

THE TAXONOMIC STATUS OF THE VENEZUELAN FROG NAMES *SCINAX MANRIQUEI* AND *S. FLavidus* (ANURA, HYLIDAE)

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ABSTRACT

Scinax flavidus La Marca 2004, is herein demonstrated to be a junior synonym of *Scinax manriquei* Barrio-Amorós, Orellana et Chacón, 2004, in the basis of precedence of publication. We argue in favor of publishing new available names only in well recognized and honest journals.

Key words: *Scinax flavidus*, *Scinax manriquei*, synonymy, nomenclature, unethical taxonomy.

SOBRE EL ESTATUS TAXONÓMICO DE LOS NOMBRES DE LAS RANAS VENEZOLANAS *SCINAX MANRIQUEI* Y *S. FLavidus* (ANURA, HYLIDAE)

RESUMEN

Demostramos que *Scinax flavidus* La Marca 2004, es un sinónimo de *Scinax manriquei* Barrio-Amorós, Orellana et Chacón, 2004, basándonos en la precedencia de publicación. Argüimos a favor de publicar nuevos nombres válidos sólo en publicaciones bien reconocidas por su honestidad.

Palabras clave: *Scinax flavidus*, *Scinax manriquei*, sinonimia, nomenclatura, ética en la taxonomía.

Two species names of hylid frogs in the genus *Scinax* from the Cordillera de Mérida in the Venezuelan Andes apparently appeared at a similar time, and apparently both constitute a single species. Thus we address here the correct precedence of the name for this taxon.

Scinax manriquei was described by Barrio-Amorós *et al.* (2004) from several localities of the southwestern part of the Cordillera de Mérida. It was published in the recognized Journal of

Herpetology, edited by the SSAR (Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles). Similarly, *Scinax flavidus* (La Marca 2004), was described from several localities of Mérida and Táchira states, appearing in a novel magazine called Herpetotropicos and edited by E. La Marca himself.

Ficha

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The article in which *Scinax manriquei* was described appeared in the light of public in the March 2004 issue, dated March 26 (Geoff Smith, chief editor, in e-mail, 21-2-2008), as also is explicit in the Journal of Herpetology 38(1). The article by Barrio-Amorós et al. (2004) was accepted for publication on 25 November 2003. It seems that while these events were developing, another paper (La Marca 2004) appeared with the description of the same *Scinax* species, namely *S. flavidus* (see below for comparison among taxa). The article by La Marca (2004) was dated on 1 of March, 2004, and is not stated when was accepted by *Herpetotropicos* (meaning by La Marca himself). La Marca's article has the printed date on the cover as March 1. The date "March 1" may have been chosen to avoid the ICZN article 21.3.1 in which in lack of evidence of a published date, it must adopt the last day of the month. We note all these facts only to offer a background for the case. According to the rules of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature and the principle of priority, *Scinax manriquei* should become a junior synonym of *S. flavidus* (as was defended by La Marca 2007). However this is only true if the dates that appear printed in the paper accords to the reality, and there are procedures to verify the dates relying upon external sources (a printed date does not mean it was printed that date). The samples of *Herpetotropicos* examined by us and other colleagues, curiously only became available in June 2004, three months later than the aforesaid date of publication. *Herpetotropicos* vol. 1(1) arrived to external libraries (such the American Museum of Natural History Library) on 29 of September 2004 (Darrel Frost, e-mail, 30-11-2007), so being distributed many months after its seeming appearance. By the information given in the cover, copies of *Herpetotropicos* were deposited at first glance only at two national libraries, the Biblioteca Nacional in Caracas, and the Biblioteca Tulio Febres Cordero in Mérida city. Querying for the date when the ISSN number was requested to the local official library "Tulio Febres Cordero" in Mérida City, where all locally-housed publications must be registered, *Herpetotropicos*' ISSN was requested on March 15, 2004, but provided on May 11th (Miss

Mauren Maldonado, "Servicio de Depósito Legal" of the "Biblioteca Tulio Febres Cordero", pers. com.), not as stated by La Marca (2007) on March 18, 2004 (he does not provide any evidence of that). In that case, it is evident that the date of 1st March that appears in the back-cover is false, unless the inside pages were printed at home (as the Hewlett Packard's trade mark seal seen on its pages proof) and used before the issue was finished (which in that case would not proof to be very ethical indeed). We also required a signed and stamped letter from the Biblioteca Nacional at Caracas, in which they state when exactly *Herpetotropicos* 1(1) arrived there. Figure 1 shows the letter stating that (free translation) "Attending your requirement, we announce that the magazine *Herpetotropicos* year 1, vol 1, numbers 3 and 4 (December 2004), and vol. 2, number 1 (March 2005), and vol. 3, number 2 (July-December 2006) are the only issues that we have in our institution, arriving the first one on 27/10/2004". This means that the issue 1(1) never arrived to the principal National Library of Venezuela, as stated by La Marca (2007).

The printing house, Centro Editorial LITORAMA C.A, recognized that they only printed the covers, but not the interior pages of *Herpetotropicos* (Fernando Molina, owner of LITORAMA, pers. com.). LITORAMA also pointed out that they were never asked to print any part of a journal, but only a folder (in fact the front and back covers). LITORAMA provided the date when the covers (and thus, the only officially printed material) were manufactured: May 28, 2004. Figure 2 shows the stamped letter by LITORAMA as a reliable document that certifies that *Herpetotropicos*' issue subject of controversy was not assembled prior to May 28 of that year. It can be translated as follows: "To whom can be of interest, CENTRO EDITORIAL LITORAMA, C.A., through the present letter explains that on date 28 of May of 2004 we made in our installations the impression of 1000 covers *Herpetotropicos* ordered by BIOGEOS. Constancy that we make after solitudine by FUNDACION ANDIGENA in the person of CÉSAR BARRIO, his Director. In Mérida, on 31 of March of 2005."

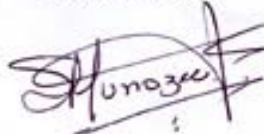
Caracas, 22 de Mayo de 2009

Señor:
Cesar L. Barrio
Director Ejecutivo
AndígenA
Ciudad.

En atención a su requerimiento, nos complace hacer de su conocimiento que las revistas "HERPETOTROPICOS", año 1, Número 3, vol. 1 número 4(2004 Diciembre), vol. 2, número 1 (2005 Marzo)- vol. 3 número 2 (2006 Julio- Diciembre), son los únicos números que se encuentran en nuestra Institución, ingresando la primera citada el 27/10/2004.

Sin otro particular al cual hacer referencia, quedo de Usted,

Atentamente,



Carmen Cecilia Sulbaran
Dirección Colección Publicaciones Seriadas

República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Instituto Autónomo
Biblioteca Nacional
y de Servicios de Bibliotecas
Dir. Colección de
Publicaciones Seriadas

Fig. 1. Signed and stamped letter by the "Dirección de Publicación Colecciones Seriadas" of the "Biblioteca Nacional de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela".

One referee of this article noted a weakness in the Code, stressing the fact that under the current Code the covers and the interior pages can be printed in different times, and considers that the inside pages are good enough to make a *nomen novum* as available if distributed without the covers. Assuming that *Herpetotropicos* was initially distributed without covers, the date appearing in the inside pages is March 2004, making the paper clearly benefited by the ICNZ article 21.3.1. Thus, the concrete date of 31 March 2004 must be taken as the only possible choice. In any way, such confusion and dirt play have nothing to offer to honest herpetology, in which authors communicate and work together if they realize that they have the same species at hand.

With the evidence here presented, *Scinax flavidus* La Marca, 2004 must be considered as a junior synonym of *Scinax manriquei* Barrio, Orellana et Chacón 2004 based on the use of a fake date of publication of *Herpetotropicos* 1(1) (article 21.4 and recommendation 21.A of the ICZN Code), being here demonstrated to be later (after May 28, 2004) than the date of publication of the *Journal of Herpetology* 38(1) on 26 March 2004.

Comparison among species

Scinax manriquei Barrio-Amorós et al. 2004 (Figure 3) was described on the basis of nine

specimens belonging to the type series, augmented to check the species variation with 22 referred specimens from Venezuela and Colombia. *Scinax flavidus* (La Marca 2004) was described from 32 specimens in the type series, and seven additional individuals from the Venezuelan Andes. We had no access to the series of *S. flavidus*, but nevertheless, using the original description (La Marca 2004) is possible to address the similarities. All characters are indeed the same for both taxa (Table 1). We found only a few details that can be noted. The tympanum diameter reported for *S. manriquei* is small (28% of eye diameter), while in *S. flavidus* it is larger (41%). The value for *S. manriquei* is a mean of all measurements of that parameter, while the value in *S. flavidus* is only from one specimen (the holotype) and there is no mention of variation in the parameter. In fact, Figure 5 in La Marca (2004) shows a dorsal view of the head with the left tympanum measuring indeed 41% of the eye diameter (ED), measured directly from the figure, while in the lateral view, the proportion of the left tympanum is much higher, 75%. In Barrio-Amorós et al. (2004) Figure 2 showing the head in profile, the corresponding percentage is nearly 50%, which is still far from the value mentioned in the text (28%).

Table 1.- Comparison between characters of *Scinax manriquei* and *S. flavidus* from its sources (Barrio-Amorós et al 2004; La Marca 2004).

Characters	<i>Scinax manriquei</i> Barrio-Amorós, Orellana et Chacón, 2004	<i>Scinax flavidus</i> La Marca 2004
Finger webbing	basal	vestigial between fingers II and III, and III and IV
tympanum	28% of ED	41-75%
Tibia length	51.2% of SVL	51% of SVL
Axillary membrane	absent	absent
Ulnar ornamentation	absent	non prominent ulnar fold
Palmar tubercle	bifid	bifid
Tarsal and calcar ornamentation	absent	absent
Skin on belly	Slightly granular	granular
colour	Yellow to Brown, with two whitish dorsolateral stripes; iris bronze	Lemon yellow on males, pale brown on females; iris bronze

A quien pueda interesar

CENTRO EDITORIAL LITORAMA, C.A., por medio de la presente hace contar que en fecha 28-05-2004 se llevó a cabo en nuestras instalaciones la impresión de 1000 CARPETAS HERPETOTRÓPICOS el cual fue ordenado por BIOGEOS.

Constancia que se expide a solicitud de FUNDACIÓN ANDIGENA en la persona de CÉSAR BARRIO, Director de la misma.

En Mérida a los treinta y un días del mes de marzo de dos mil cinco.

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Fig. 2. Signed and stamped letter from LITORAMA C.A. showing clearly the date when the covers of Herpetotropicos 1(1) were made.



Figure 3. Adult male of *Scinax manriquei* from Olinda, Estado Mérida, Venezuela. Compare with figure in La Marca (2007). Males of *S. manriquei* are yellow, while females are pale brown or gray.

This deviation from the values measured directly from the specimens against measurements from figures is an obvious artifact due to orthogonal projection, which distorts the image in lateral view. However a simple exercise of comparing and projecting the figures reveals that the drawings in Figure 5 of La Marca's paper do not tally, creating a false perception of the reality. There are further inconsistencies in both drawings in such Figure 5, since at least the profile drawing does not correspond with the scale provided and with the dorsal drawing. Care should be taken when drawings are made when submitting a paper whose nature is descriptive. We take the opportunity to reveal that in Table 1 in Barrio-Amorós et al. (2004) there is a lapsus concerning the mean value for female ED which is 3.4 and not 10.9 mm. The other character to mention is the ulnar ornamentation. La Marca (2004) noted a well defined but non prominent ulnar fold, while Barrio-Amorós et al (2004) stated that ulnar tubercles were absent. This may be due to preservation artifacts, and we do not consider it

as a highly diagnostic character. Otherwise, both descriptions are appropriate to identify the species. It is interesting that La Marca (2004) does not provide comparisons with any other species of the genus, simply stating that “esta especie se diferencia de todas las restantes especies en el género *Scinax* por su coloración amarilla y combinación de caracteres”, which means “this species differs from the rest of species in the genus *Scinax* by its yellow coloration and combination of characters”. Barrio-Amorós et al (2004) compared *S. manriquei* with 14 species of the genus.

Based on the experience of the authors of both publications, there are no other species of *Scinax* known from that biogeographic region (Andes) in Venezuela that could allow confusion.

CONCLUSION

Magazines like *Herpetotropicos* are indeed welcome in countries where it becomes difficult to publish for students or amateur herpetologists, but the scope of such magazines should be natural

history, ecology, biogeography, etc. We suggest that a special committee in the ICZN should determine by different methods which journals are serious and honest (meaning that they have a broad board in their editorial stuff to avoid personal dictatorship) to be used for nomenclature purposes. Under the current Code, there are so many inconsistencies that allow magazines and even home-made pamphlets usable for nomenclature purposes (see Bauer 1986, 1988, 1994 e.g.), which makes the nomenclature an unstable terrain in which the taxonomists must deal with. There are many precedents (Wüster et al. 2001) regarding this kind of situations.

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