

Xenodon histricus (Jan, 1863) (Squamata: Dipsadidae): distribution extension and new province record in Argentina

Julia S. D'Angelo^{1*}, Federico L. Agnolin^{1,2}, Florencia A. Godoy²

1 Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales "Bernardino Rivadavia", Av. Ángel Gallardo 470 (C1405DJR) Buenos Aires, Argentina

2 Fundación de Historia Natural "Félix de Azara", Universidad Maimónides, Hidalgo 775 (C1405BDB), Buenos Aires, Argentina

* Corresponding author. E-mail: juliasdangelo@gmail.com.ar

Abstract: *Xenodon histricus* is probably the least known species of its genus in South America. In Argentina it has not been collected since 1937, and most records were restricted to the northeastern forests of the country. We report finding this species in 1995 at San José del Morro, San Luis province, Central Argentina. This report fills a gap in the distribution of this taxon, and constitutes the most recent record of the species for the country.

Key words: Dipsadidae, *Xenodon histricus*, new record, San Luis province, Argentina

The genus *Xenodon* (proposed as a senior synonym of *Lystrophis* by Zaher et al. 2009) has six species present in Argentina: (Ceí 1993; Williams and Scrocchi 1994; Oliveira et al. 2001; Nenda et al. 2007, Giraudo et al. 2012). Among these taxa, *Xenodon histricus*, *X. pulcher*, and *X. semicinctus* are mimetic with species of the genus *Micrurus* (Ceí 1993; Williams and Scrocchi 1994; Giraudo 2001).

Xenodon histricus is by far the least known of the Argentine representatives of the genus (Devincenzi 1926; Alves et al. 2013). In Uruguay and Argentina, it is categorized as a data-deficient species (Canavero et al. 2010, Giraudo et al. 2012). It was originally described by Jan in 1863, having as a *Terra Typica* "South America" (Jan and Sordelli 1865). Regrettably, the holotype was lost in 1943 (Wallach et al. 2014). The species is distributed in southern South America, including southern Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina (Carreira et al. 2012; Wallach et al. 2014). In Argentina has been reported from the provinces of Chaco, Corrientes, Formosa, La Pampa, and Misiones (Koslowsky 1898; Serié 1921, 1936; Ceí 1993, Williams and Francini 1991; Giraudo 2001; Giraudo and Scrocchi 2002). However, vouchers exist only from Misiones, Formosa and La Pampa (Giraudo and Scrocchi 2002).

The aim of the present note is to describe and report

for the first time *Xenodon histricus* in San Luis province, increasing its distribution in Argentina.

Species determination follows characters provided by Scrocchi and Cruz (1993), and the systematics follows the proposal of Costa and Bérnils (2014).

The specimen, housed in the Reptile Collection of the Fundación de Historia Natural "Félix de Azara" (CFA-Re-450) was collected in San José del Morro (33°12'47.62" S, 065°29'30.95" W), San Luis province, Argentina by José W. Soroka on 20 March 1995 (Figure 1). It is a young female with 32 black bands on the body and 6 black bands on the tail. It has a snout-vent length 263 mm, and tail length of 34 mm. The ventral surface of the specimen was red in life, with small sparse subrectangular black blotches (Figure 2). The individual is discolored due to preservation. Scale counts are 139 ventrals, 52 anals, and 18 rows of dorsals.

The specimen was determined to be *X. histricus* by having reddish-brown dorsal coloration with 32 to 36 narrow black bands (Ceí 1993; Scrocchi and Cruz 1993). Furthermore, the specimen can be distinguished from other Argentinean species of the genus by head scalation; the rostral completely separates the nasals, prefrontal scales in contact, and antefrontal scale absent (Ceí 1993; Giraudo 2001).

In Argentina, *X. histricus* is represented by seven specimens in herpetological collections, five of which were collected from four locations in southern Misiones province and one from Formosa, although without precise location data (Giraudo 2001). A single specimen was collected in La Pampa province, but due to its location (1,500 km from the Misiones records) was considered as dubious (Giraudo 2001; Scrocchi and Giraudo 2002). However, the new record from San Luis suggests that *X. histricus* actually does occur in La Pampa.

The few available records of the species show that it is a very rare snake, probably restricted to pristine grasslands and related open habitats (Prigione et al. 2011; Alves et al. 2013). The present record supports this

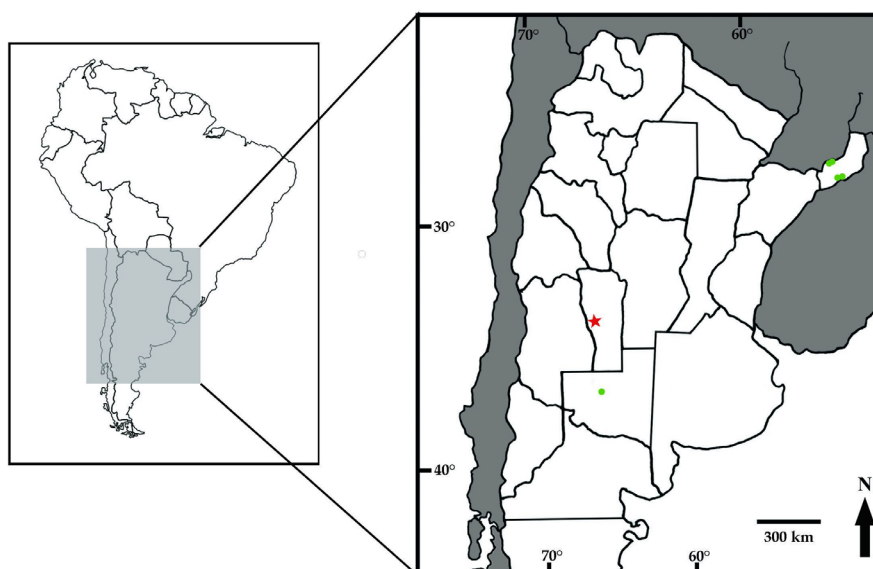


Figure 1. Map of the distribution in Argentina of *Xenodon histricus* based on specimens deposited in collections (green dots), including the new record (red star) in San José del Morro, San Luis province. The record from Formosa province lacks precise data and is therefore not shown. Data taken from Alves et al. (2013).

proposal: San José del Morro is a locality surrounded by open shrubs and grasslands (Del Vitto et al. 1994), and is located in the southwestern portion of the “Espinal Biogeographical Province” (Cabrera and Willink 1973). This ecoregion is endangered by increasing agricultural activities, mainly cultivation of soybeans (Arturi 2006).

In addition, the most recent finding of *X. histricus* in Argentina was from 1937, and no specimens have been reported since then (Viñas and Olmedo 1988; Giraudo 2001). The present specimen, collected in 1995, constitutes the most recent find for the species in the country.

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Figure 2. Dorsal (a) and ventral (b) views of specimen referred to *Xenodon histricus* (CFA-Re-450). Scale bar 30 mm. Photos by F.L. Agnolín.

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