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The *Akodon boliviensis* species group (Rodentia: Cricetidae: Sigmodontinae) in Argentina: species limits and distribution, with the description of a new entity

J. PABLO JAYAT¹, PABLO E. ORTIZ², JORGE SALAZAR-BRAVO³, ULYSES F. J. PARDIÑAS⁴
& GUILLERMO D'ELÍA^{5,6}

¹Laboratorio de Investigaciones Ecológicas de Las Yungas (LIEY). Facultad de Ciencias Naturales e Instituto Miguel Lillo, Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, Casilla de Correo 34, 4107 Yerba Buena, Tucumán, Argentina. E-mail: pjayat@proyungas.org.ar

²Cátedra de Paleontología, Facultad de Ciencias Naturales e Instituto Miguel Lillo, Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, Miguel Lillo 205, 4000 San Miguel de Tucumán, Tucumán, Argentina. E-mail: peortiz@uolsinectis.com.ar

³Department of Biological Sciences, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409. E-mail: j.salazar-bravo@ttu.edu

⁴Centro Nacional Patagónico, casilla de correo 128, 9120 Puerto Madryn, Chubut, Argentina. E-mail: ulyses@cenpat.edu.ar

⁵Departamento de Zoología, Universidad de Concepción, casilla 160-C, Concepción, Chile. E-mail: guillermo@udec.cl

⁶Corresponding author. E-mail: guillermo@udec.cl



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J. PABLO JAYAT, PABLO E. ORTIZ, JORGE SALAZAR-BRAVO, ULYSES F. J. PARDIÑAS & GUILLERMO D'ELÍA

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ABSTRACT

Akodon, with about 42 living species, is the most diverse genus of the subfamily Sigmodontinae. The *Akodon boliviensis* species group includes small-bodied, morphologically similar forms inhabiting Altiplano grasslands and grassland/forest ecotones of the eastern slope of the Andes, from central Peru to central Argentina. Northwestern Argentina contains the largest diversity of species of the group; the taxonomic treatment of these species has been based largely on unsupported and some weakly based opinions as underscored by recurrent changes. Based on morphologic and molecular data we assessed species limits among Argentinean populations of the *Akodon boliviensis* species group. We conclude that four species of the *A. boliviensis* species group inhabit northwestern Argentina. These are: *A. boliviensis*; *A. caenosus* (under which we synonymyze *A. aliquantulus*); *A. spegazzinii* (of which the nominal forms *alterus*, *leucolimnaeus*, and *tucumanensis* are junior synonyms); and *A. sylvanus*. Additionally, we described here a new species of the *A. boliviensis* species group, *Akodon polopi*, which inhabits central Argentina. This is the only species of the *A. boliviensis* species group inhabiting the Sierras Grandes range (ca. 2000 m), mountain system of medium height, isolated (ca., 600 km) from the main Andean chain by low elevation arid and semiarid environments. Additionally, our phylogenetic analyses suggests that the *Akodon varius* species group is polyphyletic.

Key words: *Akodon boliviensis*, *Akodon caenosus*, *Akodon polopi* n. sp., *Akodon spegazzinii*, *Akodon sylvanus*, *Akodon varius*, Akodontini, new species, Argentina, Pampa de Achala, taxonomy

INTRODUCTION

As currently understood, *Akodon* Meyen is the most diverse sigmodontine genus with ca. 42 living forms recognized at the species level. The taxonomic and nomenclatorial complexity of *Akodon* is now widely recognized (Myers 1989; Myers *et al.* 1990; Pardiñas *et al.* 2005, 2006; Patton & Smith 1992; Reig 1987; Smith & Patton 2007). Although recent contributions (e.g., Braun *et al.* 2000; 2008; Christoff *et al.* 2000; Geise *et al.* 1998, 2001; Hershkovitz 1998; Jayat *et al.* 2007a; Myers 1989; Myers & Patton 1989a; Myers *et al.* 1990;