

**Opportunistic consumption of placenta in the endemic Rice Rat (*Cricetidae*, *Aegiolomys galapagoensis bauri*) on the island of Santa Fe, Galapagos**

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Editado por/Edited by: D. F. Cisneros-Heredia, Ph.D.(c)

Recibido/Received: 07/12/2012. Aceptado/Accepted: 07/14/2012.

Publicado en línea/Published on Web: 12/28/2012. Impreso/Printed: 12/28/2012.

**Abstract**

The endemic rice rat *Aegiolomys galapagoensis bauri* on the island of Santa Fe in the central part of the Galapagos Archipelago has been observed to consume the placenta of the Galapagos Sea lion (*Zalophus wollebacki*). This diurnal scavenging undoubtedly represents a means of obtaining proteins for a small mammal that typically specializes on a diet of plant material.

**Keywords.** Rice rat, *Oryzomys*, placenta consumption

**Resumen**

La rata endémica *Aegiolomys galapagoensis bauri* de la Isla Santa Fe en el centro del Archipiélago de Galápagos fue observada consumiendo la placenta de un lobo marino (*Zalophus wollebacki*). Para un mamífero pequeño que consume principalmente materia vegetal, la posibilidad de aprovechar una fuente de proteínas concentradas debe ser una oportunidad valiosa.

**Palabras Clave.** Rata de arroz, *Oryzomys*, consumo de placenta



**Figure 1: Santa Fe rice rat chewing on a recently expelled sea lion placenta**

While the endemic Santa Fe rice rat, *Aegiolomys galapagoensis bauri*, recently revised from the allocation *Oryzomys bauri*, is described as being primarily noc-

turnal in its activities [1], it is sometimes sighted during daytime visits along lowland trails established by the Galapagos National Park for the purpose of ecotourism. Here we report observation of scavenging by this cricetid on the placenta of a Galapagos sea lion (*Zalophus wollebacki*) on the morning of 10 October 2011 at 08h30 under overcast skies. During a period of several minutes, two adults persistently took turns running out from under salt bush (*Cryptocarpus* sp.) just behind the beach landing site and repeatedly chewing on the placenta very near the head of the adult female that had given birth scant hours before. Considering that diurnally active Galapagos hawks (*Buteo galapagoensis*) also scavenge on placentas [2] and regularly feed on rice rats [3], such behavior seems particularly risky.

Rice rat diets in general [4] are described as primarily including seeds and fruits but some species may be rather omnivorous, sometimes consuming “invertebrate

matter” [2, 5]. Undoubtedly these small mammals require some ingestion of proteins for proper health; such opportunism may be essential as plant material is typically limited in these nutrients. Opportunities to consume protein in a concentrated form may be somewhat unusual and likely highly sought after, thereby offsetting predation risks in such a case when refuge is available at such proximity.

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