



## Taxonomic status of *Akodon oenos* (Rodentia, Sigmodontinae), an obscure species from West Central Argentina

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### Abstract

*Akodon oenos* Braun, Mares, and Ojeda, 2000 was described on a large sample of individuals collected from two localities near Mendoza city, Argentina. This sample was obtained in the 1980's by Julio R. Contreras and María I. Rossi and labeled, but never published, as “*Akodon minoprioi* new species.” The description provided by Braun and collaborators was limited to craniodental and color pelage traits compared with those of five individuals of the sympatric form *A. molinae* Contreras, 1968. *Akodon oenos* was proposed as new and presumptively allied to the *A. varius* species group of *Akodon*. In February 2009 we collected an individual of *Akodon* in Llancañelo Natural Reserve, southern Mendoza, that morphologically fits the original description of *A. oenos*. Further study of some individuals of the type series of *A. oenos* reinforces this taxonomic hypothesis for the Llancañelo specimen. However, comparisons with other *Akodon* species overlooked by Braun and collaborators, reveals striking similarities with the widespread and phenotypically variable species *A. spegazzinii* Thomas, 1897. The evidence at hand, including morphological, karyological, and genetical traits, allows us to propose a new taxonomic scenario. *A. oenos* is considered here a junior synonym of *A. spegazzinii* and therefore belongs to the *A. boliviensis* species group of *Akodon*, extending the known geographic distribution for this species at least to southern Mendoza piedmont in the ecotone between the Monte and Patagonia eco-regions. More generally, this situation highlights the necessity when working with complex genera (as many sigmodontines are) to perform extensive comparisons and to use several sets of evidence in order to reduce the probability of generating biologically redundant names and more taxonomic confusion.

**Key words:** *Akodon spegazzinii*, phylogeny, *boliviensis* group, *varius* group, Mendoza

### Introduction

About 41 living species are currently recognized in the genus *Akodon* Meyen, 1833, being one of the most diverse within the Sigmodontinae radiation (Musser & Carleton 2005). Several of these species are known from fragmentary data turning their specific status debatable. This is the case of *Akodon oenos*, an entity coined by Braun *et al.* (2000) for two adjacent populations from west central Mendoza province, Argentina. This species was described based on a large sample of individuals secured by Julio R. Contreras and María I. Rosi in the early 1980's and distinguished by these researchers as “*Akodon minoprioi*” (in schedis). However, this name was never formally published, thus becoming a *nomen nudum* (see Galliari *et al.* 1996). The original description of *A. oenos* was limited to few morphological data retrieved from museum skull and skin specimens without examination of fresh material. Furthermore, a comparison with putative related forms was restricted to a single species, *A. molinae* Contreras 1968 that lives sympatrically with *A. oenos*, while ignoring other at least geographically close candidates (e.g., *A. iniscatus* Thomas, 1919 [including *nucus*, Thomas et Saint Leger, 1926], *A. neocenus* Thomas, 1919). Although *A. oenos* was envisioned as a potential member of the *A. varius* species group of *Akodon* (see Braun *et al.* 2000), the