

RESUMO - PROTOZOOLOGIA E PATÓGENOS TRANSMITIDOS POR
VETORES

**ECTOPARASITE DIVERSITY AND MOLECULAR DETECTION OF
RICKETTSIA BELLII IN AMBLYOMMA OVALE FROM WILD SMALL
MAMMALS IN SANTA CATARINA, BRAZIL**

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Wild small mammals play a key role in maintaining ectoparasites and microorganisms of medical relevance. This study investigated the ectoparasite community and the occurrence of Rickettsia in hosts captured around the “Quebra-Queixo” Hydroelectric Power Plant, western Santa Catarina, Brazil. Between November 2023 and February 2024, 19 animals were captured, including 17 rodents (Rodentia: Cricetidae), one white-eared opossum

(*Didelphis albiventris*), and one yellow-sided opossum (*Monodelphis dimidiata*). A diverse community of 51 ectoparasites was collected from nine individuals. The identified taxa comprised Laelapidae mites on rodents, *Leptopsylla segnis* fleas on *M. dimidiata*, nymphs of *Amblyomma ovale* and *Ixodes loricatus* on rodents, and immature stages plus one adult female of *Amblyomma dubitatum* collected from the environment. Blood and ectoparasite samples were screened by real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR), and one *A. ovale* nymph was confirmed positive for *Rickettsia bellii* by species-specific protocols. While serological reactivity to *R. bellii* antigen has been reported in Santa Catarina, molecular evidence of *R. bellii* in *A. ovale* had not been documented in the state; here we provide the first molecular record, underscoring the need for integrated One Health surveillance strategies targeting ectoparasites and vector-borne pathogens in human-modified landscapes.

Palavras-chave: rickettsiae; glta; wildlife surveillance; hydroelectric power plant; vector-borne bacteria.