

Gerhard Gottsberger & Ilse Silberbauer-Gottsberger: *Life in the Cerrado*

Vulnerable Hotspot

The Cerrado, also referred to as “Brazil’s unknown heart”, features an extraordinary range of plant and animal biodiversity. A two-volume opus brings the endangered ecosystem closer to readers.

Imagine a vast landscape; so huge that one could fit the United Kingdom in it eight times over. Imagine the wild homeland of more than 1,600 species of higher animals, including termites, leaf-cutter ants, Giant Armadillos, Cougars and Ocelots. Imagine a green oasis – wet in winter, hot and dry in summer – containing over 10,000 species of vascular plants, coexisting with fire for aeons and suffering in recent times from unscrupulous big business. Imagine a region that is, in terms of ecology, the richest savannah in the world and, at the same time, one of the most threatened ecosystems on the South American continent.

Imagine Brazil’s unknown heart: the Cerrado.

This vast tropical savannah ecoregion in central Brazil is, after the more famous Amazonia, the second largest of Brazil’s major biomes. Two million square kilometres in size, the Cerrado is characterised by an extraordinary range of plant and animal biodiversity. However, this serenity is in danger. Only 1-3 % of the Cerrado is protected by law, and agriculture and cattle ranching continue to destroy the ecosystem. It is disputable whether this threatened natural heritage can be preserved for further generations.



Double pack: *Life in the Cerrado* comes in two volumes. Each offers an inspiring read.

Those who are interested in learning more about this largely unknown region, should take a look at *Life in the Cerrado*. The authors, Gerhard Gottsberger and Ilse Silberbauer-Gottsberger, both natives of Graz, Austria, published this groundbreaking, two-volume opus in 2006. The couple are among the most skilled Cerrado experts worldwide, and their 660-page publication represents a lifetime’s work.

Urgent need for conservation

Gottsberger is a professor emeritus of botany at Ulm University, Germany, and the former director of the university’s botanical garden there. He and his wife lived (and did



South American vegetation (orange: cerrado and savannah).

biological research) in Brazil from 1967/68, and returned to Europe in 1983. “Our publication is intended as a basis for further explorations”, he says, but it is hard to believe that further generations can discover more relevant insights about this ecological region in the light of this standard work.

Life in the Cerrado delivers a plethora of information about any imaginable biological topic. The chapters of Volume 1 (“*Origin, Structure, Dynamics and Plant Use*”) cover geology and geomorphology, soil properties, climate, vegetation types, the influence of fire and frost on plants and vegetation, seed germination, the features of Cerrado plants, vegetation rhythm, and much more. Volume 2 (“*Pollination and Seed Dispersal*”) focuses mainly on the relationship between animals and plants. The chapters are about reproduction and seed formation and about the role of bees, bats, butterflies and other animals as seed dispersal agents.

The authors worked nearly ten years on this book and then couldn’t find a publishing house that wanted to publish it at a reasonable price. To ensure adequate quality, Gottsberger and his wife decided to take matters into their own hands. The result reaches unusually high standards in contents and printing quality. The photos and drawings are outstanding as well as the clearly arranged maps, charts, and tables. The layout and the paper quality are both excellent, too. Well done!

WEANÉE KIMBLEWOOD

Gerhard Gottsberger & Ilse Silberbauer-Gottsberger: *Life in the Cerrado*. Reta-Verlag, Ulm, 2006. Vol. I: 277 pages, €49.00, Vol. II : 383 pages, €59.00.



View of the “Chapada dos Guimarães” red sandstone plateau. Nice, isn’t it? But be careful where you step...

Photo: Gottsberger