Phylogeography – Session 2

Biogeography of small mammals in south-western Angola: the first genetic evidence

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Angola represents one of the most understudied African countries with respect to biodiversity at all levels. Furthermore, Angola represents an area which holds particular interest for biogeographers owing to its immense habitat diversity and the confluence of three very different biomes: northern Congo basin lowland forests, eastern Zambezian miombo woodlands and southern Namib Desert. Although recent activities of various research groups brought some interesting results about the diversity and biogeographic affinities of Angolan birds, virtually nothing is known about mammals. Especially small mammals are a very useful model for testing the uniqueness/endemicity/biodiversity value since humans have had a strong impact on mammalian distributions in Angola, particularly on those of large carnivores and ungulates during the civil war (1975-2002), when widespread poaching affected strongly a range of species. A field expedition with the main purpose of collecting small mammals was conducted in July 2017. Altogether, we sampled 318 individuals at 11 different localities in south-western Angola. According to external identification, sampled specimens belong to 18 different genera. This high diversity reflects the habitat diversity of sampled localities as we were trapping in dry, semi-desert and desert habitats (typical for some *Elephantulus*, *Petromyscus* and *Gerbilliscus*) up to moist forest (here we found *Lophuromys*, *Aethomys* and *Mus*). Phylogenetic analyses based on DNA barcoding in the context of our collection of samples from mostly eastern and central Africa have revealed an interesting biogeographic pattern in four genera or species lineages (*Mus minutoides*, *Mus triton*, *Mastomys* and *Dendromus*). All of them were represented by two different species or lineages in south-western Angola, the first one has its relatives in the north (southern Democratic Republic of Congo) whilst the second easterly in Zambia.
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