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NOTES ON GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Mammalia, Marsupialia, Didelphidae, *Lestodelphys halli*: New records, distribution extension and filling gaps.

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Lestodelphys halli (Figure 1), the southernmost living Neotropical marsupial (Marshall 1977) is also one of the least known representatives of this group regarding geographic distribution, ecology, and natural history. This species - endemic of Argentina - ranges from the Province of Mendoza in the north to the Province of Santa Cruz in the south. Despite the wide area included, roughly from 33º to 48º S, the recording localities documented are scarce and discontinuous (Birney et al. 1996; Pardiñas et al. 2003; Martin 2003; 2005).

We report here new recording localities of *Lestodelphys halli*, hence filling gaps and extending its geographic distribution eastward in Central Patagonia.

The specimens were collected during summers of 2004, 2005 and 2006 in field trips carried out in the Province of Río Negro, mainly in the Somuncura plateau and in the Province of Chubut, Chubut river basin. The studied specimens are craniodental remains (Figure 2) recovered from owl pellets (*Tyto alba* and *Bubo magellanicus*) and two individuals trapped alive (Figure 1). The osteological remains were identified using reference material from the Colección de Mamíferos (CNP) and Colección de Egagrópilas y Afines "Elio Massoia" (CNP-E), both official collections housed at the Centro Nacional Patagónico, Chubut, Argentina. The new materials referred in this contribution were deposited in these collections.

Figure 1. *Lestodelphys halli* (male) trapped in north-western of the Province of Chubut.

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The new localities are (Figure 3):
New distributional records in previously known area of occurrence:
1- Cañadón de la Buitrera, Piedra Parada, Chubut (42º39'05" S, 70º06'11" W): CNP-E 8.
2- Near Estancia Cretón, Piedra Parada, Chubut (42º41'44" S, 70º01'33" W): CNP-E 124.
3- Estancia Cretón, Piedra Parada, Chubut (42º44'38" S, 70º03'18" W): CNP-E 122 and 123.
4- Estancia Cretón, Piedra Parada, Chubut (42º42' S, 70º02' W): CNP-E 39.

Filling gaps:
5- Puesto Machín, Río Negro (41°40'40" S, 69°24'05" W): CNP-E 101.
6- Cañadón Arroyo Quetrequile (41º41'49" S, 69º24'13" W): CNP-E 99.
7- Cañadón del Painemil, Río Negro (41º44'29" S, 69º22'05" W): CNP-E 100.
8- 2 km NW Gastre, Chubut (42º14' S, 69º12' W): CNP-E 57.
9- Campo Netchovitch, Fofo Cahuel, Chubut (42º19'42" S, 70º33'40" W): CNP-E 120 and two live specimens trapped.
10- Fofo Cahuel, Chubut (42º20'27" S, 70º28'05" W): CNP-E 116 to 119.
11- Cerro Gorro Frigio, Chubut (43º05'30" S, 69º19'23" W): CNP-E 40.
12- Estancia El Torito, Chubut (43º16'35,9" S, 69º08'29,5" W): CNP-E 121.
13- Near Cerro Cóndor, Chubut (43º23'20" S, 69º10'13" W): CNP-E 66.

Extension of distribution to the east:
14- Cerro Corona, Río Negro (41º27' S, 66º54' W): CNP-E 76.
15- Subida del Naciente, Río Negro (41º40' S, 67º09' W): CNP-E 27.
16- 4 km S Tres Banderas, Chubut (42º48'31" S, 68º00'56" W): CNP-E 75, and CNP 883 to 886.
17- Cañadón Carbón, Chubut (43º49'27" S, 67º51'04" W): CNP-E 92.
18- Los Altares, Chubut (43º50'40" S, 68º25'20" W): CNP-E 94.
19- Estancia Los Manantiales, Chubut (45°43'59" S, 67º28'59" W): CNP-E 83.
20- Astra, Chubut (45º44' S, 67º29' W): CNP-E 84.

Figure 2. Skull and mandible of *Lestodelphys halli*, CNP 885; scale = 10 mm.

These 20 recording localities are located in the Patagónica Phytogeographic Province (*sensu* León et al. 1998; Figure 3). Some of the new localities reported here are near to the Monte Phytogeographic Province (localities 14 to 19), but no recent record is known for this unit in Central Patagonia. This scenario suggests that *L. halli* is mainly restricted to the Patagonian steppe, although there are two known localities of occurrence at Monte Phytogeographic Province, in

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Patagonia: Lihuel Calel (Province of La Pampa) and Choele Choel (north of the Province of Río Negro). These records could be considered relicts of a wider distribution during Holocene times and could not reflect the optimal habitats where this species inhabit today.

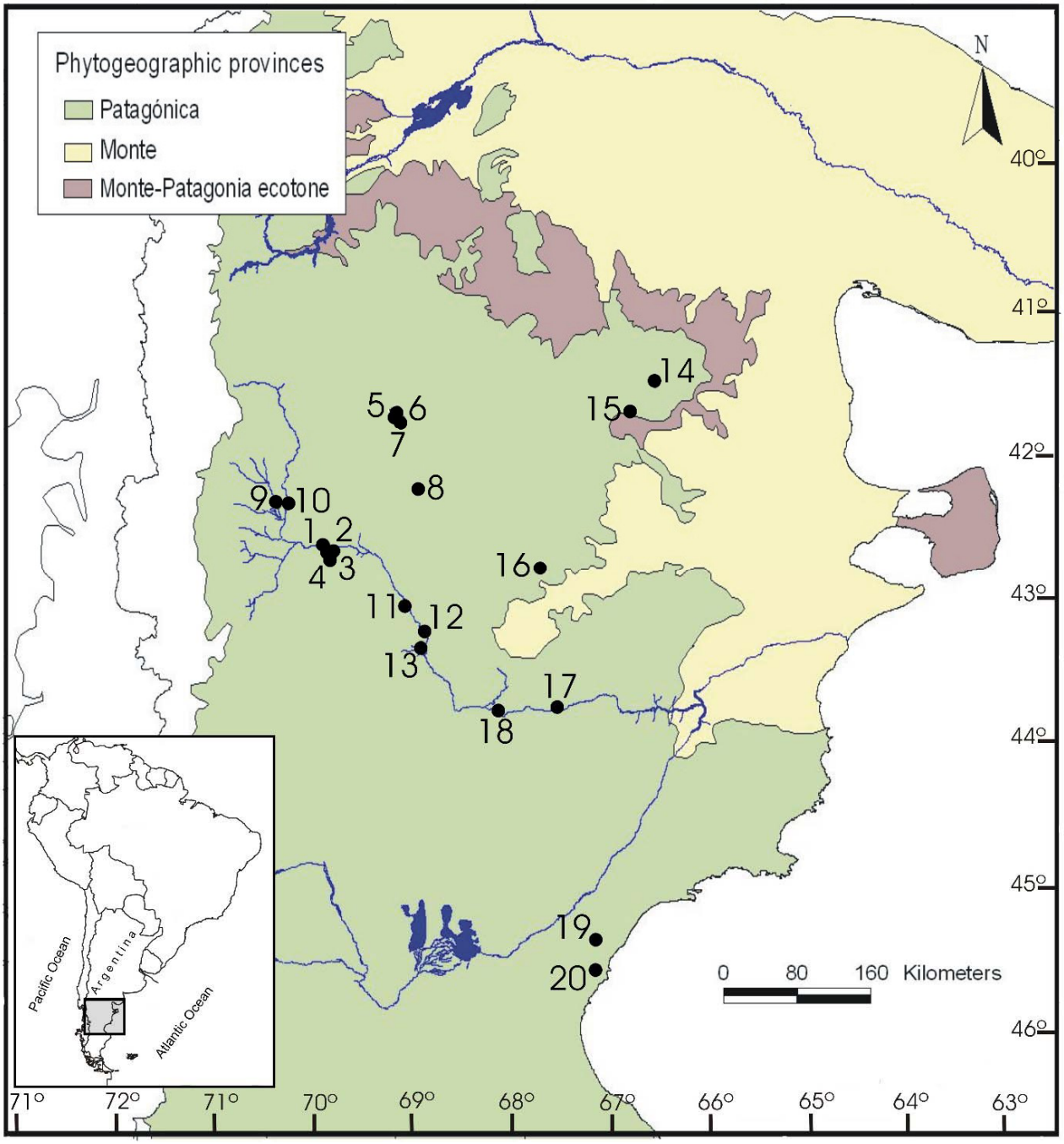

Figure 3. Map of Central Patagonia showing new recording localities for *Lestodelphys halli*.

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