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RE-EXAMINING THE HYPOTHESIS OF ALLOPATRIC DISTRIBUTION OF *MYOPROCTA ACOUCHY* AND *M. PRATTI* (MAMMALIA: DASYPROCTIDAE) IN SOUTH AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

Currently, two allopatric species of acouchies, genus *Myoprocta* (Rodentia: Dasyproctidae) are recognized. Nevertheless, there is morphological variability in the regions where the species are distributed that suggests either sympatry of two (or more) distinct species or else breakdowns in the characters that have been used to diagnose the species. We reviewed specimens of *Myoprocta* from Colombia and found that both reddish and greenish forms are sympatric in the Amazon basin of the country, including areas adjoining Ecuador and Peru. These records apparently refute the hypothesis of allopatry for these species in South America. However, the results of a principal components analysis showed little or no morphological separation between these two forms. In addition, a review of skulls throughout the geographic range of *M. pratti* shows high morphological variation. Although sympatry of reddish and greenish acouchies has been suggested for the Amazon region of Ecuador, our review found no evidence of this. In view of our findings, further revisionary work is needed to clarify the status of these forms.

KEY-WORDS: Amazonas; Acouchies; Distribution; Hybridization; Sympatry.

INTRODUCTION

The acouchies (*Myoprocta*) are medium-sized caviomorph rodents of the family Dasyproctidae endemic to South America (Voss *et al.*, 2001; Woods & Kilpatrick, 2005). Two species are currently recognized: *M. acouchy*, distributed in Guyana, French Guiana, Surinam, and Brazil north of the Amazon and east of the Rio Branco, and *M. pratti*, distributed

in southern Venezuela (headwaters of the Orinoco), eastern Colombia and Ecuador, northern Peru, and western Brazil (Woods & Kilpatrick, 2005). Voss *et al.* (2001) identified a combination of pelage, size, and cranial characters to distinguish *Myoprocta* species. *Myoprocta acouchy* (red acouchi) is principally rich reddish-brown dorsally, with saturate long dark hairs along the rump midline and uniformly orange or reddish underparts, whereas *M. pratti* (green acouchi)

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