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“Timber Exploitation in Colonial Brazil: A Historical Perspective of the Atlantic Forest”

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Timber was an important resource for the construction of colonial Brazil, although pertinent information is limited. We used the available archival material and an interdisciplinary methodology, spanning historical, botanical and ethnobotanical methods, to illuminate the exploitation of native timber during the colonial period and its relevance for the contemporary conservation status of the Atlantic Forest. Central to our methodology was the development of a standardized protocol focusing on folk names for timber trees, which permitted us to relate historical records and ecological data. Even though historical information is scarce, scattered, and sometimes contradictory, we could demonstrate the past prestige of timber as well as the harvest impact on local forests. We conclude that the extensive exploitation of the Atlantic Forest’s timber resources throughout the colonial period contributed to the current state of vegetation, where many of the species abundant in the past are now rare and threatened. (Abstract)

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