



New data on morphology and natural history of *Deltamys kemp* Thomas, 1919 (Cricetidae, Sigmodontinae) from central-eastern Argentina

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Abstract

We provided new data on morphology and natural history of the rare sigmodontine rodent *Deltamys kemp*. Field work was conducted in Reserva Costanera Sur, Buenos Aires, central-eastern Argentina during two consecutive years. The glans penis of *D. kemp* is short and stocky and sub-cylindrical in appearance; the stomach is unilocular-hemiglandular; the baculum has a well developed cartilaginous portion, with two lateral digits and a central one; gall bladder is present. We also describe for the first time the soft palate and the manus and pes morphology. Soft palate, stomach, glans penis, manus and pes morphology of *Deltamys* is similar to *Akodon*, its hypothesized sister taxon. *D. kemp* was more frequently captured in relatively pure stands of the tall grass *Cortaderia selloana*. According to the available records in Argentina, *D. kemp* occupies preferably grassy marshes and dense gramineous patches in gallery forest. Reproductive season seems to start at the late winter-early spring and to last until the end of summer-early autumn. Stomach contents of four individuals had mainly insects and insect larvae. Ectoparasites found in *D. kemp* included the Acari *Androlaelaps fahrenheitsi*, A. aff. *A. rotundus* and *Laelaps paulistanensis*, and the Siphonaptera *Polygenis* sp.

Key words: Rodentia. Akodontini. Kemp's Grass Mouse. Ecology

Introduction

The genus *Deltamys* includes only one species, *Deltamys kemp* Thomas, which is distributed from northeastern Buenos Aires and southern Entre Ríos provinces in Argentina, throughout Uruguay to the Atlantic littoral of the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil (Massoia, 1964; Fronza *et al.*, 1981; Massoia, 1983; Castro *et al.*, 1991; Bianchini & Delupi, 1993; González & Massoia, 1995; González, 1996; González & Fregueiro, 1999; González, 2001; González & Pardiñas 2002). *Deltamys kemp* is a small, dark colored mouse, with conspicuously small eyes and dense velvety pelage (González & Pardiñas 2002). This mouse prefers lowland coastal areas, including lagoons and flooding grasslands, although it does not show any specialized external adaptations for aquatic life (Massoia 1964; González & Massoia 1995). Phylogenetic analysis based on molecular data indicates that the monotypic genus *Deltamys* is the sister group of the *Akodon* clade (D'Elía 2003; D'Elía *et al.* 2003; but see Smith & Patton in press).

The knowledge about the distribution of *D. kemp* in Argentina is poor because few specimens (<30) have been collected and deposited in scientific collections. *D. kemp* is hardly distinguished externally from middle-sized species of *Akodon*, such as the sympatric *Akodon azarae*, and there could be some confusion in capture-recapture studies between these two species (D'Elía *et al.* 2003). In addition, the rarity of *D. kemp*, at least in Argentinean localities (e. g., Bianchini & Delupi 1993; Massoia 1964), implies that little is known about its natural history and ecology. Most ecological information of *D. kemp* is a by-product of specimen