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RECORD OF A NEW FOOD ITEM IN THE DIET OF THE CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara plancus*) IN BRAZIL: FRUITS OF THE MACAW PALM (*Acrocomia aculeata*)

REGISTRO DE UN NUEVO ALIMENTO EN LA DIETA DEL CARANCHO (*Caracara plancus*) EN BRASIL: FRUTOS DE LA PALMERA MBOCOYÁ (*Acrocomia aculeata*)

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ABSTRACT: The Crested Caracara (*Caracara plancus*) is described as an opportunistic bird that feeds on both carrion and live prey. It forages by scratching the ground with its feet in search of items such as peanuts and beans, and it also consumes oil palm fruits. The species exhibits a wide geographic distribution, ranging from Argentina to the southern United States, occupying a great variety of environments, except for the Andes Mountain range. Its most abundant populations are found in southeastern and northeastern Brazil. The objective of this manuscript is to report a new food item in the diet of the Crested Caracara in Brazil: the fruits of the macaw palm (*Acrocomia aculeata*). The records were obtained during an avian community survey using Nikon Action 8×40 binoculars in the southern region of the state of Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil. Further studies are recommended to better understand the importance of macaw palm in the diet of the Crested Caracara, as well as the role of this bird in plant-animal interactions, given that it might act as a seed disperser.

KEYWORDS: *diet, ecology, Falconiformes, feeding guild*

RESUMEN: El Carancho (*Caracara plancus*) se describe como un ave oportunista que se alimenta tanto de carroña como de presas vivas. Forrajea rascando el suelo con las patas en busca de elementos como cacahuetes y judías, y también consume frutos de la palma de aceite. La especie presenta una amplia distribución geográfica, que se extiende desde Argentina hasta el sur de Estados Unidos, ocupando una gran variedad de ambientes, a excepción de la cordillera de los Andes. Sus poblaciones más numerosas se encuentran en el sudeste y noreste de Brasil. El presente manuscrito tiene como objetivo registrar un nuevo alimento en la dieta del Carancho en Brasil: los frutos de la palmera mbocoyá (*Acrocomia aculeata*). Los registros se obtuvieron durante un estudio de comunidades de aves mediante el uso de prismáticos Nikon Action 8×40 en el sudeste de Brasil. Se recomiendan estudios adicionales para comprender mejor la importancia de los frutos de mbocoyá en la dieta del Carancho, así como el papel de esta ave en las interacciones planta-animal, dado que podría actuar como un dispersor de semillas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *dieta, ecología, Falconiformes, gremio trófico*

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The Falconidae family is represented in Brazil by 20 bird species (Pacheco et al. 2021), among which is the species popularly known as the Crested Caracara (*Caracara plancus*). The species has a broad geographical distribution, extending from Argentina to the southern United States, occupying a wide variety of environments, excluding the Andes Mountains. Its largest population is found in southeastern and northeastern Brazil (Sick 1997; Morrison & Dwyer 2021; Wikiaves 2026).

The Crested Caracara is described as an opportunistic bird (Sick 1997), and it feeds on both dead and living animals. It is frequently found along roadsides and in burn areas (sometimes in groups), as well as by the seashore, where it does not reject even the most caustic myriapods (Sick 1997). The species also consumes lizards, snakes, amphibians, and snails, raids the nests of other birds and, in Brazil, scratches the soil with its feet in search of peanuts and beans, harvests oil palm fruits, attacks newborn lambs, and follows tractors plowing the land to collect earthworms and even giant earthworms (Sick 1997; Morrison & Dwyer 2021; Moura et al. 2012).

Here we report a new food item in the diet of the Crested Caracara in Brazil: the fruits of the macaw palm (*Acrocomia aculeata*). On November 6, 2020, we observed an individual of Crested Caracara foraging on the ground for fallen macaw palm fruits. Upon detecting the team, the bird took flight, carrying the fruit in its talons. The observation took place at Sítio Santa Cruz (21°15'S, 44°57'W, 890 masl), in the municipality of Lavras, southern Minas Gerais state, Brazil, during a study on the bird community and using Nikon Action 8x40 binoculars. The landscape of the study area is characterized by the presence of fragments of semideciduous seasonal forest, riparian forest of the Santa Cruz stream, and anthropic areas (pastures and cultivated land; Moura & Soares-Júnior 2010). The records were obtained from a macaw palm (Fig. 1) situated within an anthropic pasture area.

The great macaw palm has globose fruits, 3.3–5.8 cm in diameter, a chartaceous epicarp, usually yellowish-green, a fleshy, fibrous, and mucilaginous mesocarp, typically yellowish but potentially presenting other colors, a bony, thick, dark brown endocarp strongly adhered to the mesocarp, and 1–4 seeds with a large amount of solid endosperm adnate to the endocarp. It occurs in tropical and subtropical America, and across almost the entire Brazilian territory, with higher population densities found in the states of Minas Gerais and São Paulo. It is typically associated with open areas and pastures, though it also occurs in different types of vegetation formations, such as semideciduous forests, under various soil types, climates, and altitudes (Reflora 2026).

Even though the Crested Caracara is a widely studied species and is considered an omnivorous bird in the literature, there are only a few plant-based food items mentioned in its diet, such as the fruits of the African oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*; Sick 1997). In particular, the consumption of macaw palm fruits by the Crested Caracara was previously recorded by Villalba & Fariña (2023) for Corrientes Province, Argentina.

To conclude, the Crested Caracara could potentially be a disperser of macaw palm seeds since, as we observed, its habit of carrying the fruits suggests that some may be dropped, thus germinating across various Brazilian biomes and phytophysiognomies (Reflora 2026). Further studies are needed to confirm this hypothesis, as well as to understand the importance of the fruits of the macaw palm in the diet of the Crested Caracara.



Figura 1. Adult plant of macaw palm (*Acrocomia aculeata*). Adapted from Valderrama (2021).

Figure 1. Adulto de palmera mbocoyá (*Acrocomia aculeata*). Adaptado de Valderrama (2021).

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