

First record of *Vitreorana ritae* (Anura, Centrolenidae) for southern Amazonia inferred from molecular, reproductive and acoustic evidence

Primer registro de *Vitreorana ritae* (Anura, Centrolenidae) en el sur de la Amazonía inferida a partir de evidencia molecular, reproductiva y acústica

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ABSTRACT

Frogs of the family Centrolenidae are adapted to live at high altitudes, and so it is not surprising that their greatest diversity is in the Andes mountain range. Here we extend the known geographic distribution of *Vitreorana ritae* by more than 550 km towards southern Amazonia. The species was identified by morphological, acoustic and molecular characteristics (mitochondrial marker 16S rRNA). The records reported here are the first for the genus *Vitreorana* in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil, as well as for the transition zone between the Amazonia and Cerrado biomes. These records are consistent with the hypothesis that the low number of species of centrolenids reported in the lowlands of the Amazon region may be the result of limited sampling. Even though *V. ritae* is distributed throughout the Amazon, most of its diagnostic morphological characteristics are conserved. Thus, the great rivers of the Amazon Basin do not seem to act as geographical barriers for this species; however, due to the limited sample size, further acoustic and molecular studies are needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Keywords. Acoustic parameters, Amazon-Cerrado ecotone, glass frog, intraspecific genetic variation

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RESUMEN

Las especies de anfibios de la familia Centrolenidae están adaptadas a vivir en regiones de elevada altitud, por lo que no sorprende que su mayor diversidad ocurra en la Cordillera de los Andes. Aquí expandimos el ámbito de distribución de *Vitreorana ritae* por más de 550 km al sur del río Amazonas. La identificación de la especie se realizó con base en la comparación de las características morfológicas, acústicas y moleculares (marcador mitocondrial 16S rRNA). Nuestro registro es el primero de este género para el Estado de Mato Grosso, Brasil, así como para la zona de transición entre los biomas Amazonía y Cerrado. Este registro es concordante con la hipótesis de que el bajo número de especies registradas en la planicie amazónica puede ser el resultado de un menor esfuerzo de muestreo. Observamos que, a pesar de la amplia distribución de la especie en la Amazonía, la mayoría de las características morfológicas diagnósticas de *V. ritae* se conservan. Sugerimos que los grandes ríos de la cuenca amazónica parecen no actuar como barrera geográfica para esta especie. Sin embargo, y como resultado de nuestro pequeño tamaño de muestra, se requerirán estudios acústicos y moleculares adicionales para confirmar esta hipótesis.

Palabras clave. Ecótono Amazonía-Cerrado, parámetros acústicos, rana de cristal, variación genética intraespecífica

INTRODUCTION

The family Centrolenidae comprises 157 species of eleven genera of what is commonly referred to as glass frogs (Guayasamin et al. 2009). They are distributed from the tropics of Central America, throughout the tropical Andes, the Sierra Nevada in Colombia, the coast of Venezuela to Bolivia, Trinidad and Tobago, the Guiana Shield, and the Atlantic Forest of southeastern Brazil and northeastern Argentina (Frost 2019). Fourteen centrolenid species are currently known to occur in Brazil: *Hyalinobatrachium cappellei* Van Lidth de Jeude, 1904; *H. carlesvilai* Castroviejo-Fisher, Padial, Chaparro, Aguayo-Vedia, and De la Riva, 2009; *H. iaspidiense* (Ayarzagüena, 1992); *H. mondolfii* Señaris and Ayarzagüena, 2001; *H. muiiraquitan* Oliveira and Hernández-Ruz, 2017; *H. munozorum* (Lynch and Duellman, 1973); *Teratohyla adenocheira* (Harvey and Noonan, 2005); *T. midas* (Lynch and Duellman, 1973); *Vitreorana baliomma* Pontes, Caramaschi, and Pombal, 2014; *V. eurygnatha* (Lutz, 1925); *V. franciscana* Santana, Barros, Pontes, and Feio, 2015; *V. parvula* (Boulenger, 1895); *V. ritae* (Lutz, 1952); and *V. uranoscopa* (Müller, 1924) (Frost 2019).

Although the number of Brazilian centrolenid species has increased in recent years with new records for previously isolated sites, mainly in the Amazon (ICMBio 2009, Toledo et al. 2009, Venâncio et al. 2014), there still remain large knowledge gaps regarding the distribution of several species, most of which are known from isolated localities within a large geographic range (Frost 2019). Moreover, only 79 % of Brazilian centrolenids have had their advertisement call described (Guerra et al. 2018). Specific information about the distribution and vocalization of anuran species is of great importance for taxonomic and conservation purposes (Castroviejo-Fisher et al. 2011, Guerra et al. 2018). Bioacoustic information has been particularly relevant in studies of anuran behavior (Gerhardt and Huber 2002), community ecology (Oseen and Wassersug 2002) and evolution (Cocroft and Ryan 1995, Goicoechea et al. 2010), and has contributed to the discovery of many morphologically-conservative cryptic species (Padial et al. 2008, Glaw et al. 2010).

Vitreorana ritae (Lutz, 1952) occurs in eastern Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, southern Guyana, eastern Suriname, French Guiana and from the state of Roraima south to central Amazonia and west to extreme western Amazonas

State in Brazil (Frost [c2019](#)). The species has been recorded at different localities in the state of Pará, such as the Caxiuanã and Tapajós National Forest (Gonçalves [2013](#)), the Xingu River (Vaz-Silva *et al.* [2015](#)), and the Altamira National Forest (ICMBio [c2009](#)). *Vitreorana ritae* is the senior synonym of *Cochranella oyampiensis* (Lescure, 1975) and *Cochranella amertasia* (Flores, 1987). It is morphologically similar to *V. helenae*, which is considered its sister species (Kok and Castroviejo-Fisher [2008](#), Castroviejo-Fisher *et al.* [2014](#), Moraes *et al.* [2017](#)) and occurs in the Tepuis of the Guiana Shield, although *V. ritae* is distinguished by its gray iris and green dorsum with black spots (yellow and uniformly green dorsum, respectively, for *V. helenae*; Guayasamin [2008](#)).

The present study extends the distribution of *Vitreorana ritae* with sites in the municipalities of Cotriguaçu and Sinop in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil. The advertisement call and tadpole morphology and molecular data from a male collected in the transition zone between the Cerrado and the Amazon are compared with that of previously known populations.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Data collection and species identification

A female of *Vitreorana ritae* (SVL = 22.9 mm) was collected on 20 December 2015 on the São Nicolau Farm in the municipality of Cotriguaçu, state of Mato Grosso, Brazil (09° 50' South, 58° 13' West; SIRGAS 2000 datum, 216 m) (Fig. 1a – b). A male of *V. ritae* (SVL = 19.8 mm) was photographed, recorded and collected on 6 dec 2017 in the municipality of Sinop, Mato Grosso, Brazil (11° 24' South, 55° 28' West; data datum SIRGAS 2000, 434 m.) (Fig. 1c – d). Another male of *V. ritae* (SVL = 19.9 mm) was collected on 16 feb 2018 at the Sinop Lake hydroelectric plant (11° 24' South, 55°23' West; datum SIRGAS 2000, 428 m). All three specimens were euthanized using a 2 % lidocaine solution and had their liver removed and preserved in 98 % ethanol. Each specimen was subsequently fixed in 10 % formaldehyde, preserved in 70 % ethanol and deposited in the Biological Collection of Southern Amazonia (ABAM) of Universidade Federal do Mato Grosso (UFMT), Campus Sinop, Brazil (ABAM-H 2596, ABAM-H 3085, ABAM-H 3650). The collection permit was issued by Instituto Chico

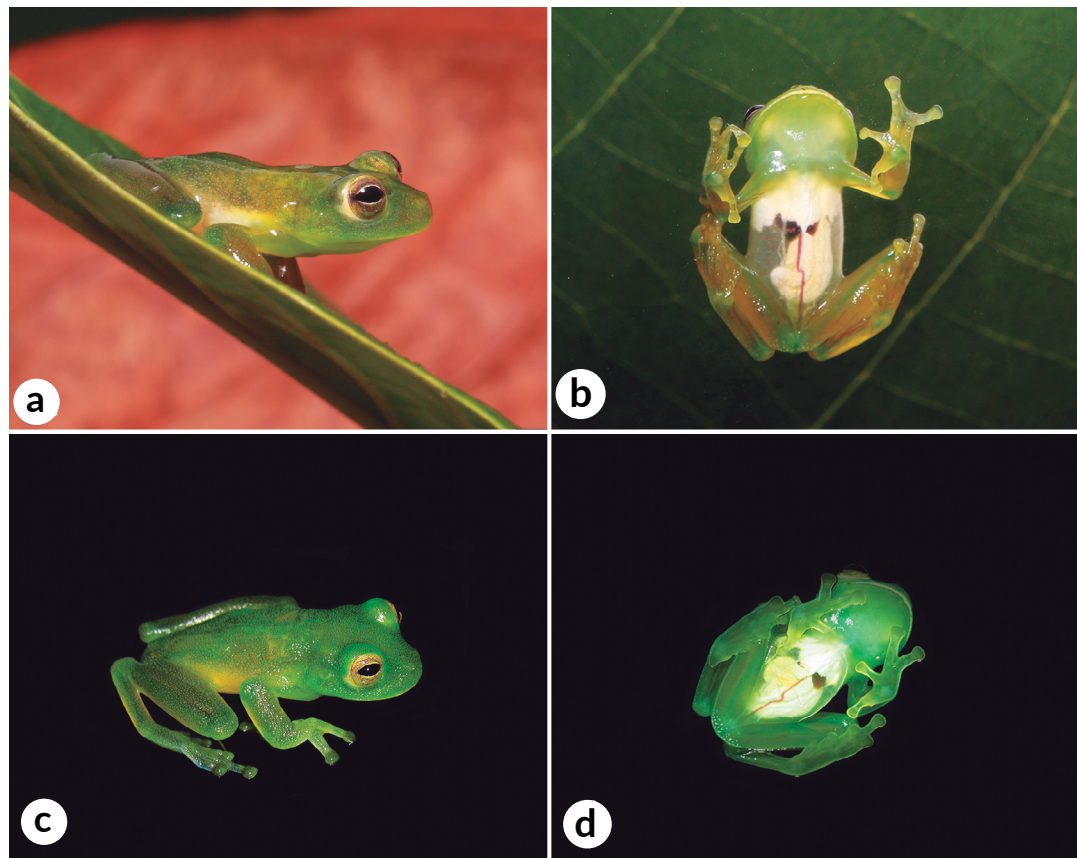


Figure 1. Individuals of *Vitreorana ritae* recorded in southern Amazonia. **a-b.** Female, municipality of Cotriguaçu, state of Mato Grosso, Brazil (ABAM-H 2596); **c-d.** Male, municipality of Sinop, state of Mato Grosso, Brazil (ABAM-H 3085). (Photos a, b and d by Marcos Penhacek; photo c by Domingos J. Rodrigues).

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An egg clutch in the final stages of embryonic development was also found on the same shrub where the male was found in the municipality of Sinop. The clutch was photographed, collected and taken to the UFMT laboratory, Campus Sinop, where it was kept in an aquarium (40 x 60 x 50 cm). After hatching, two tadpoles were euthanized using a 2 % lidocaine solution, fixed in 5 % formaldehyde and deposited in ABAM (ABAM-H 50, ABAM-H 52). The external morphology of the tadpoles was compared with descriptions of other *Vitreorana* tadpoles (e.g. Menin *et al.* 2009). The developmental stage of the tadpoles was determined according Gosner (1960).

Two approaches were used to identify the adult frogs. The first combined morphological data (presence of vomerine teeth; presence and pigmentation of hepatic and intestinal peritoneum; bone and dorsum coloration; and face shape) and bioacoustic data described by several authors (Lutz and Kloss 1952, Lescure 1975, Lescure and Marty 2000, Guayasamin *et al.* 2006, Cisneros-Heredia and Mcdiarmid 2007, Guayasamin *et al.* 2009, Menin *et al.* 2009, Cisneros-Heredia 2013). The second employed BLAST (<https://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Blast.cgi>), to compare DNA sequence data of one of the collected specimens with *V. ritae* sequences found in GenBank.

Acoustic analysis

Two advertisement calls of a male were recorded using a Sennheiser ME 66 directional microphone coupled to a professional Marantz PMD 660 digital recorder set at a sampling rate of 44.1 kHz and 16-bit resolution and positioned 1.0 m from the specimen. The calls were analyzed using Raven Pro 1.5 (Bioacoustics Research Program 2014). Temporal properties were obtained from oscillograms (temporal resolution of 500 ms), while spectral information was obtained from spectrograms using Fast Fourier Transformation (FFT) with a 256-point window and a frequency resolution of 90 Hz. Seven parameters of the advertisement call were measured: three temporal – (1) call duration (s), (2) interval between calls (s) and (3) call rate (call / min.); and four spectral – (1) number of harmonics, (2) minimum frequency (5 %) (Hz), (3) dominant frequency (highest peak of energy) including all harmonics (Hz), and (4) maximum frequency (95 %) (Hz). Terminology for the acoustic parameters followed Köhler *et al.* (2017). Sonograms and spectrograms were produced

using the R package Seewave (Sueur *et al.* 2008) and tuneR (Ligges *et al.* 2014), with the following settings: FFT size of 256 points, Hanning window, and 90 % overlap. avy

Molecular analysis

Total genomic DNA was extracted from the liver of the male collected in the municipality of Sinop using the 2 % CTAB protocol (Doyle and Doyle 1990). A 16S mtDNA fragment was amplified through PCR by applying 16Saf and 16Sbr primers (Palumbi *et al.* 1991). The sequencing reaction was performed according to the manufacturer's recommendations for the sequencing mix ABI BigDye Terminator using the primer 16Saf. The sequences (ca. 600 Pb) were aligned using the ClustalW algorithm (Thompson *et al.* 1994) with BioEdit 7.2 software (Hall 1999). The uncorrected pairwise distance (p-distance) between the *Vitreorana ritae* populations of this study and those of GenBank from French Guiana and *V. helenae* from French Guiana and Venezuela were calculated using MEGA 6.0 (Tamura *et al.* 2013).

RESULTS

The specimens collected were identified as *Vitreorana ritae* based on the vomerine teeth, a white hepatic peritoneum partially covering the liver, a white gastrointestinal peritoneum, green bones in life, dorsal green coloration with dark green spots in life and lavender with dark spots in preservative, and a rounded snout in dorsal view and slightly inclined in lateral view (Fig. 1). The new records of *V. ritae* in the municipalities of Cotriguaçu and Sinop, Mato Grosso (Fig. 2), extends the distribution of the species by 530 and 560 km, to the southeast and south, respectively, from the nearest known distribution of the species (Altamira National Forest, Pará, Brazil; ICMBio 2009), and 1500 and 1700 km, respectively, to the southeast of the type locality (Colombia) (Flores 1987, Cisneros-Heredia 2013).

The egg clutch was found on the adaxial face of a leaf hanging at a height of 1.5 m over a small permanent stream (1.2 m width). The clutch contained 21 embryos wrapped in an off-white, translucent gelatinous capsule (Fig. 3a). The embryos were at stage 21 (Gosner 1960) and exhibited a greenish vitellum and head and a greenish brown tail. After five days in an aquarium, the gelatinous capsule became whitish and opaque (Fig. 3b) and the tadpoles hatched at approximately stage 25. At this stage, the

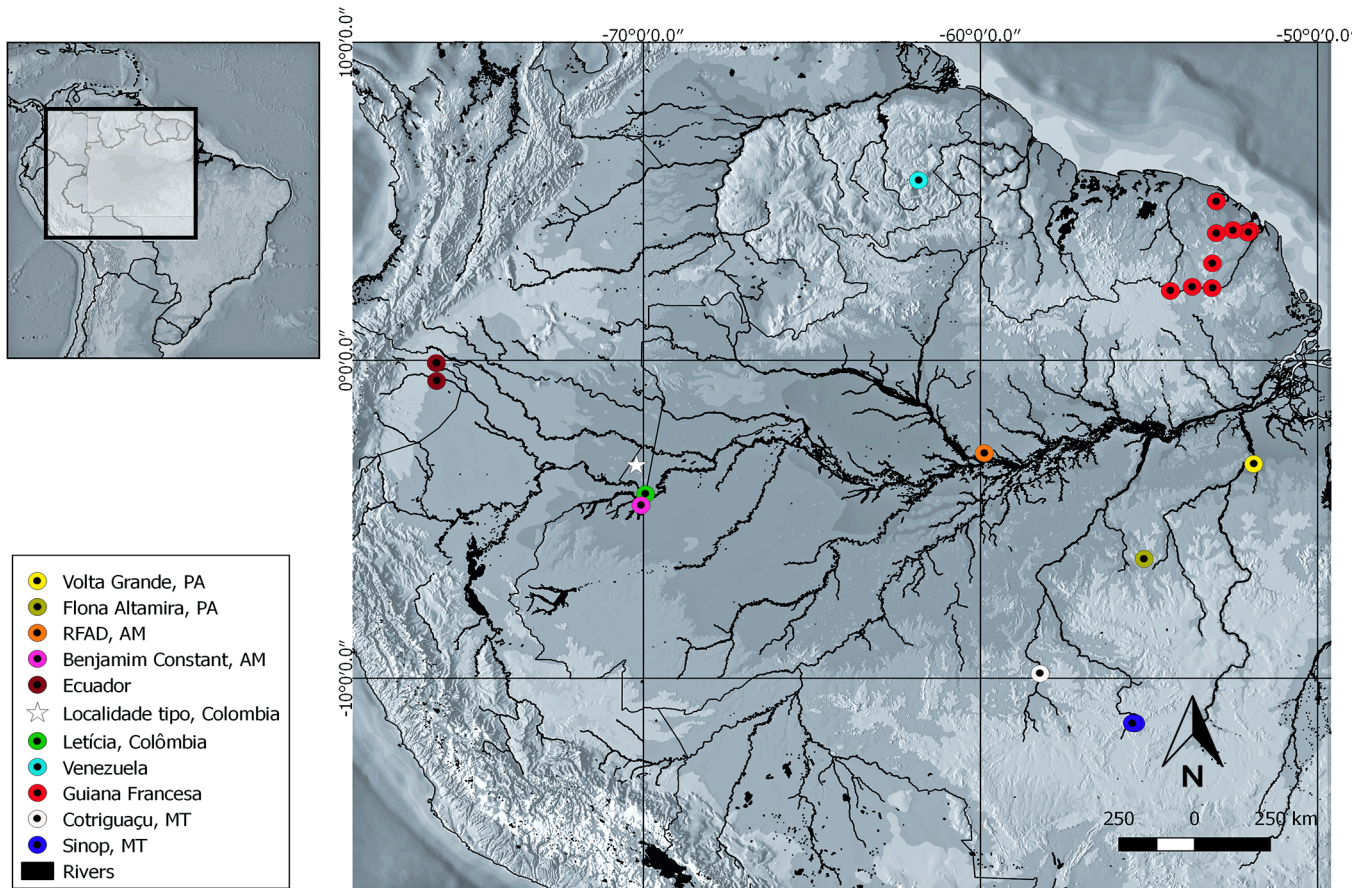


Figure 2. Records of *Vitreorana ritae* in the Amazon. Volta Grande, state of Pará, Brazil (Vaz-Silva et al. 2015); Flona Altamira, state of Pará, Brazil (ICMBio c2009); RFAD, state of Amazonas, Brazil (Lima et al. 2006, Menin et al. 2009); Benjamim Constant, state of Amazonas, Brazil (Lutz and Kloss 1952); Ecuador (Ortiz et al. c2018); Colombia (Lynch 2005, Cisneros-Heredia 2013); Venezuela (Señaris and Ayarzagüena 2005); and French Guiana (Lescure 1975, Lescure and Marty 2000, GBIF c2017).

tadpoles remained with green vitellum, but with a slightly translucent greenish brown stem and head (Fig. 3c–d). The tadpoles did not develop any further after falling into the aquarium water, at which point they had an elongated and flat body with a subterminal oral disc, a labial tooth row formula (LTRF) of 0/1–2, large marginal papillae and unserrated or arched jaw sheaths.

The calling male was located on the top of a leaf (25 x 15 cm) at a height of approximately 3.5 m over a small stream. The advertisement call consists of a single pulsed note with two visible frequencies (Fig. 4). The duration of the two recorded calls were 0.29 and 0.30 s (N = 2), with a call interval of 1.43 min. The average minimum frequency was 4392 Hz (4306 and 4478 Hz, N = 2), the maximum frequency was 4995 Hz (for both calls), and the average dominant frequency was 4737 Hz (4651 and 4823 Hz, N = 2). The frequency of the second harmonic averaged 9990 Hz (9646 and 10335 Hz, N = 2) (Fig. 4).

Molecular analysis of 16S mtDNA (ABAM-H 3085) from Mato Grosso revealed a 1 % difference with *V. ritae* collected in French Guiana and 4 – 5 % difference with vouchers of its sister species *V. helenae* collected in French Guiana and Venezuela (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

The new records of *Vitreorana ritae* extend the known distribution of the species 560 km south of the nearest known locality (ICMBio c2009), and thus represents the southernmost known population of this species. These new records, combined with previous records for glass frogs in the Brazilian Amazon (i.e., Noronha et al. 2012, Pontes and Mattidi 2013, Oliveira et al. 2017, Araújo et al. 2018), indicate that there is an insufficient sampling in many regions and that the geographic distribution of most species is not fully known. Furthermore, many of these species lack natural history data (Noronha and Rodrigues 2018).

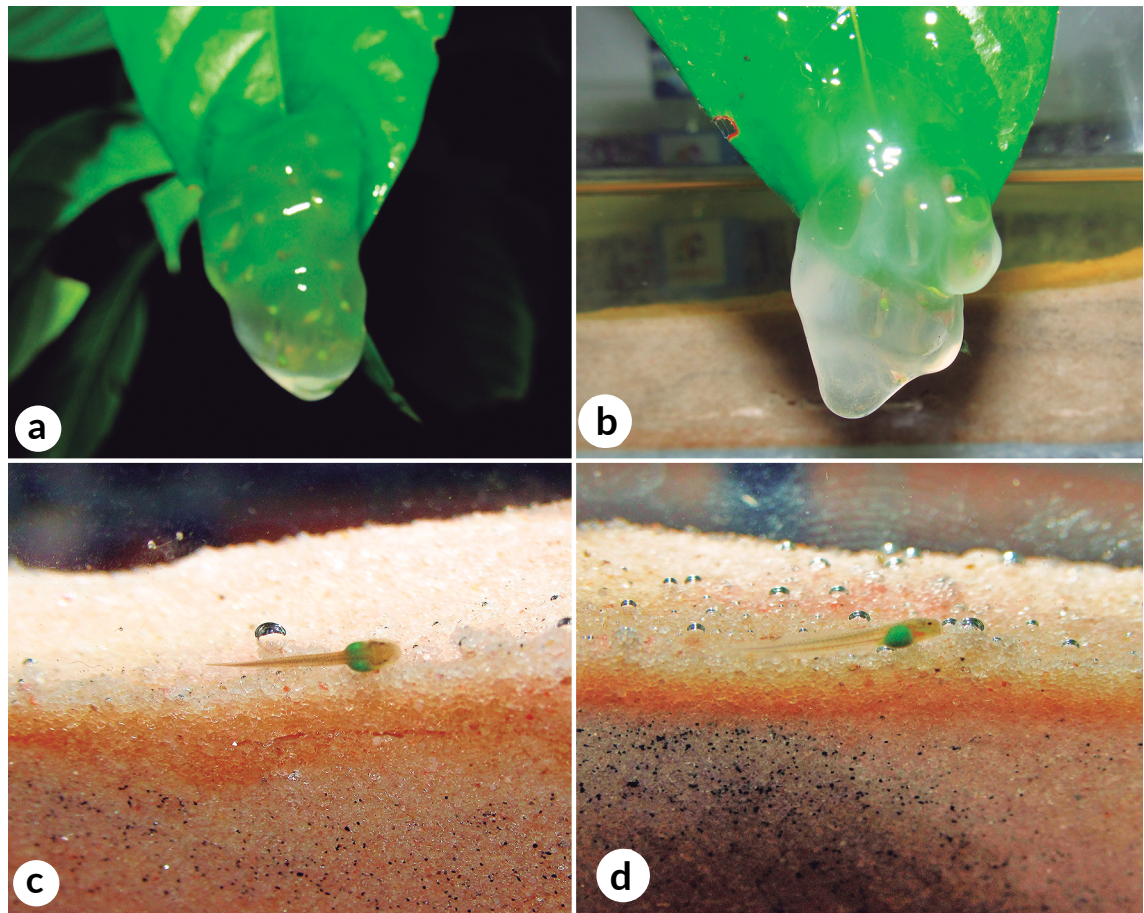


Figure 3. Egg clutch and tadpoles of *Vitreorana ritae* collected in southern Amazonia. **a.** Clutch in riparian fores, municipality of Sinop, state of Mato Grosso, Brazil; **b.** same clutch in the laboratory (ABAM); **c.** dorsal and **d.** lateral views of a tadpole at stage 25 (Gosner 1960), (Photos M. Penhacek).

Adult individuals of *V. ritae* are generally difficult to locate and males call sporadically (Zimmerman and Bogart 1984). Reproductive activity of *V. ritae* occurs mainly between January and May, when males can be observed calling from vegetation above streams and where females deposit clutches on upper or lower leaves. Eggs hatch after several days and the embryos fall into the water where they complete their development as free-swimming tadpoles (Menin et al. 2009). The streams where *V. ritae* reproduces support strong water currents during the rainy season, and so the tadpoles possess a fossorial habit. This likely explains why few centrolenid tadpoles have been observed and collected throughout the vast region of the Brazilian Amazon. The morphological description of the tadpoles originating from the clutch found in Mato Grosso agrees with that of Menin et al. (2009).

The advertisement call of *V. ritae* recorded in southern Amazonia (municipality of Sinop, MT) is a single pulsed harmonic note, which differs from the number of notes of the calls described for the species by Zimmerman and

Bogart (1984) for central Amazonia (two notes), Señaris and Ayarzagüena (2005) for Venezuela (two notes), and Lescure and Marty (2000) in Guyana (four notes). Call duration also differed from the calls described from central Amazonia (average 130 ms, Zimmerman and Bogart 1984) and Guyana (average 107 ms, Lescure and Marty 2000). The dominant frequency reported here for southern Amazonia (average 4737 Hz, 4651 Hz and 4823 Hz, N=2) was similar to that reported for males of central Amazonia (4640 – 5160 Hz, Zimmerman and Bogart 1984) and Venezuela (3810 – 4920 Hz, Señaris and Ayarzagüena 2005), but differed from that described for males of Guyana (5570 – 7470 Hz, Lescure and Marty 2000). The calling male reported here exhibited a long period of silence between calls, which was also reported by Zimmerman and Bogart (1984). Although the acoustic parameters of the advertisement calls differ among regions, all these studies analyzed a very small number of individuals and calls, which limits the ability to understand intra- and inter-individual variation and variation among populations. In addition, environmental (e.g., temperature) and social (e.g., number

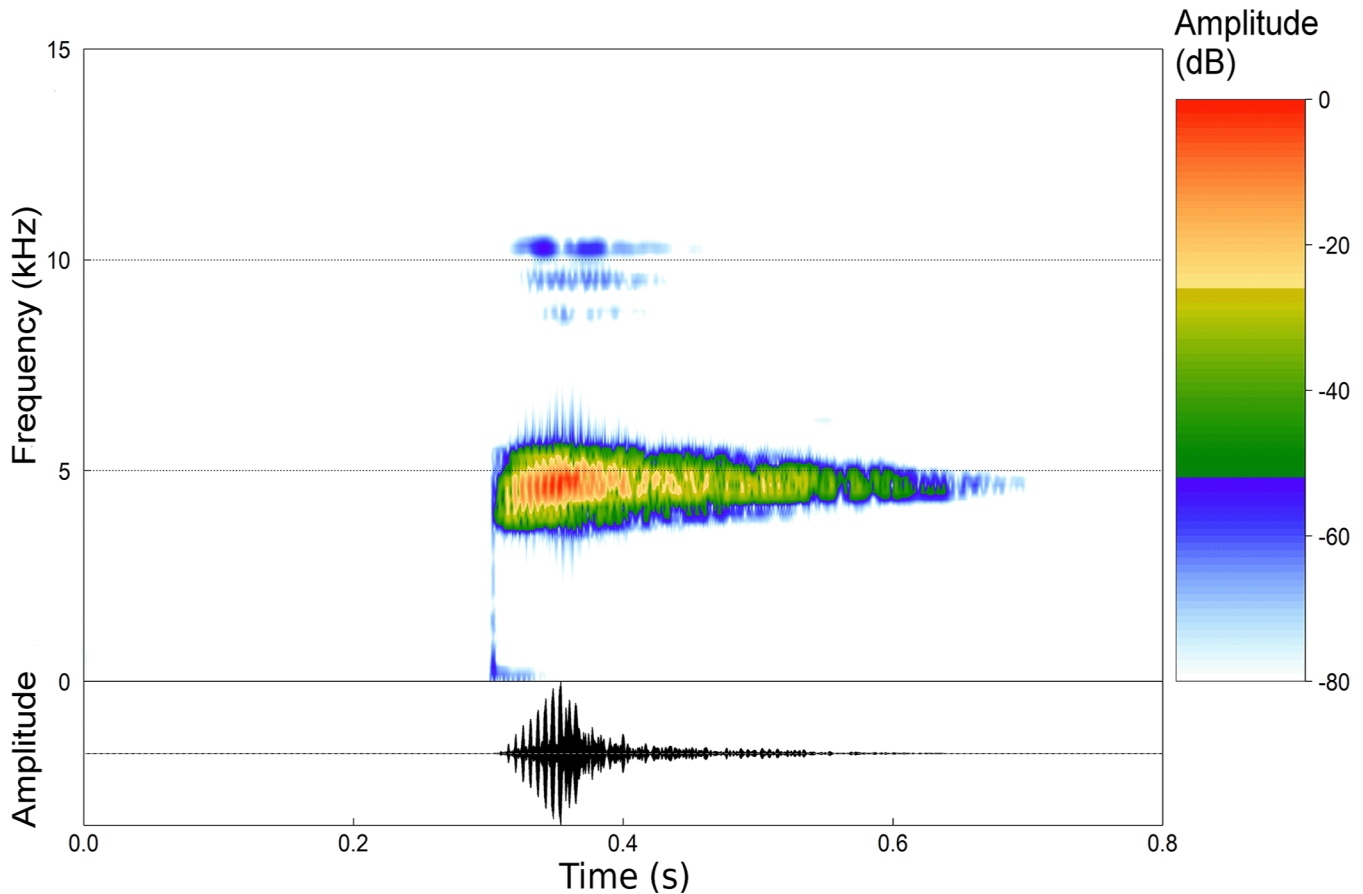


Figure 4. Sonogram and spectrogram of the advertisement call of *Vitreorana ritae* in southern Amazonia, Brazil. Voucher (ABAM-H 3085). December 6 2017, 21:55 pm, 27°C, 95% humidity, SVL = 19.8 mm.

of calling males) contexts can influence temporal parameters, such as the number of notes, for example (Morais *et al.* 2012, Köhler *et al.* 2017). Since anurans can have wide vocal repertoires (Toledo *et al.* 2015), it is also possible that the calls described for *V. ritae* represent different types of calls.

Amphibians generally have a low vagility and high philopatry, which are characteristics that promote differentiation and ultimately speciation (Wells 2012, Lima *et al.* 2020). In this sense, although most anuran species would be expected to have small geographic distributions with distantly separated populations having greater genetic differences, there are some cases of widely distributed species with low genetic distances, such as *Dendropsophus nanus* (Boulenger, 1889) (Fouquet *et al.* 2007), *Allophryne ruthveni* Gaige, 1926 (Castroviejo-Fisher *et al.* 2012), and *Adelphobates galactonotus* (Steindachner, 1864) (Rojas *et al.* 2020). There are also cases of low genetic distances between distinct species, such as *Pseudopaludicola jaredi* Andrade, Magalhães, Nunes-de-Almeida, Veiga-Menoncello, Santana, Garda, Loebmann, Recco-Pimentel,

Giaretta, and Toledo, 2016 (Andrade *et al.* 2016) and *Proceratophrys ararype* Mângia, Koroiva, Nunes, Roberto, Ávila, Sant'Anna, Santana, and Garda, 2018 (Mângia *et al.* 2018). The low genetic distance among populations of *V. ritae* supports the hypothesis that some anuran species can maintain low genetic distances even though they have wide geographic distributions (Wynn and Heyer 2001, Fouquet *et al.* 2007).

The present work contributes to the knowledge of *V. ritae* and demonstrates that even though it is widely distributed throughout the Amazon and Cerrado transition zone, the genetic, morphological and acoustic characteristics of the species are highly conserved, which may indicate the maintenance of gene flow among populations. The results presented here also demonstrate the capacity of the species has to adapt to different climates and environments by eradicating to lowland forests of the Amazon in drier areas such as the ecotone with the Cerrado. Finally, we emphasize the need for greater sampling in southern Amazonia because the diversity of the region is

Table 1. Uncorrected distance (p-distance) between specimens of *Vitreorana ritae* and *V. helenae* from different locations: (1) *V. ritae* from the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil; (2–3) *V. ritae* from French Guiana (EU663017, MB 165 voucher; EU266755, MB 165); (4) *V. helenae* from French Guiana; and (5–8) *V. helenae* from Venezuela.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1								
2	0.01							
3	0.01	0.00						
4	0.04	0.04	0.04					
5	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.00				
6	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.00			
7	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00		
8	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	

underestimated. Furthermore, the region has been experiencing major environmental impacts, from accelerated expansion of agribusiness and industrial exploitation of natural resources, which may cause the extinction of numerous populations or even endemic species before they are even known scientifically.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

MP was responsible for collecting data, identifying the specimens, acoustic analysis and writing the text; SFA identified the specimens and revised the text; EAO was responsible for molecular analysis, wrote the text and created the image; EJHR wrote the text; VGB was responsible for acoustic analysis and writing the text; LRRR was responsible for molecular analysis and reviewing the text; DJR was responsible for collecting data, identified the specimens and reviewing the text.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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