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CITIZEN SCIENCE AS A POWERFUL TOOL TO COLLECT BIOLOGICAL DATA. THE CASE OF THE CARRYING OFFSPRING BY ARMADILLOS

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RESUMO

Armadillos (Dasypodidae and Chlamyphoridae) are the only extant mammals characterized by bony shielded regions that protect their head, body, and tail. They have been found exclusively in the Americas. Although different types of studies were carried out in armadillos (which includes evolutionary history, anatomy, histology, parasitology, ecology and physiology) and the fact that they are easily maintained in zoos, little is known about their reproductive strategies. Reproduction is seasonal (from late winter and throughout the entire austral spring and summer, i.e., September to March). During mating season two to four males attempt to mate with a single female, after mating the female raises the offspring alone. Behavioral aspects linked to parental care are little known among armadillos. This contribution describes and documents for the first time (both by photos and video) the carrying of young offspring by Chaetophractus villosus and Zaedyus pichiy at different locations of Argentina and Chile. This study was performed by different methods which includes field work and interviews to local farmers and by social networks, following the rules of the citizen science. The multimedia records correspond four to C. villosus and one to Z. pichiy. In all cases the adult catches their pup with its mouth, from its right or left forelimb (one case from the border of the pup scapular shield). Even though the observations presented here do not permit establish the sex of the adult, it probably corresponds to a female, as was observed in Euphractus sexcinctus. This behavior could be related to the nearby predator or related to climatic factors that affect the places of refuge and upbringing of the offspring, given that four cases recorded in Argentina were immediately after a few days of heavy rains that could have flooded the den and forced females to switch between burrows. Due to all cases are temporally and geographically disconnected and were observed in different ecoregions and species, this behavior could be widespread and part of the usual repertoire of behaviors of the species rather than rare occurrences. Finally, these results show the importance of the teamwork between researchers and citizens to gain new information about mammals, especially those concerning to cryptic species, distribution and/or particular or uncommon behavior.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Key words: Chaetophractus, Chlamyphoridae, Citizen Science, postnatal care, Zaedyus

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