



## A new large didelphid of the genus *Thylophorops* (Mammalia: Didelphimorphia: Didelphidae), from the late Tertiary of the Pampean Region (Argentina)

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### Abstract

We describe *Thylophorops lorenzinii* **sp. nov.** (Marsupialia, Didelphidae), the largest known didelphid opossum, living or extinct. Its type specimen comes from Late Pliocene levels at Punta San Andrés, southeastern Buenos Aires Province, Argentina. With an estimated body mass between 4.8 and 7.4 kg, it obviously surpasses that of the (up to now) largest didelphid, the living *Didelphis virginiana* Kerr. In addition to its larger size, the new species differs from *T. chapalmalensis* Ameghino and *T. perplanus* Ameghino in that its lower molars have more labially salient hypoconids and proportionally large hypoconulids which are not antero-posteriorly compressed.

**Key words:** *Thylophorops lorenzinii* **sp. nov.**, Didelphidae, Marplatan Stage/Age, Argentina

### Resumen

Se describe a *Thylophorops lorenzinii* **sp. nov.** (Marsupialia: Didelphidae), la zarigüeya más grande, fósil o viviente, hasta ahora conocida. Su ejemplar tipo procede de niveles del Plioceno Tardío de Punta San Andrés, en el sudeste de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina. Con una masa corporal estimada entre 4,7 y 7,5 kg, sobrepasa claramente aquella del (hasta ahora) más grande didélfido conocido, *Didelphis virginiana* Kerr. Más allá de su mayor tamaño, la nueva especie difiere de *T. chapalmalensis* Ameghino y *T. perplanus* Ameghino en que sus molares inferiores tienen hipocónulidos proporcionalmente grandes, los cuales no están comprimidos anteroposteriormente, y en que los hipocónidos son más salientes labialmente.

**Palabras clave:** *Thylophorops lorenzinii* **sp. nov.**, Didelphidae, Piso/Edad Marplatense, Argentina.

### Introduction

Large sized, 2n=22 opossums (Marsupialia: Didelphidae: Didelphinae; Reig et al. 1977, Kirsch & Palma 1995) are widely distributed throughout the Americas, especially in tropical South America. However, their late Cenozoic history and taxonomy is mostly known from fossil sites in higher latitudes such as those of the Pliocene-Pleistocene deposits in the Pampean Region (Goin 1995). A remarkable aspect of these late Cenozoic associations is that didelphines show a decided trend toward more carnivorous-faunivorous feeding habits, as revealed by their dental specializations. One example of this trend is the extinct *Thylophorops* Ameghino, a genus showing affinities with *Didelphis* Linnaeus and *Philander* Brisson (Goin 1991, *contra*