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CHANGES IN SEED-REMOVING ANTS BETWEEN SEASONS IN A NATURAL ECOTONE

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Some neotropical regions have well defined periods of drought and rainfall, which may be related to change in resources availability and, indirectly, to change of communities and ecosystem functions. This work aimed to evaluate the influence of seasonality on seed-removing ant richness, composition and activity. We hypothesized that with the change of dry to rainy season there is increase in richness, change in composition and increase in activity. This study was carried out in northern Minas Gerais at the APA Pandeiros, in a Cerrado-Caatinga transition area. We sampled ants in 12 areas, in July 2014 and January 2016. In each area, we established ten sampling points containing ten artificial diaspores. We observed each sampling point for five minutes and three times each. We performed GLMM to evaluate the difference in richness and NMDS followed by ANOSIM to evaluate the change in composition and we evaluated the amount of seeds removed as an indirect measure of ant activity in two seasons. Seed-removing ant richness was lower in dry season, species composition was different between seasons, and the dry season showed lower seed removal. Insects, in general, have higher species richness during the rainy season likely because there is greater resources availability which would allow greater number of organisms to coexist by sharing these resources. In dry season, there is a decrease of these resources leading to a reduction of species with active foraging activity removing less seeds. The decrease of ant richness and change in composition may affect the ecosystem functions performed by these organisms. Understanding these changes in ant assemblages caused by seasonality may be important to predict global changes such as those caused by global warming and to think about better conservation strategies.

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