

## Small mammals of the Atacama Desert (Chile)

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### Abstract

The little-known mammalian fauna of the Atacama Desert and adjacent Puna in northern Chile is analysed by means of live-trapping, and examination of fox scats and owl pellets. On the basis of physiognomy, climate, altitude and vegetation, four biomes were recognized: coastal lowland Lomas, mid-altitude Riparian and Oasis biomes, and highland Puna. A total of 188 individuals in six small mammal species was caught with 2736 trap-nights chiefly during the summer months of 1997 and 1998. Representatives of another four small mammal species were detected among 123 fox scats (*Pseudalopex* spp.). A total of 346 pellets cast by Barn owls (*Tyto alba*) showed that they caught species not found in the fox diet, but captured in Sherman traps. The mammal sampling effected by live-traps, foxes and owls was rarely coincident, with some species collected only by traps or by foxes (owls coincided nicely with traps in presence-absence records). Even when captured by the three, the proportional representation of small mammals in live-traps, fox scats and owl pellets differed markedly. It is recommend that all these means of data collection (and perhaps snap-traps) are used to assess the mammalian biodiversity of any little-known site, lest surveying results be seriously flawed.