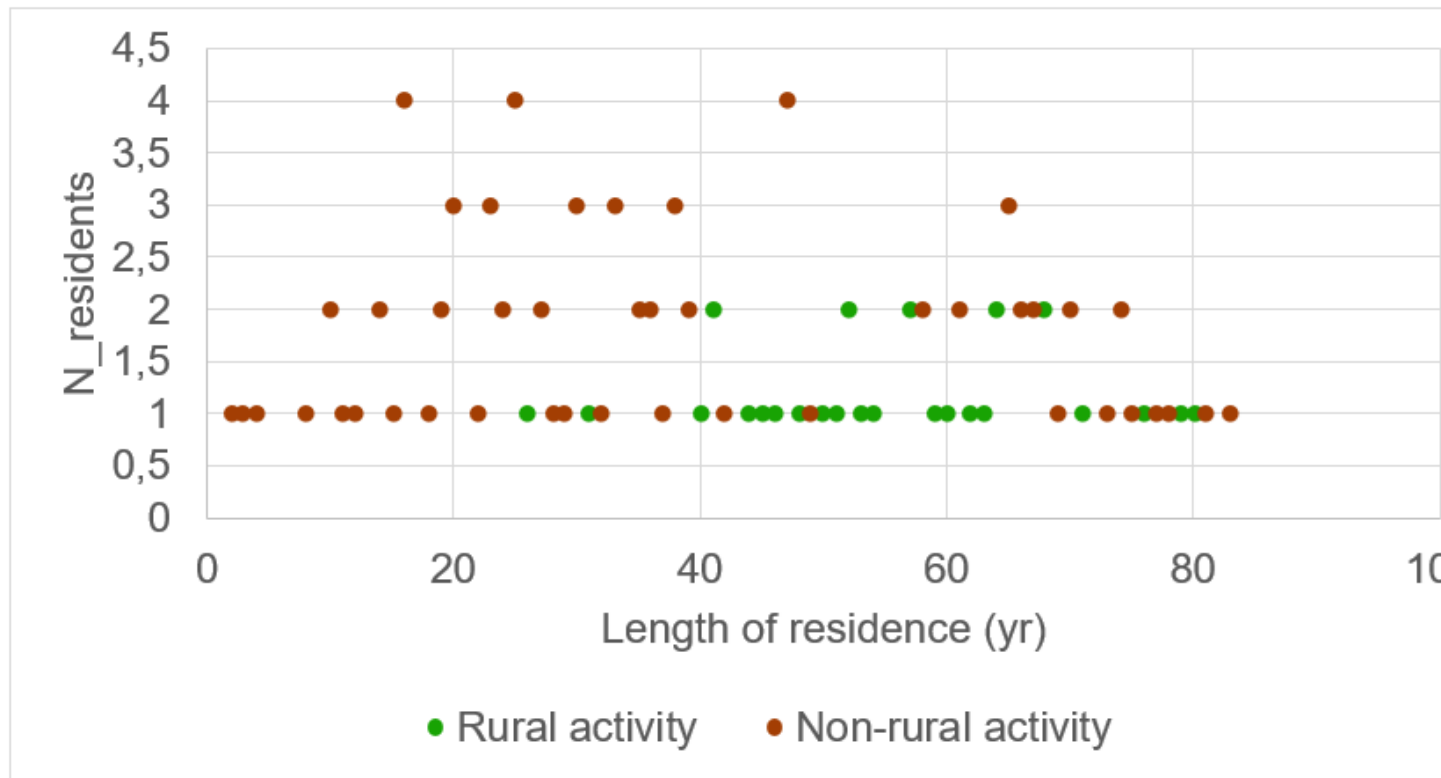
To test H2, respondents' answers to each question about the behavioral ecology of species were classified as: (i) "I know" (when the respondent had some knowledge about the question); (ii) "I don't know" (when the respondent did not know any information about the question) (adapted from Silvano and Begossi 2002). The respondents' profile was classified according to four criteria: (1) age, (2) occupation, (3) length of residence at the location, and (4) frequency of encountering the species. Length of residence and age were considered continuously in years. Occupation was classified into two categories, namely: "rural activity" (i.e., farmers and livestock breeders); "non-rural activity" (e.g., trade workers, artisans, and civil servants). The frequency of encountering each species was classified as: daily, weekly, monthly, annually, more than an-

**Table 1.** Profile of informants who participated in interviews to collect data on Local Ecological Knowledge in relation to the behavioral ecology of mammals, in the Ribeira District, Cabaceiras, PB, Brazil.

| <b>Sociodemographic characteristics</b> | <b>Number of respondents (%)</b> |
|---|----------------------------------|
| <b>Sex</b>                              |                                  |
| Female                                  | 92 (61%)                         |
| Male                                    | 58 (39%)                         |
| <b>Age (yr)</b>                         |                                  |
| 19-29                                   | 22 (15%)                         |
| 30-39                                   | 25 (17%)                         |
| 40-49                                   | 27 (18%)                         |
| 50-59                                   | 30 (20%)                         |
| 60-69                                   | 26 (17%)                         |
| 70                                      | 20 (13%)                         |
| <b>Length of residence (yr)</b>         |                                  |
| 2-18                                    | 17 (11%)                         |
| 19-29                                   | 21 (14%)                         |
| 30-39                                   | 19 (13%)                         |
| 40-49                                   | 24 (16%)                         |
| 50-59                                   | 25 (17%)                         |
| 60-69                                   | 24 (16%)                         |
| 70                                      | 20 (13%)                         |
| <b>Occupation</b>                       |                                  |
| Rural activity                          | 29 (19%)                         |
| Non-rural activity                      | 121 (81%)                        |

nually, and never seen. The data were organized into: (1) transforming the occupation variable into binary in which the value 0 (non-rural activity) or 1 (rural activity); (2) transforming the variable frequency of encounter into an ordinal variable, being: Never seen (0) < More than annually (1) < Annually (2) < Monthly (3) < Weekly (4) < Daily (5); (3) transforming the informants' response into binary, being 0 for "I don't know" and 1 for "I know". Then, a generalized linear mixed model (GLMM) was constructed, in which the response variable was the LEK, and the predictor variables were the criteria used to classify the informant's profile. The variables "informant" (each person interviewed) and "family" (interviewees from the same family) were used as random factors. We used these variables to reduce biases associated with pseudoreplicates. In addition, the data distribution family

was defined as binomial. A multicollinearity analysis was then performed after defining the model, for which the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used. The VIF showed collinearity between the age of residents and length of residence at the location. We chose to remove 'age' as a variable from the analyses as the aim of the study was related to accumulated experience in the local environment and direct exposure to the species, which is directly related to an individual's time of residence rather than an individual's age (e.g., Wayland and Walker 2014). The data were analyzed using the statistical software R 4.2.3 (R Development Core Team, 2023), employing the packages "dplyr" for data manipulation, "ggplot2" for graphical visualization, "knitr" for report reproducibility, "here" for directory management, and "lme4" for fitting linear mixed-effects models, while the "car" package was used



**Figure 2.** Distribution of the number of interviewed residents ( $N_{residents}$ ) according to their occupation (rural and non-rural activity) and length of residence in the location (years). Each dot corresponds to one or more respondents with the same length of residence and occupational category, indicating the relative frequency.

for additional model assessments, including analyses of variance and assumption checking. The significance level established for all analyses was  $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$ .

Descriptive data on the Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) on the behavioral ecology of the studied species can be observed at Table 3. Patterns of the behavioral ecology were classified as conspicuous or cryptic behaviors, and further categorized in accordance to ecological aspects such as: lifestyle, social organization, living environment, resting environment, feeding habit, when offspring are born, times per year offspring are born, number of puppies per litter, who cares and how cares.

## RESULTS

### H1: Influence of the Behavioral Ecology of mammals (conspicuous or cryptic) in LEK

The LEK for conspicuous behaviors was significantly higher than for cryptic behaviors (Wilcoxon:  $V = 11325$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; Figure 3), corroborating our first hypothesis.

### H2: Influence of the informant's profile in the LEK on the Behavioral Ecology of mammals

As expected, the model shows that local ecological knowledge is influenced by occupation, length of residence in the region, and frequency of encounters that people have with mammal species. People who have rural activities as their occupation showed significantly higher LEK regarding the behavioral ecology of mammals than those who do not have rural activities (GLMM:  $z = 2.99$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; Figure 4). Furthermore, the LEK was significantly higher with longer residence in the region (GLMM:  $z = 2.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; Figure 4). Finally, people showed higher LEK when there is a higher frequency of encounters with the species; thus, “daily” was significantly higher than the categories “never seen” (GLMM:  $z = 21.8$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), “more than annually” (GLMM:  $z = -5.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and “annually” (GLMM:  $z = 3.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, “daily” was not significantly higher than “monthly” (GLMM:  $z = -1.52$ ,  $p = 0.127$ ) and “weekly” (GLMM:  $z = 0.11$ ,  $p = 0.90$ ; Figure 4).

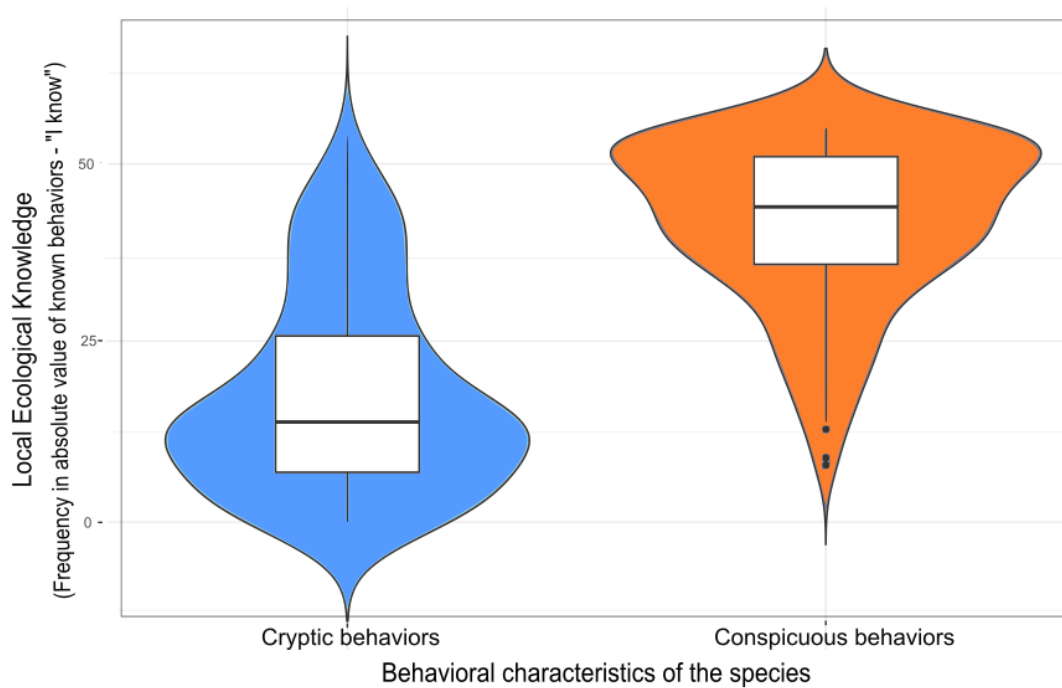
**Table 2.** Free list of wild mammal species used in the study in order of salience, locally known in Cabaceiras, Paraíba, Brazil.

| Family<br>Scientific name                              | Popular name<br>(Portuguese/English) | Salience index | p-value |
|--|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------|
| <b>Canidae</b><br><i>Cerdocyon thous</i>               | Raposa/Crab-eating / fox             | 0.6142         | 0.000   |
| <b>Mephitidae</b><br><i>Conepatus semistriatus</i>     | Tacaca / Striped / hog-nosed skunk   | 0.3999         | 0.000   |
| <b>Caviidae</b><br><i>Galea spixii</i>                 | Preá / Spix's / Yellow-toothed cavy  | 0.2940         | 0.000   |
| <b>Callitrichidae</b><br><i>Callithrix jacchus</i>     | Sagui / Marmoset                     | 0.2668         | 0.000   |
| <b>Felidae</b><br><i>Herpailurus yagouaroundi</i>      | Gato-vermelho / Jaguarundi           | 0.2280         | 0.000   |
| <b>Dasypodidae</b><br><i>Euphractus sexcinctus</i>     | Tatu-Peba / Yellow Armadillo         | 0.2280         | 0.000   |
| <b>Caviidae</b><br><i>Kerodon rupestris</i>            | Mocó / Rock cavy                     | 0.2234         | 0.000   |
| <b>Procyonidae</b><br><i>Procyon cancrivorus</i>       | Guaxinim / Crab-eating raccoon       | 0.1911         | 0.000   |
| <b>Myrmecophagidae</b><br><i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i> | Tamanduá-mirim / Lesser anteater     | 0.1892         | 0.000   |
| <b>Felidae</b><br><i>Leopardus tigrinus</i>            | Gato-pintado / Oncilla               | 0.1802         | 0.0001  |
| <b>Didelphidae</b><br><i>Didelphis albiventris</i>     | Timbú / White-eared opossum          | 0.1737         | 0.0001  |

### Local Ecological Knowledge about the behavioral ecology of mammals (descriptive results)

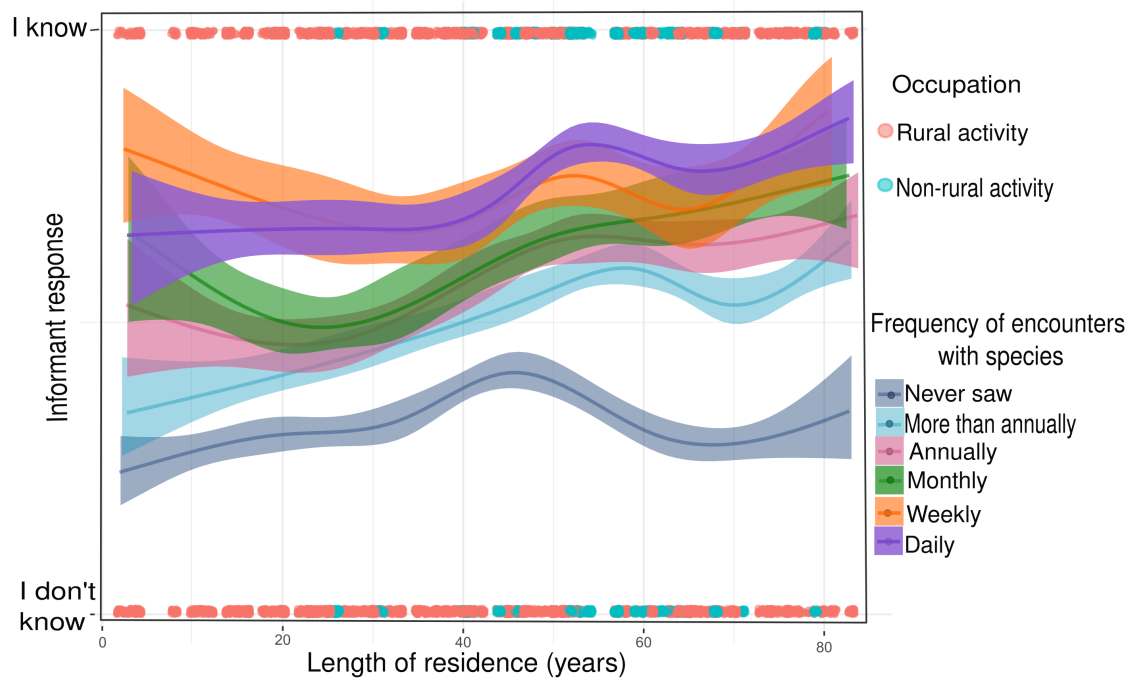
In general, responses regarding conspicuous behaviors (e.g., activity period, social organization, living environment, resting and feeding locations), showed a lower frequency of “I don’t know” responses. In contrast, for cryptic behaviors, especially those related to reproduction (season of offspring birth, number of litters, and number of offspring born), were a higher number of “I don’t know” responses could be observed in virtually all species could be observed. This pattern also held true for questions related to parental care, particularly the question “Do you know offspring

are taken care of?”, which showed a high number of “I don’t know” responses (see Table 3).



**Figure 3.** Estimation of the model that presents the difference in Local Ecological Knowledge between conspicuous and cryptic behaviors. Behavioral characteristics of the species are represented on the x-axis; the LEK, represented on the y-axis, is expressed in absolute values of the “I know” responses in relation to the behaviors known by people. The horizontal violins in shades of blue and orange represent the data density distribution for each category of behavioral characteristics. The shape and width of the violins indicate the density and distribution of the data.





**Figure 4.** Estimation of the model showing the relationship between length of residence at the location (x-axis), informant response regarding the Behavioral Ecology of the species (y-axis) and their associations with occupation and frequency of encounter with the species. The scattered points (jitter) are colored according to occupation and represent the effect of this variable on the LEK, in which the upper and lower points on the y-axis correspond to the responses “I know” and “I don’t know”, respectively. The colored curves represent the categories of encounter frequency with the species: the curves referring to “daily” (pink), “weekly” (orange) and “monthly” (purple) are close to the upper limit of the y-axis because they present more “I know” responses, while the curves referring to “never seen” (gray), “more than annually” (blue) and “annually” (green) are closer to the lower limit of the y-axis because they present more “I don’t know” responses.

**Table 3.** Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) regarding the conspicuous and cryptic behaviors of the studied species. Codes for mammal species: *L.tig* (*L. tigrinus*), *H.yag* (*H. yagouaroundi*), *P.can* (*P. cancrivorus*), *K.rup* (*K. rupestris*), *G.spi* (*G. spixii*), *C.tho* (*C. thous*), *C.jac* (*C. jacchus*), *C.sem* (*C. semistriatus*), *T.tet* (*T. tetradactyla*), *E.sex* (*E. sexcinctus*), *D.alb* (*D. albivestris*). c: Coivara (pile of dry branches). The numbers represent the sum of the number of responses given by the respondents for each piece of data. The sum may sometimes exceed the total number of respondents (n=150), since each person could cite more than one aspect for each question asked.

| Behavioral ecology           | Mammal species   |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
|------------------------------|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                              | <i>L. tig</i>  | <i>H. yag</i> | <i>P. can</i> | <i>K. rup</i> | <i>G. spi</i> | <i>C. tho</i> | <i>C. jac</i> | <i>C. sem</i> | <i>T. tet</i> | <i>E. sex</i> | <i>D. alb</i> |
| <b>Conspicuous behaviors</b> | Question: At what time do you see this animal in the region (or know that it appears)? |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| <b>Lifestyle</b>             |  |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Twilight                     | 10   | 12            | 6             | 25            | 24            | 18            | 4             | 2             | 6             | 6             | 6             |
| Nighttime                    | 49   | 42            | 105           | 20            | 29            | 105           | 5             | 147           | 70            | 103           | 91            |
| Daytime                      | 31   | 45            | 11            | 81            | 108           | 49            | 145           | 6             | 17            | 30            | 19            |
| I don't know                 | 67   | 62            | 32            | 33            | 12            | 8             | 2             | 2             | 61            | 24            | 38            |
| <b>Social organization</b>   | Question: When you see this animal in the region, how many do you usually see?         |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Group                        | 9  | 11            | 29            | 91            | 108           | 19            | 146           | 4             | 5             | 12            | 18            |
| Solitary                     | 78   | 85            | 79            | 37            | 41            | 129           | 7             | 140           | 94            | 120           | 104           |
| Pair                         | 10   | 10            | 14            | 6             | 8             | 40            | 0             | 15            | 8             | 10            | 14            |
| I don't know                 | 53   | 56            | 44            | 26            | 5             | 8             | 2             | 7             | 52            | 21            | 32            |
| <b>Living environment</b>    | Question: Where does this animal live (where does it roam)?                            |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Trees                        | 2  | 3             | 12            | 1             | 1             | 0             | 144           | 1             | 12            | 0             | 24            |
| Burning holes/holes          | 0  | 0             | 1             | 2             | 8             | 2             | 1             | 24            | 5             | 94            | 18            |
| Rocks                        | 28   | 29            | 19            | 116           | 61            | 25            | 0             | 22            | 16            | 7             | 14            |
| Vegetation/bush              | 77   | 83            | 28            | 26            | 72            | 101           | 4             | 60            | 64            | 40            | 35            |
| Riverbank                    | 1  | 3             | 53            | 1             | 4             | 6             | 0             | 2             | 3             | 10            | 1             |
| Plantations                  | 0  | 0             | 0             | 2             | 26            | 1             | 1             | 2             | 0             | 5             | 1             |
| Houses                       | 0  | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 9             | 2             | 1             | 0             | 10            |
| Roads                        | 0  | 2             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 5             | 0             | 3             | 0             | 1             | 0             |
| Fences/walls                 | 0  | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 11            | 0             | 0             | 0             | 5             |
| CoivaraC                     | 0  | 0             | 1             | 0             | 20            | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 0             |
| I don't know                 | 47   | 30            | 43            | 16            | 12            | 19            | 1             | 44            | 53            | 9             | 53            |
| <b>Resting environment</b>   | Question: Where does this animal sleep/rest?   |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Trees                        | 12   | 12            | 24            | 1             | 2             | 3             | 113           | 3             | 29            | 0             | 30            |
| Burning holes/holes          | 3  | 1             | 4             | 4             | 23            | 5             | 0             | 41            | 13            | 127           | 23            |
| Rocks                        | 29   | 36            | 30            | 117           | 60            | 39            | 0             | 24            | 20            | 3             | 13            |
| Vegetation/bush              | 36   | 44            | 25            | 12            | 47            | 52            | 1             | 37            | 27            | 13            | 18            |
| Riverbank                    | 1  | 0             | 8             | 0             | 0             | 2             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             |
| Plantations                  | 2  | 0             | 0             | 1             | 9             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 1             | 1             |

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| Behavioral ecology                       | Mammal species   |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
|--|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|  | <i>L. tig</i>  | <i>H. yag</i> | <i>P. can</i> | <i>K. rup</i> | <i>G. spi</i> | <i>C. tho</i> | <i>C. jac</i> | <i>C. sem</i> | <i>T. tet</i> | <i>E. sex</i> | <i>D. alb</i> |
| CoivaraC                                 | 1  | 1             | 0             | 0             | 6             | 2             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             |
| I don't know                             | 73   | 61            | 68            | 19            | 28            | 50            | 36            | 50            | 65            | 10            | 72            |
| <b>Feeding habit</b>                     | Question: What does this animal eat?                                   |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Dead animals                             | 1  | 0             | 3             | 0             | 0             | 3             | 0             | 3             | 0             | 41            | 0             |
| Local fauna                              | 35   | 35            | 61            | 0             | 1             | 26            | 46            | 25            | 4             | 2             | 10            |
| Tree resin                               | 0  | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 10            | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             |
| Tree bark                                | 0  | 0             | 0             | 9             | 1             | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             |
| Insects                                  | 4  | 5             | 3             | 4             | 9             | 4             | 9             | 22            | 103           | 17            | 18            |
| Native vegetation                        | 1  | 12            | 7             | 72            | 68            | 1             | 18            | 15            | 12            | 45            | 14            |
| Animal eggs                              | 1  | 1             | 3             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 37            | 0             | 0             | 2             | 0             |
| Farm birds and/or eggs                   | 9  | 11            | 16            | 0             | 0             | 81            | 2             | 60            | 1             | 0             | 27            |
| Farm mammals                             | 26   | 46            | 1             | 0             | 0             | 17            | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             |
| Native plants                            | 0  | 0             | 2             | 11            | 32            | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             |
| Exotic plants                            | 0  | 0             | 25            | 3             | 24            | 1             | 2             | 3             | 0             | 9             | 1             |
| Anthropogenic food                       | 0  | 0             | 1             | 11            | 11            | 0             | 92            | 6             | 0             | 10            | 6             |
| Carnivore                                | 43   | 33            | 12            | 0             | 0             | 31            | 4             | 2             | 1             | 8             | 6             |
| Herbivore                                | 0  | 0             | 0             | 3             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 1             | 1             |
| Omnivore                                 | 0  | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             | 2             | 1             |
| I don't know                             | 48   | 47            | 48            | 47            | 26            | 22            | 6             | 40            | 40            | 35            | 76            |
| <b>Cryptic behaviors</b>                 |  |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| <b>Reproduction</b>                      | Question: Do you know what time of year this animal has offspring?     |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| When offspring are born                  |  |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| All year round                           | 3  | 5             | 2             | 13            | 26            | 3             | 20            | 3             | 1             | 4             | 3             |
| Winter (cold season)                     | 2  | 6             | 2             | 5             | 5             | 6             | 10            | 7             | 7             | 12            | 5             |
| Summer (hot season)                      | 0  | 0             | 1             | 2             | 2             | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             | 6             | 0             |
| I don't know                             | 145  | 139           | 145           | 130           | 117           | 141           | 120           | 139           | 142           | 128           | 142           |
| <b>Times per year offspring are born</b> | Question: Do you know how many times a year this animal has offspring? |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| 1 time                                   | 14   | 21            | 14            | 5             | 2             | 20            | 12            | 13            | 16            | 17            | 9             |
| 1 - 2 times                              | 0  | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 1             |
| 2 times                                  | 8  | 8             | 6             | 10            | 9             | 7             | 9             | 7             | 6             | 13            | 5             |
| 2 - 3 times                              | 1  | 3             | 1             | 7             | 14            | 3             | 8             | 2             | 1             | 3             | 5             |
| 4 - 6 times                              | 0  | 0             | 0             | 6             | 14            | 0             | 8             | 0             | 1             | 1             | 2             |
| I don't know                             | 127  | 118           | 129           | 121           | 111           | 120           | 112           | 128           | 126           | 116           | 128           |
| <b>Number of puppies per litter</b>      | Question: How many puppies are born?                                   |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| 1 puppy                                  | 4  | 4             | 6             | 2             | 1             | 10            | 13            | 5             | 7             | 7             | 0             |
| 1 - 2 puppies                            | 6  | 5             | 3             | 7             | 6             | 8             | 11            | 5             | 6             | 5             | 2             |
| 1 - 3 puppies                            | 3  | 4             | 0             | 1             | 6             | 3             | 3             | 1             | 1             | 4             | 4             |

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| Behavioral ecology                       | Mammal species |               |               |               |  |               |               |               |               |               |               |  |
|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--|
|  | <i>L. tig</i>  | <i>H. yag</i> | <i>P. can</i> | <i>K. rup</i> | <i>G. spi</i>  | <i>C. tho</i> | <i>C. jac</i> | <i>C. sem</i> | <i>T. tet</i> | <i>E. sex</i> | <i>D. alb</i> |  |
| 1 – 4 puppies                            | 1              | 2             | 0             | 2             | 4  | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             |  |
| 2 puppies                                | 15             | 9             | 8             | 10            | 14   | 15            | 31            | 21            | 13            | 23            | 10            |  |
| 2 - 5 puppies                            | 7              | 4             | 4             | 5             | 15   | 9             | 11            | 6             | 2             | 7             | 3             |  |
| 3 puppies                                | 3              | 1             | 1             | 4             | 2  | 1             | 4             | 1             | 1             | 2             | 1             |  |
| 3 – 5 puppies                            | 3              | 3             | 0             | 11            | 12   | 3             | 3             | 2             | 2             | 1             | 4             |  |
| 4 puppies                                | 1              | 3             | 0             | 2             | 4  | 7             | 2             | 0             | 3             | 4             | 4             |  |
| 4 – 6 puppies                            | 3              | 5             | 2             | 1             | 6  | 2             | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 5             |  |
| 5 – 7 puppies                            | 1              | 1             | 0             | 1             | 2  | 0             | 1             | 0             | 1             | 1             | 5             |  |
| 8 – 10 puppies                           | 0              | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0  | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 4             |  |
| I don't know                             | 103            | 109           | 126           | 104           | 78   | 92            | 71            | 108           | 114           | 95            | 108           |  |
| <b>Parental care</b>                     |                |               |               |               |  |               |               |               |               |               |               |  |
| <b>Who takes cares</b>                   |                |               |               |               |  |               |               |               |               |               |               |  |
|  |                |               |               |               | Question: Do you know who takes cares of the offspring?    |               |               |               |               |               |               |  |
| The mother                               | 85             | 82            | 67            | 86            | 93   | 108           | 92            | 90            | 82            | 84            | 87            |  |
| The father                               | 0              | 1             | 0             | 1             | 0  | 0             | 2             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             |  |
| The parents                              | 12             | 13            | 14            | 11            | 16   | 5             | 28            | 10            | 8             | 14            | 3             |  |
| The group                                | 0              | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0  | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 1             |  |
| Nobody                                   | 0              | 0             | 0             | 2             | 0  | 0             | 0             | 1             | 0             | 0             | 1             |  |
| I don't know                             | 53             | 54            | 68            | 51            | 41   | 37            | 28            | 49            | 60            | 52            | 58            |  |
| <b>How taken cares</b>                   |                |               |               |               |  |               |               |               |               |               |               |  |
|  |                |               |               |               | Question: Do you know how offsprings are to taken care of? |               |               |               |               |               |               |  |
| Breastfeeding                            | 38             | 34            | 25            | 37            | 40   | 39            | 23            | 27            | 24            | 35            | 19            |  |
| Feeding                                  | 5              | 6             | 2             | 1             | 2  | 5             | 10            | 0             | 2             | 4             | 1             |  |
| Protection                               | 5              | 7             | 4             | 6             | 8  | 13            | 1             | 6             | 4             | 8             | 1             |  |
| Carries offspring on Its back            | 0              | 3             | 0             | 0             | 0  | 1             | 48            | 1             | 6             | 1             | 4             |  |
| Carries offspring in a pouch (marsupium) | 0              | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0  | 0             | 1             | 1             | 1             | 0             | 22            |  |
| I don't know                             | 104            | 103           | 123           | 106           | 100  | 98            | 75            | 118           | 118           | 104           | 103           |  |

## DISCUSSION

The Local Ecological Knowledge of two communities on the behavioral ecology of mammals was accessed herein. As expected, conspicuous behaviors by the mammals led to higher LEK, presumably because they enabled greater observation by people, corroborating our first hypothesis. Silvano and Begossi (2002) found that fishermen provided more information about the habitat of fish than about their reproduction, since reproduction would occur in a more cryptic manner. Similarly, interviewees in the present study knew more about the different habits of mammals (conspicuous) compared to aspects of reproduction and parental care (in most species a cryptic pattern). Therefore, interviewees seem again to present greater knowledge about behaviors that they can observe more easily. The descriptive results corroborate this pattern, in which conspicuous behavioral aspects (such as activity period, social organization, habitat use, and feeding), were mentioned as more easily observed in daily life and seem to generate less uncertainty (“I don’t know”) among respondents. On the other hand, cryptic behaviors, such as reproductive aspects and parental care, which occur seasonally and in more protected locations, were more uncertainty among respondents. This indicates that the LEK may be particularly efficient in describing more visible behaviors, however, more limited for less visible behaviors. This reinforces the importance of complementary approaches when seeking a broader understanding on the behavioral ecology.

In addition to the visibility of the behaviors themselves, LEK also appears to be influenced by the informants’ own life context. The results show that informants who carry out rural activities, have lived in the region for longer and more frequently encounter the species have greater knowledge about the behavioral ecology of mammals, corroborating our second hypothesis. For example, research areas such as Psychology or Education have already brought up that contextualized experience promotes better understanding of reality, unlike knowledge acquired through reports of others or simple reading (e.g., Koning and Tabbers 2011; Ballantyne and Packer 2016). Thus, people who observe animals in their natural environment better understand some ecological aspects of native species, as contact seems to generate a greater level of familiarity (Gandolfo and Hanazaki 2014; Sampaio *et al.* 2018). When accessing LEK to detect populations of an endangered primate species, Turvey *et al.* (2016) found that residents who performed work related to the forest were more likely to identify the species they were studying (Hainan gibbon, *Nomascus hainanus*). Similarly, Miard *et al.* (2017) found that occupation influences the LEK, allowing people who performed

rural activities to be more able to correctly identify slow lorises (*Nycticebus menagensis*). As observed in our study, Afriyie and Asare (2020) found that the residence length was one of the factors that influenced knowledge when accessing the LEK to detect estimates of mammal numbers in a nature reserve in Kogyae (Ghana). It is important to mention that while one could notice a higher frequency of “I know” answers by “younger” residents the same occurred by 40-60 years of residence. Although these patterns were not statistically significant in our study, it suggests the need for further exploration. While more confident and/or boldness by younger residents (e.g., Prims and Moore 2017) could have elicits more “I know” answers, an increase of “I know” answers by 40-60 years old residents might have been due to a greater number of such individuals engaged in rural activities. In this case it appears that the combination of longer residence time and rural occupation may promote the accumulation of direct experiences with species and enhance LEK (also see Iniesta-Arandia *et al.* 2015). Future studies could address these patterns throughout a methodology specifically developed and/or focused on these questions added to a more a representative sample size.

Regarding the frequency of people’s encounters with mammals, the results once again reinforce the importance of contact in forming knowledge. When seeking to obtain data on the distribution and abundance of mammal species, Afriyie and Assare (2020) argue that sightings were the main indicator of local knowledge and perception. In addition to corroborating this research, the present study shows that it is essential to have greater contact with the animals for people to learn about the behavior of a given species, as it improves knowledge of specific behavioral characteristics. In this sense, although not statistically significant, it is important to note that the group of interviewees who declared never having seen any of the species (“never saw”) appears in the graph closer to the lower axis (“I don’t know”), even among residents with longer length of residence. This pattern suggests that length of residence alone does not guarantee direct encounters with local fauna. One possible explanation is that the absence of encounters with a species may be related to ecological factors, such as restricted spatial distribution of the species in the region or reduced population levels (Torrents-Ticó *et al.* 2021). For a further understanding future studies could specifically address such variables. What seems clear to us is that LEK depends on the frequency of people’s encounters with species, as we observe lower levels of knowledge when individuals have never had direct contact, and higher levels of knowledge when they have had frequent direct contact, regardless of how long they have lived in the area. In this sense, when a person has a rural occupation, lives longer in the locality and encounters

animals more frequently, they have more opportunities to observe animals in nature and thus learn about their behavior. People with this profile can act as partners by sharing and contributing to the construction of knowledge about mammal behavioral ecology.

In addition to highlighting how sociocultural factors can influence LEK on the behavioral ecology of mammals, the results open space to reflect considering bridging LEK and Behavioral Ecology of mammals. When considering LEK on the behavioral ecology of mammals, it is important to recognize that its contribution occurs, to a greater degree, in relation to more visible behaviors. This pattern highlights the need to consider the context of observation and the type of interaction between humans and fauna, in addition to reinforcing the need to promote dialogue between different forms of knowledge. On the other hand, Behavioral Ecology can support the appreciation and importance of local knowledge, especially in contexts that involve the loss of biodiversity. This two-way street can promote a more equitable approach between these two knowledge systems.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the residents of the communities of Ribeira and Sítio Alto da Boa Vista, located in the Ribeira district (Cabaceiras – PB) for their availability and for sharing their knowledge. We would like to thank Prof. Geraldo Baracuhy and the Baracuhy Biological Field Station for their logistical support in conducting this study. We would also like to thank the Foundation for Science and Technology Support of the State of Pernambuco (FACEPE) for granting a master's research scholarship to the first author of this manuscript. This work was carried out with the support of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Brazil (CAPES) - Financing Code 001, through the Postgraduate Support Program (PROAP).

## DATA AVAILABILITY

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Conceived the present idea: TMS, MFDF, AS, NS. Carried out data collection: TMS.

Carried out the data analysis: TMS, MFDF.

Wrote the first draft of the manuscript: TMS.

Review and final write of the manuscript: TMS, MFDF, AS, NS.

Supervision: MFDF, NS.

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**Received:** 13 November 2025

**Accepted:** 14 August 2025

**Published:** 11 April 2026

