

Commentary

Enhancing taxonomy research in Brazil: the need for comprehensive funding beyond human resources

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Abstract

The National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and Confap announced the launch of the 5th edition of the Protax programme aimed at supporting the advancement of human resources in biological taxonomy. The funding for the programme has been increased from R\$6 million (equivalent to 1,1 million US dollars) to R\$14 million (\$2,5 million), making grants of up to R\$400,000 (\$73 thousand) per project available. However, it is important to note that the programme primarily emphasises human resources, overlooking the crucial need for funding fieldwork, which plays a vital role in taxonomic research in diverse ecosystems like the Amazon. To ensure the success of Protax, a comprehensive approach including dedicated funds for expeditions and biological collections is essential.

Keywords

PROTAX, Brazil, CNPq, taxonomy

Protax Programme

On August 6, 2024, the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), in partnership with the National Council of State Research Support Foundations (Confap), launched the 5th edition of the Programme to Support Research Projects for the Training and Qualification of Human Resources in Biological Taxonomy (Protax) (CNPq 2024). The programme aims to advance taxonomy research in Brazil by offering grants focused on training and developing talent in this field. The funding for Protax has significantly increased, rising from R\$6 million (equivalent to 1,1 million US dollars) to R\$14 million (\$2,5 million), allowing individual grants of up to R\$400,000 (\$73 thousand) per project. This increase is a positive step for researchers, enabling them to pursue more ambitious projects and offer better support to those involved.

Problems and Solutions

Even with the increased funding, the programme has a significant limitation: its heavy focus on human resource support overlooks the critical need for sufficient fieldwork funding. This is particularly concerning in a country like Brazil, known for its vast and diverse ecosystems, such as the Amazon rainforest. Fieldwork in these remote and challenging environments often represents a large portion of research costs. The logistical difficulties of conducting expeditions in such areas can be immense. For example, organising a single scientific expedition to an unexplored region of the Amazon is equivalent to the budget of an individual Protax project. Other areas, like the Atlantic Forest, Pampas, Pantanal, Cerrado, and Caatinga, also require extensive and costly expeditions.

Taxonomic research heavily relies on fieldwork, managing extensive biological collections and developing phylogenetic studies. These components are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of biodiversity and demand significant financial investment. For instance, conducting a phylogenetic analysis for 100 species can cost R\$90,000 (\$16 thousand). Such costs vividly illustrate the financial hurdles researchers encounter in conducting comprehensive taxonomic studies. Without sufficient funding for fieldwork, biological collections and phylogenetic research, the scope and quality of taxonomic studies are compromised. Researchers may be forced to scale back their work, reduce the number of species studied or even forego fieldwork, all of which undermine the overall objectives of the Protax programme.

Given the challenges outlined, it is imperative that CNPq and Confap recognise the importance of fieldwork and adopt a more holistic approach to funding taxonomy research. This approach should include the establishment of dedicated funds within the Protax programme specifically for scientific expeditions and the development and maintenance of biological collections. The current structure of Protax is not conducive to researchers at the early stages of their careers, as they lack projects or funds to support their research, despite being awarded the Protax funding.

Such a strategy would address a significant gap in the current funding model, ensuring that researchers have the resources necessary to conduct comprehensive studies. By providing targeted funding for fieldwork and other critical components of taxonomic research, CNPq and Confap could significantly enhance the effectiveness of the Protax programme, leading to a deeper understanding of Brazil's rich biodiversity. Adequate support for these elements is crucial to the success of Protax and its overarching goal of advancing biological taxonomy in Brazil. This approach would meet the immediate needs of researchers and contribute to the long-term development of taxonomy as a critical scientific discipline in understanding and preserving biodiversity.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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