



Exploitation of faunal resources by hunter-gatherers in the center of the Pampa grasslands during the Holocene: The archaeofauna of the Laguna Cabeza de Buey 2 site (San Carlos de Bolivar, Buenos Aires, Argentina)



Nahuel A. Scheifler, Pablo G. Messineo*

INCUAPA-CONICET, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Avenida del Valle 5737, B7400JWI, Olavarría, Buenos Aires, Argentina

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present a detailed zooarchaeological study conducted on the bone assemblage from the Laguna Cabeza de Buey 2 site, located on the margins of a small shallow lake in the center of the Pampa grasslands (province of Buenos Aires, Argentina). Taxonomic structure, taphonomic information, site formation processes, and subsistence strategies for different occupation events are described and discussed. At least three events of pre-Hispanic occupation (two in the Middle Holocene [6800 and 4150 14C years BP] and one in the Late Holocene) and one in Historical moments were identified. Human occupations are developed in relation to a shallow lake under a climate more arid during the Middle Holocene, which decreased up to the current environmental conditions; humid temperate. The camelid *Lama guanicoe* (guanaco) was always the most important economic resource during the three events of human occupation in the Holocene, followed by *Ozotoceros bezoarticus* (pampean deer) and, to a lesser extent, by three species of small armadillos (*Chaetophractus* sp., *Zaedyus pichiy*, and *Tolypeutes matacus*). In Historical times, modern domestic faunal remains (*Equus caballus* and *Bos taurus*) were exploited. A subsistence strategy focused on artiodactyls, mainly guanaco, allows suggesting certain specialization through time in the exploitation of animal resources by hunter-gatherer groups in the center of the Pampa grasslands, strategy that contrasts with what is recorded in other areas of the Pampean region.

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1. Introduction

The current zooarchaeological record of the Pampa grasslands has a broad chronological and spatial distribution. Research of the economy of hunter-gatherers has made remarkable advances in some areas (e.g., Interserrana, Tandilia, North, South, and Salado Depression) of the Pampean region due to the increase in the number of sites investigated and the consequent generation of faunal data in the last three decades (e.g., Quintana and Mazzanti, 2001; Martínez and Gutiérrez, 2004; González, 2005;

Acosta et al., 2010; Stoessel, 2012; Frontini, 2013; Álvarez, 2014a). At the same time, zooarchaeological studies in some areas of this region (e.g., west) have had little development as a result of the lack of systematic research (see exceptions in Politis et al., 2012; Álvarez, 2014b). Recently, we conducted an excavation at the Laguna Cabeza de Buey 2, a multi-component archaeological site located in the western Pampean region of Argentina.

In this paper, we present the results of taxonomic and taphonomic analysis carried out on the skeletal faunal assemblage recovered for diverse events of human occupations at the Laguna Cabeza de Buey 2 site. The main objective is to evaluate the exploitation of faunal resources for understanding the subsistence strategies in the West area of the Pampa grasslands during the Holocene. To achieve this aim, we evaluated the taphonomic

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: nscheifler@soc.unicen.edu.ar (N.A. Scheifler), pmessine@soc.unicen.edu.ar (P.G. Messineo).

processes and agents that modified the bone assemblage. Also, we conducted the paleoenvironmental study based on the taphonomic and taxonomic information of the site, together with different proxy data (pollen, sedimentology, and geomorphology) from diverse records, for understanding the environmental scenarios and their relationship with the adaptive strategies implemented by hunter-gatherers at the Laguna Cabeza de Buey 2 site. Finally, we compare the zooarchaeology information generated in this paper with other archaeological contexts located in different areas of the Pampa grasslands of Argentina in order to highlight geographical and chronological variation in the exploitation of faunal resources during the Holocene.

2. Regional setting

The Pampean region, an extensive flat to gently undulating landscape, is located in the eastern part of Argentina between 30° and 39° S. This vast plain is distinguished by a humid temperate prairie covered by grass (Soriano et al., 1992). This region is characterized by an east-west moisture gradient and increasing continentality towards the northwest. Average temperatures in the northeast are between 24 °C in summer (January–February) and 10 °C in winter (July–August), whereas in the southwest for the same months the average is between 20 °C and 7 °C. Precipitation is highly seasonal with two well-defined rainy seasons, spring and fall. The annual total rainfall increases towards the east from ca. 400 mm in the southwest to 1000 mm or more in the northeast (Burgos, 1968).

The most conspicuous terrestrial vertebrate (excluding the livestock) living in the open grasslands are micromammals

(<1 kg) and small mammals (between 1 kg and 20 kg). Among the former are the cricetid rodents (e.g., *Holochilus brasiliensis*, *Reithrodon auritus*, *Akodon azarae*, and *Calomys musculus*), the caviomorph rodents (e.g., *Galea leucoblephara*, *Microcavia australis*, *Cavia aperea*, and *Ctenomys* sp.), and the didelphid marsupials (Massoia et al., 2000; Gómez Villafaña et al., 2005; Pardiñas et al., 2010). With respect to small mammals are caviomorph rodents (e.g., *Lagostomus maximus* and *Myocastor coypus*), armadillos (e.g., *Chaetophractus villosus*, *Dasyops hybridus*, and *Zaedyus pichiy*), and carnivores (e.g., *Leopardus geoffroyi*, *Lycalopex gymnocercus*, and *Conepatus chinga*) (Redford and Eisenberg, 1992). Today, some medium and large native mammals (>20 kg), such as guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*), pampean deer (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*), and puma (*Puma concolor*), are absent in most of the region, although they were common in the Holocene (see Martínez and Gutiérrez, 2004; Politis et al., 2011). Also, there is a large number of small birds (<20 kg), the major species belonging to the Tinamidae (tinamous), Anatidae (ducks and swans), Rallidae (coots, moorhens, and burritos), Podicipedidae (grebes), and Ardeidae (herons) Families (Darrieu and Camperi, 2001). In addition, there is a large flightless bird, the Greater rhea (*Rhea americana*).

Laguna Cabeza de Buey is located in the West area of the Humid Pampas sub-region (Politis and Barros, 2006; Fig. 1) and it is a semi-permanent shallow lake constituted by an elongated interdune depression, which is surrounded by fixed sand dunes. This shallow lake is situated on the eastern border of the aeolian unit called by Zárate and Tripaldi (2012) the Central Pampean Dunefield, which was characterized on the basis of its geomorphological features and the geological and structural settings. The main landforms in the

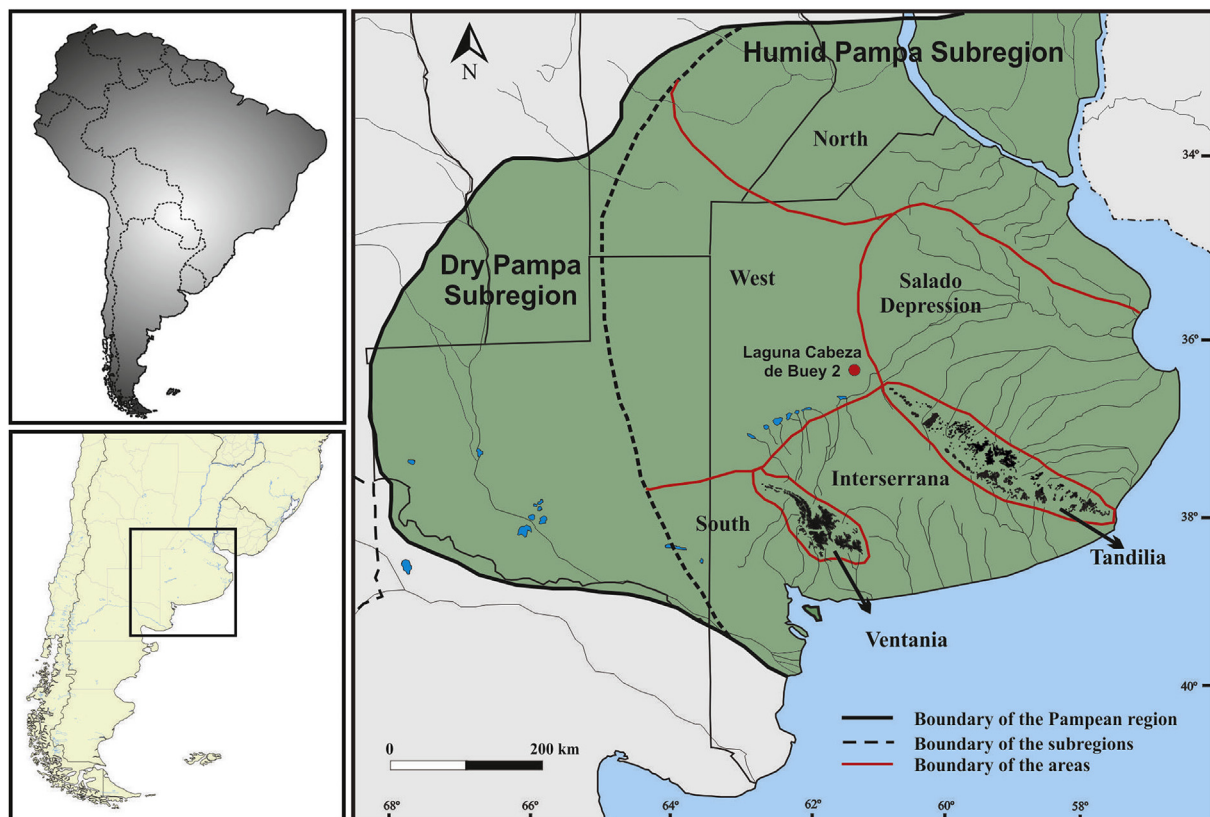


Fig. 1. Map showing the Pampean region and the location of the Laguna Cabeza de Buey 2 site in the West area (Argentina).

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