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Biogeographical regionalisation of the Neotropical region

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Abstract

A biogeographic regionalisation of the Neotropical region is proposed as a hierarchical classification of sub-regions, dominions, provinces and districts. This regionalisation is based on biogeographic analyses of terrestrial plant and animal taxa, and seeks to provide universality, objectivity and stability, such that it can be applied when describing distributional areas of particular taxa or comparing different biogeographic analyses. The Neotropical region is currently comprised of three sub-regions (Antillean, Brazilian and Chacoan), two transition zones (Mexican and South American), seven dominions (Mesoamerican, Pacific, Boreal Brazilian, Southwestern Amazonian, Southeastern Amazonian, Chacoan and Parana) and 53 provinces. For some of the latter, sub-provinces and districts are recognized. Complete synonymies and brief descriptions of the areas are provided, as well as the endemic taxa that diagnose the different provinces.

Key words: Antilles, biogeographical classification, Central America, Mexico, Neotropics, South America

Introduction

The biogeographical regionalisation of the Neotropical region has had a long and complex history (Rapoport 1968; Sánchez Osés & Pérez-Hernández 1998, 2005; Cox 2001; Pérez-Hernández & Lew 2001; Morrone 2002a, 2010a), with many phytogeographical, zoogeographical, biogeographical and ecoregional schemes proposed for over 150 years for the region as a whole or for some particular countries. The existence of different and conflicting area delimitations in these schemes makes the description and comparison of distributional areas rather subjective. Additionally, there are hundreds of names available for naming areas in the Neotropics. The International Code of Area Nomenclature (herein ICAN; Ebach *et al.* 2008) provides some criteria for accommodating existing and newly named areas.

My objective is to provide a regionalisation of the Neotropical region, with explicit area definitions and a standardised nomenclature following ICAN, so that different area definitions for the same name or the same areas with different names can be avoided. This regionalisation is based on terrestrial taxa, and includes previously defined areas and their names.

General structure

A biogeographical regionalisation is a hierarchical system that categorize geographic areas in terms of their biotas, involving the basic levels of realm, region, dominion, province and district (Ebach *et al.* 2008; Escalante 2009). The regionalisation of the Neotropical region presented herein comprises four basic hierarchical levels: sub-regions, dominions, provinces and districts; in a few cases sub-provinces are recognized. In general I followed the nomenclatural conventions set out in ICAN (Ebach *et al.* 2008, 2013), following the notion of priority for using existing names instead of new names. Sclater (1858) is adopted as the date of the starting point of biogeographical nomenclature, as it constitutes the first widely adopted world biogeographical regionalisation. In a few cases I have kept widely used names instead of older synonyms, applying a criterion analogous to the *nomen oblitum* convention of taxonomical nomenclature. In other cases, when several alternative names were competing but none of them was widely used, I selected the name that I believe would provide better stability.

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