Neoplatymops mattogrossensis. By Michael R. Willig and J. Knox Jones, Jr.

Published 13 December 1985 by The American Society of Mammalogists

Neoplatymops mattogrossensis (Peterson, 1965)

Neoplatymops mattogrossensis Veira, 1965:3. Type species Molossops mattogrossensis Veira.

CONTEXT AND CONTENT. Order Chiroptera, Family Molossoidea. The genus Neoplatymops is monotypic; some regard it as a subgenus of Molossops.

Neoplatymops mattogrossensis (Veira, 1942)

South American Flat-headed Bat


CONTEXT AND CONTENT. Context same as for generic account above. No subspecies are recognized.

DIAGNOSIS. Inasmuch as the genus is monotypic, this diagnosis applies to both genus and species (Peterson, 1965). Size small for a member of the family Molossidae (Fig. 1). Forearm with small wart-like granular structures on the dorsal surface not found in any other New World molossid; gular gland on throat; dental formula i 1/2, c 1/1, p 2/2, m 3/3, total 30; upper incisors strongly hooked forward and separated from each other and from canines by evident spaces; two premolars above and below well developed, not crowded, F3 small, but P4, p3, and p4 large and conspicuous; skull distinctly flattened, lacking sagittal crest (Fig. 2); lacrimal ridges well developed.

GENERAL CHARACTERS. Males average significantly larger than females in most external and cranial measurements but the differences are not great (Willig, 1983, in press). Average external and cranial measurements for a series of males and females, respectively (± 1 SD and n in parentheses), from northeastern Brazil (Willig, 1983) are as follows: total length, 79.1 (3.12, 22), 76.8 (4.49, 26); length of tail, 25.5 (2.84, 22), 25.7 (2.50, 26); length of hindfoot, 5.3 (0.55, 22), 5.0 (0.45, 26); length of ear, 13.4 (0.58, 22), 13.1 (0.71, 26); length of forearm, 30.1 (0.90, 22), 30.2 (1.03, 26); greatest length of skull, 14.11 (0.35, 21), 13.47 (0.34, 22); condylobasal length, 13.91 (0.31, 21), 13.31 (0.25, 22); zygomatic breadth, 9.76 (0.25, 15), 9.31 (0.25, 11); postorbital constriction, 3.36 (0.10, 22), 3.29 (0.08, 25); mastoid breadth, 9.60 (0.40, 16), 9.06 (0.22, 14); breadth of braincase, 7.08 (0.28, 21), 6.81 (0.18, 22); breadth across upper molars, 6.54 (0.13, 21), 6.40 (0.15, 23); length of maxillary toothrow, 5.57 (0.15, 21), 5.34 (0.13, 25); length of mandibular toothrow, 5.91 (0.10, 22), 5.69 (0.13, 24). Weight (g) of this Brazilian series averaged 6.1 for 22 males and 5.4 for 26 females. Willig (in press) provided additional measurements, including those of specimens from Guyana and Venezuela. Based on univariate and multivariate statistical analyses of external and cranial characters (Willig, in press), only slight geographic variation in size among presently known populations was found. Principal component analyses and cluster analyses did not reveal natural groups or clusters of individuals representing each geographic sample.

Some cranial measurements (mm) of the holotype (male) and a female from the type locality, respectively, follow (measured by MRW): greatest length of skull, 14.5, 13.3; breadth of braincase, 7.4, 7.2; postorbital breadth, 3.6, 3.5; length of maxillary toothrow, 5.8, 5.5; palatal breadth, 6.4; postpalatal length, 5.8, 6.0; palatal length, 7.3, 6.7; condylobasal length, 14.0, 13.1; rostral breadth, 2.2, 1.9; length of maxilla, 11.2, 10.5; length of mandibular toothrow, 6.0.

The pelage is relatively short (about 3 mm middorsally) and sparse. Upperparts pale brownish, the individual hairs brown distally and white basally; the white basal coloration is evident in dorsal view, resulting in the overall paleness. Ears and membranes dark brown, contrasting noticeably with dorsum; ears widely separated. Venter pale whitish to grayish, sometimes tinged slightly with brown. Hairs on hindfeet long and conspicuous, extending far beyond toes. Additional cranial characters (Peterson, 1965) include: both pairs of lower incisors deeply bifid; hypocone suppressed on M1 and M2; M5 with well-developed third cusp; premolars forming continuous palate anteriorly (no emargination); lower canines in line with cheekteeth; conspicuous antorbital foramen, opening dorsateriorly; pronounced mandibular depression behind root of canine and below the two premolars. Illustrations were provided by Peterson (1965).

DISTRIBUTION. The distribution of this flat-headed bat is not especially well documented. It is known to occur in five general areas from southeastern Venezuela and southwestern Guyana southward to eastern and central Brazil (Fig. 3).

FORM AND FUNCTION. Neoplatymops is one of the smallest described molossids (Freeman, 1981; Peterson, 1965; Willig, 1985). Its aerodynamic attributes are more like those of the Vespertilionidae than of the Molossidae (Willig, in press). Average measurements for a series of males and females, respectively, from northeastern Brazil (Willig, in press) are as follows: surface area (cm²), 34.2, 32.6; wing span (cm), 21.7, 21.3; aspect ratio, 7.0, 7.0; tip index, 1.9, 1.8; wing loading (g/cm²), 0.093, 0.086. Maximum flight speeds were estimated as about 33 km/h. Crevise dwelling was suggested by Willig (in press) as a selective force that reduced morphometric variation in this molossid. Because of the strength and mechanical advantage derived from the moderately thick jaws and well-elevated condyles above the toothrow, this flat-headed bat is capable of consuming both soft- and hard-shelled food items (Freeman, 1981).

The adaptive significance of the forearm granulations has not been determined. One of us (MRW) has attempted to remove specimens from crevices with forceps; upon contact, individuals of this species wedge their forearms against the upper surface of the granitic exfoliation. The granulations on the forearm may provide additional anchorage into the porous granitic surface, thereby reducing aerodynamic lift on the upper surfaces of the forearm.

Fig. 1. Live specimen of Neoplatymops mattogrossensis from northeastern Brazil (photograph by M. R. Willig).
Fig. 2. Dorsal, ventral, and lateral views of cranium and dorsal view of lower jaw of Neoplatympops matogrossensis (male, 2295 M. R. Willig, Carnegie Mus. Nat. Hist.). Greatest length of skull is 14.5 mm (photographs by N. Olson).

The incidence of capture by potential predators such as snakes and marsupials.

Embryonic development has not been reported for this species. However, Peterson (1965) recorded variation associated with post-partum ontogeny. The wart-like granulations of the forearm were present on even the youngest neonates from Guiana; additional data from northeastern Brazil indicates that the granules develop well before parturition.

REPRODUCTION AND ONTOGENY. Isolated records of pregnant and lactating specimens from Guyana were reported by Peterson (1965). Willig (in press) noted that Neoplatympops was monogamous and seasonally monestrous with parturition occurring during the transition from the dry to wet seasons in the Brazilian Caatingas. Reproductive synchrony was complete.

ECOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR. This molossid is a micro-habitat specialist (Willig, 1983, in press). In the Caatingas of northeastern Brazil, its local distribution is restricted to areas containing rocky outcrops where it roosts close to the ground in narrow horizontal crevices beneath granitic exfoliations. A similar roost preference has been reported in Venezuela, Guyana, and elsewhere in Brazil by Handley (1976), Peterson (1965), and Szirmai and Taddei (1976), respectively. Small holometabolous insect taxa compose the diet of this species. Coleopteraeae (Scarabaeidae, Hydrophilidae, and Dytiscidae) and dipterans (nematocerans and Caliphoridae) were the predominant food items in the Caatingas, although some taxa in the Hemiptera, Lepidoptera, Homoptera, Hymenoptera, Diptera, Orthoptera, and Blattodea were consumed also (Willig, in press). Dietary information from other localities is unavailable. The peculiar aerodynamic characteristics of Neoplatympops result in low vagility for a volant mammal and increased foraging maneuverability for a molossid (Freeman, 1981; Willig, in press). As a result, this flat-headed bat occupies an atypical molossid niche.

GENETICS. The 2n number of an adult female Neoplatympops from northeast Brazil was 48 and the fundamental number was 60 (62 if the sex chromosomes are considered acrocentric; A. L. Gardner, pers. comm.). The karyotype includes one pair of large biarmed chromosomes and three pairs of medium-sized metacentrics or submetacentrics. The gross chromosomal morphology of Neoplatympops is similar to that of Otomops and Platymops. Karyotypic evidence does not support inclusion of this flat-headed bat in the genus Molossops. However, if Neoplatympops is considered to be a subgenus of Molossops, then the range of karyotypic variation within the genus (2n = 34 to 48; FN = 56 to 60 or 62) is unusually large for the otherwise chromosomally conservative taxa in the Molossidae (Gardner, pers. comm.).

REMARKS. Currently there is controversy as to whether Neoplatympops should be recognized as a distinct genus or as a subgenus of Molossops. Koopman (1982), for example, recognized Neoplatympops, but Honacki et al. (1982), following Freeman (1981), did not. Whether Cynomops or Molossops should be recognized at the generic level (subgenera or subgeneric levels) is unresolved, and Bañez (1980) recently named Cabrermops, based on Molossops aquatorianus. Until Molossops and its related taxa are

Fig. 3. Probable distribution of Neoplatympops matogrossensis (modified from Koopman, 1982). Dots represent areas of certain known occurrence (after Willig, in press); white dot (1) indicates the type locality. Solid bar above the scale of miles equals 500 km.
studied in detail, we choose to retain Neoplatymops as distinct at the generic level. It differs from other New World Molossops (sensu lato) in its flattened skull, two well-developed premolars above and below, wart-like granules on the forearm, and in other ways described by Peterson (1965), as well as karyotypically.

The generic name of the South American flat-headed bat is a combination of three Greek words, neo (new), platy (flat), and mops (bat). The specific name comes from Mato Grosso, the state in Brazil from which the holotype originated.

LITERATURE CITED


Editor of this account was B. J. Verts. Managing editor was Timothy E. Lawlor.

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