

NOTA CIENTÍFICA

First records of the Oriental species *Ulomoides dermestoides* (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae) in Argentina

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• **ABSTRACT.** The occurrence in Argentina of the Oriental tenebrionid *Ulomoides dermestoides* (Fairmaire) is reported for the first time. The species was found attacking wheat bread and stored wheat grains (*Triticum aestivum* L.) in Buenos Aires province. It was also collected at houses in Misiones, Tucumán, Santa Fé, Córdoba, San Luis, and Río Negro provinces, where people rear it to be used as Oriental medicine for treatment of cancer.

KEY WORDS. Tenebrionidae. *Ulomoides dermestoides*. Distribution. Argentina.

• **RESUMEN.** Primera cita de la especie oriental *Ulomoides dermestoides* (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae) para la Argentina. Se cita al tenebriónido oriental *Ulomoides dermestoides* (Fairmaire) por primera vez para la Argentina. La especie fue hallada atacando pan y trigo (*Triticum aestivum* L.) almacenado en la provincia de Buenos Aires. También fue recolectada en viviendas en las provincias de Misiones, Tucumán, Santa Fé, Córdoba, San Luis y Río Negro, donde se la cría domésticamente para su uso como una medicina oriental para tratamiento del cáncer.

PALABRAS CLAVE. Tenebrionidae. *Ulomoides dermestoides*. Distribución. Argentina.

Fairmaire (1893a) characterized *Alphitobius? dermestoides* from Indo-China and he thought that this species had been previously described by Chevrolat (1878) as *Histeropsis dermestoides*. Later, Fairmaire (1893b) classified this species in *Martianus* Fairmaire. Gebien (1939) listed this species belonging to *Martianus* endemic from Indomalaya and Papua. Kaszab (1955) stated that the species described by Fairmaire under the name *Alphitobius? dermestoides* was not *Histeropsis dermestoides* Chevrolat. Halstead (1975) synonymized *Martianus* with *Palembus* Casey, suggesting the new combination *Palembus dermestoides* (Fairmaire). More recently, Doyen *et al.* (1989) synonymized *Palembus* with *Ulomoides* Black-

burn, so that the new combination for this species is *Ulomoides dermestoides* (Fairmaire).

This species has not been listed in catalogs for the Americas (Gebien, 1939; Blackwelder, 1945) nor in two recent lists for Argentina, one on all the tenebrionid fauna reported to the country (Flores, 1998) and the other dealing with tenebrionids attacking plants and stored grains (Flores & Debandi, in press). The first published record for South America is from Colombia (Vergara *et al.*, 1997) and more recently was reported in Brazil where it was introduced by Oriental immigrants that use the beetles for treatment of asthma, arthritis, tuberculosis, and sexual impotency (Buzzi & Miyazaki, 1999). However, some specimens of

this tenebrionid were collected as early as 1977 in Brazil, attacking stored groundnuts (*Arachis hypogea* L), according to data on specimens identified by T. J. Spilman at the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC (Warren E. Steiner, Jr. pers. comm.).

In June 2000, R.E.S. received specimens of *Ulomoides dermestoides* from Picada Chacabuco, in Leandro N. Alem Department, Misiones province (Northeast Argentina), reared domestically in houses for use as an alternative treatment for cancer. At that time, local newspapers of Misiones published some short articles stating that a "gorgojo" (common name in Spanish for the weevils, sic) was an effective medicine for cancer. Simultaneously, this tenebrionid was being offered alive to anywhere in the country. In these newspapers, people were reported to have received samples of this tenebrionid by mail in remote places from Misiones, such as Buenos Aires.

In November, 2000 S.B.P. received specimens of *Ulomoides dermestoides* that were reported attacking wheat bread in La Plata, Buenos Aires province (East Argentina). In April, 2001 the owner of a silo that stores wheat grains (*Triticum aestivum* L.) in Bavio, Magdalena, Buenos Aires province, brought a sample of specimens of this tenebrionid to S.B.P., reporting an infestation in the silo.

During March, April, and May, 2002 G.E.F. received specimens of *Ulomoides dermestoides* from San Miguel de Tucumán, Tucumán province (Northwest Argentina), from Casilda, Santa Fé province (East Argentina), from Río Cuarto, Córdoba province (Central Argentina), from San Luis, San Luis province (Central Argentina), and from Bariloche, Río Negro province (South Argentina), where it is also being reared in houses for treatment of cancer.

At present, we know this species has become widespread throughout the country and it is a potential pest in stored grains and cereals. For Misiones, the point of arrival was from Asunción, Paraguay, according to the personal Communications of the people that brought the first specimens to R.E.S.

Voucher specimens were determined using the key of Spilman (1991: Plate 102, Fig. C) and deposited in Argentina: Cátedra de Entomología, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (Córdoba), Fundación e Instituto Miguel Lillo (San Miguel de Tucumán), Museo Argentino de Ciencias Natura-

les "Bernardino Rivadavia" (Buenos Aires), Museo de La Plata (Buenos Aires), Instituto Argentino de Investigaciones de las Zonas Áridas (Mendoza), and U.S.A.: National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, and The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

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