

**PALAEOECOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR THE LATE PLEISTOCENE OF
CENTRAL IBERIA: SMALL MAMMALS FROM LOS CASARES CAVE
(GUADALAJARA PROVINCE, SPAIN)**

Á.C. Domínguez-García^{1,2*}, G. Cuenca-Bescós¹, M.P. Alfaro-Ibañez¹, L. Luque³,
J.J. Alcolea-González³, M. Alcaraz-Castaño³

¹Aragosaurus-IUCA, Departamento de Ciencias de la Tierra, Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad de Zaragoza, c/ Pedro Cerbuna 12, 50009 Zaragoza, Spain.

²Departamento de Geodinámica, Estratigrafía y Paleontología, Facultad de Ciencias Geológicas, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, c/ José Antonio Novais 12, 28040 Madrid, Spain.

³Área de Prehistoria, Departamento de Historia y Filosofía, Universidad de Alcalá, c/ Colegios 2, 28801 Alcalá de Henares, Spain.

*presenting author, acdomgar@unizar.es

Keywords: *Quaternary, palaeoenvironment, taphonomy, palaeoclimate, Neanderthals*

Los Casares cave is a classic archaeopalaeontological site known since the late 19th century that contains a deposit showing evidence of Neanderthal and carnivore occupations during MIS 3 in layers C and B–C of the Seno A (44.9–42.2 cal kyr BP). In order to provide an updated palaeoenvironmental and palaeoclimatic framework for the last Neanderthals of central Iberia, a rich small mammal assemblage comprising a minimum of 244 individuals and 25 taxa was analysed in depth for the first time. The origin of the accumulation can be related to the predatory activity of some mammalian carnivores since the high percentage of signs of digestion observed (>70%) reaches a high to extreme degree of alterations. From a biochronological point of view, the presence of *Allocricetus bursae*, *Pliomys lenki*, and *Alexandromys oeconomicus* is consistent with the radiocarbon age and archaeological record of the deposit. Palaeoecological reconstructions performed show stable warm and humid Mediterranean climate with slight variation between different layers of the stratigraphic sequence. The temperatures inferred are similar than at present, whereas rainfall was slightly more abundant than today. Reconstructed landscapes are mainly constituted by open areas with humid meadows and forest patches with moderate ground cover. Aquatic areas, such as rivers, streams, marshlands or ponds, were also represented around the site. Therefore, the small mammal assemblage suggests environmental and climatic conditions favorable for Neanderthals inhabiting this area at that time.

Acknowledgements: A.C.D.G. is supported by a postdoctoral Margarita Salas contract (CT18/22) funded by the European Union “NextGenerationEU/PRTR”. M.P.A.I. is funded by a FPU grant (FPU20/02030-MIU, Gobierno de España). This research has been also funded by the ERC under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (No 805478; MULTIPALEOIBERIA project).