An Entomological Trip to Argentina

Part I

by Olivier Boilly

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My name is Olivier Boilly. I am 31 years old. I have been passionate about dung beetles from Central and South America and Europe for over ten years. I am an entomologist at the Museum of Natural History of Lille in the North of France, where I breed over 25 species of insects, give presentations to the public and manage the collections.

My friend Olivier Décobert asked me to share my two trips to Argentina (Photo 1), from January 21 to February 13, 2008 and December 24 to January 17, 2009. It is the best period to catch many beetles.

I made these two expeditions with my wife Maud, an excellent companion and collector.
We arrived at the Buenos Aires Airport (Ezeiza) and we went to the domestic airport (Aeroparque) to take a plane to Salta in northwestern Argentina.

1) Jujuy and Purmamarca

We rented a car and we drove to Jujuy to see the Salinas Grandes and Purmamarca.

On the way, we stopped along the famous Ruta 9 (Photo 2) to put some dung traps with “fresh” (in my bag more than 24 hours) fish. The natural environment is composed of tropical forest with birds and a lot of different songs. I put six traps with fish and 5 with my dung. We looked at dung we were able to find some *Dichotomius* sp., some *Onthophagus hirculus* Mannerheim, 1829 and a few *Sulcophanaeus batesi* (Harold, 1868) (Photo 3). The first Phanaeini caught on my own!

After that, we took the road to the north and we crossed a boundry between two biotopes in the area of El Carmen. We stopped on the road to study horse dung where we caught a few more *Sulcophanaeus batesi*.

We arrived in Jujuy at night and we found a hotel. This was most difficult since we don’t speak Spanish.

The next morning we took the car to go to Purmamarca and the Salinas Grandes (Photo 4). The road is not long but high. It was difficult to breathe at 4,170 meters on the last mountain pass.
At this height, all is very dry so there were not a lot of beetles, only a few tenebrionids. I only caught 3 Trogidae, *Polynoncus pilularius* (Germar, 1824), near Purmamarca under dried dung. But the landscape (Photo 5) is wonderful at this place with colored mountains and typical plants.

II) Salta to Cafayate

We took the famous Ruta 40 from the South of Salta to Cafayate. The beginning of the road is tropical forest. I placed some dung traps at this place (Pulares). The altitude increasing, we crossed clouds, the weather was really bad and the road too and finally we arrived to the Parque Nacional Los Cardones (Photo 6) with an elevation between 2,700 and 5,000 meters. We saw a lot of cactus on the altiplano. After this place, just before Payogasta, we caught some running beetles: *Anomiopsoides heteroclyta* (Blanchard, 1845) (Photo 7). This is a very strange Eucranini. This species uses its anterior legs to carry pellets and the other legs to run very fast. They make burrows and try to hide themselves when you hunt them.

Then, we went to Cachi and Molinos. I walked in the city of Molinos at night to search for beetles near lights. At this period and altitude (2,200 meters), the nights are cold, but I found a lot of Dynastini and Rutelini. The next day, we took the long road to Cafayate (four hours and a very bad road), the Calchaquies Valleys and Quebrada de las Flechas are really
amazing! The road follows the Rio Calchaqui.

We arrived in San Carlos, and we caught some more Anomiopsoides heteroclyta at the exit of the city.

From Cafayate, we took the Ruta 68 (north) to Salta, we wanted to see the Quebrada de las Conchas. On the road, we caught more Anomiopsoides heteroclyta.

We found two hotels, so we slept the first night in Alemania and the second in Coronel Moldes. I set up a light (Photo 8) at the Alemania hotel. I caught a lot of beetles: 
Golofa eacus Burmeister (Photo 9), 1847, Omorgus suberosus (Fabricius, 1775), Mallodon spinibarbis (Linné, 1758), Homonyx planicostatus argentinus Gutierrez, 1952, Megacephala sp., Oncideres sp, Phileurus didymus Linné, 1758, Brachygnathus angusticollis Burmeister, Brachygnathus festivus Dejean, 1826, Platycoelia inflata Ohaus, 1904, Epichalcoplethis sanctijacobi (Ohaus, 1905), Pelidnota fulva Blanchard, 1850 and Calosoma argentiniensis Csiki, 1927.

During the day, a lot of Gymnetis pudibunda Burmeister, 1866 were flying at the top of the trees. We found some Euphoria lurida (Fabricius, 1775) (Photo 10) larvae in manure. I set a lot of dung beetle traps to catch the famous Sulcophanaeus imperator (Chevrolat, 1844), some Canthon quinquemaculatus Castelnau, 1840, Canthon ornatus Redtenbacher, 1867 Canthon...
curvodilatatus Schmidt, 1920, Canthon principalis Burmeister, 1873, Malagionella puncticollis Blanchard, 1846 and a few Deltochilum gibbosum (Fabricius, 1775).

The next day, we stayed in Coronel Moldes and again set up a light. I caught one Neoathyreus martinezorum Howden, 1985 and near the hotel found half of a Megasoma joergenseni Bruch, 1910 killed by a dog! This night was less interesting because the species were not so much attracted by the trap as the first night. However, thanks to this light. I saw new species: Oncideres sp., a lot of Rutelinae and Dynastinae and a few little Cerambycidae and Melolonthidae.

The day after, we took the car and we passed near Pulares to check the bait trap. We caught some Sulcophanaeus batesi, Canthon quinquemaculatus and a few Polynoncus pilularius.

The next day we went to Cafayate and Tafi del Valle.

III) Tucuman

Before arriving in Tucuman, we had to pass by the road to Tafi del Valle. At this place near Amaicha del Valle (Photo 11), the climate is very dry with a lot of cactus. We stopped to see if insects were active. We found a few Calocomus desmarestii (Guérin-Méneville, 1831) (Cerambycidae), some Anomiopsoides heteroclyta and a pair of Ocypetes crassicollis.
We took the road to San Miguel de Tucuman. The mountain road is very long by way of Tafi del Valle, and after one hour and a lot of rain (normally, there is no rain at this place!) we arrived at a place where the road was collapsed (Photo 12). So we turned back to find a hotel in Amaicha del Valle. At this place, we found some *Polynoncus haafi* (Vaurie, 1962) under a dead goat.

The day after, the road was repaired. They must have worked during the night to repair it. It is the only short road from Cafayate to Tucuman, and if not passible, we must drive by Salta, a much longer route.

Just before arriving in Tafi, we stopped to search in dung (there were a lot of horses and cows), but the temperature was 10°C (50º F) at 2,300 meters. Nevertheless, we found a lot of *Sulcophanaeus batesi* (Photo 14) and *Oruscatus davus* (Erichson, 1847) (Photo 15); they were flying and were very active. It was really strange because of the low temperature.

The road from Tafi goes down to Tucuman, so the temperature increases and the forests become tropical. At this place it was warmer than 30°C (86º F) and with high humidity. We slept in Tucuman, and we went to Salta by the Ruta 9 the next day. We stopped near Tapia to try to find *Sulcophanaeus imperator* (Photo 16). I saw cows and we searched...
for beetles in dung. There was only some *Gromphas lacordairi* Brullé, 1843 and a few *Onthophagus hirculus* Mannerheim, 1829. I searched for a long time and found nothing. We took the car and we stopped near a farm where we saw three horses. I found one female *Sulcophanaeus imperator* crushed on the road. The pasture was sandy with a few small trees. I saw some fresh dung. Around the dung, I saw disturbed soil and it moved! With my hands, I dug and found more than 30 specimens of this wonderful species!

We went to Métan to sleep and the day after we made a small trek to the El Rey National Park (Photo 17). It is a tropical forest, the same type as in the south of Bolivia. It is a very good place to see and take pictures of lots of insects, birds and mammals.

I put some dung traps along the road near Lumbrera, and caught *Deltochilium gibbosum*, *Deltochilium pseudoicarus* Balthasar, 1939, *Malagionella astyanax punctatostriata* Blanchard, 1846, *Dichotomius triangulariceps* Blanchard, 1846 (a rare species) and some small Canthonini.

[To be continued in the next issue]
In May, 1991. I was still a young entomologist, searching everywhere to find new species. I was with my wife on a 2-week trip to Yugoslavia, which was still the name of this country at that time. We knew that there were some problems between the Serbs and Croats, but we didn’t realize that only one month later, there would be a war…

I searched for all kinds of Coleoptera but concentrated on ground beetles and scarabs. I found an interesting forested area where I discovered the green form of *Trypocopris vernalis* L. In France, this species is black or dark blue. I also collected *Protaetia affinis* (Andersch) and *Lucanus cervus* (Linné) larvae. After rearing, one of these larvae resulted in the smallest *Lucanus cervus* I have ever seen: its size is only 27 mm! I mention only scarab species, but there were also interesting carabids.
Here is the scary part: one day, I decided to return to this wonderful area to check my traps and try to find new beetles. After a few minutes, I heard a car stop and decided to go back to the road to see if there was a problem. Two military men, an officer and a soldier who held a machine gun, were looking at my car. When they saw me, the officer immediately asked if I had a gun in my pocket by asking “Pistolet, pistolet?” which is a French name for a gun. I answered “No!” as I slowly removed a glass jar (for my insect specimens) from my pocket and nothing more. I explained in my broken German that I was a French entomologist looking for insects, and that I was not dangerous at all! The officer inspected my passport and left, stating “No problem.” After their departure, I was sufficiently disturbed by this experience to stop my entomological investigations and immediately go back to the town Senj, where I again found my wife. I explained to her what had just happened in the forest.

We quickly understood, after talking with people and seeing more and more soldiers everywhere, that the problem between the Serbs and Croats was seriously escalating. We decided that it was really dangerous to stay and returned in France a few days later, a 1,700 kilometer (1,056 mile) car trip.

At present, this country where I found many interesting beetles is not called Yugoslavia, but Croatia.
On our return from nine months in Australia, we noted a decided increase in the bureaucracy which disrupted collecting and our studies. Not only were more and more permits needed, but some countries did not allow their insects to be sent out, not even for identification. They seemed to think that insects might be shown to contain some valuable compounds which might be exploited by others if the insects left their country. In addition, politicians decided that science was influencing their budget and therefore needed “proper control”. Thus the studies of many scientists were adversely influenced by supposedly trained administrators who knew nothing about the science that they were administering. I’m sure that many of our readers are familiar with this type of situation and, in my opinion, it only slows down individual initiative. Such a change in direction has limited scientific exploration in many ways.

When we returned from Australia we had most of the summer of 1989 to get settled and take advantage of an invitation to visit Don Thomas in Chiapas, México. This time Anne stayed home while I left in early June to spend three weeks with Don, Brett Ratcliffe, and some others. At that time Don was living in Tuxtla and working on a program of sterilizing screw worm flies. Fortunately he preferred to collect beetles in his spare time and, therefore, he not only hosted us but took us to a number of his favorite localities near Tuxtla. Close by was Sumidero Park (Photo 1), a scrub forest fringing an awesome canyon. There was a guard at the entrance to the park and - with a ranger’s OK - we were able to collect there during the day. For night collecting we were told to get a permit, which we were unable to do. Like many Central American parks, the local woodcutters were busy, as were some growers of corn, beans, etc., so that any “natural” sections of the park were rapidly being reduced! Despite this, many of the trees and shrubs were in bloom and there were many flower feeding scarabs and cerambycids in evidence.
Collecting, especially along the edge of the canyon (Photos 2 and 3), was very productive. One new species of *Trigonopeltastes* was collected and later named *T. thomasi* Howden & Ratcliffe (Photo 4) after Don Thomas.

We collected in a number of different localities (Photo 5) in the vicinity of Tuxtla, including a different area of canyon, with generally good results, except when we were rained out, which happened frequently in the evenings. We made a two-day side trip to the San Cristobal de las Casas area; I did not expect to find much new to me as I had collected there for more than a month in 1969. I was interested in seeing how the area had changed in 20 years, but was still surprised that so much forest had disappeared during that time. I have learned one thing over the years - don’t go back years later to a favorite collecting area and expect it to be unchanged!

A second foray was made along Highway 190 toward the state of Oaxaca (Photo 6), stopping at a small motel in an area called Cinco Cerros where Don had good collecting earlier. I was not optimistic, as the nearby hill had only a few oaks and pines left on the grass covered hillside. Just below the motel was the road and below that a tangle of vegetation along a dry wash. Happily, I was wrong. Rarely have I seen better collecting for beetles that interested me; most of the major groups of scarabs were represented: dynastines, *Chrysina*, *Pelidnota*,...
Trigonopeltastes thomasi Howden & Ratcliffe, the best of my poor photos of the species.

Over 50 species of cerambycids were also collected that night at the handy florescent lights under the overhanging roof.

There was only one problem - a number of large cane toads (Bufo marinus) also enjoyed the plentiful food supply! These were a problem until we found that tossing the toads into the open beds of passing small trucks worked nicely, and none returned while we were there. I thought that I might be extending the range of the toad, but then decided that anywhere the small trucks went would already be occupied by toads. The only difference it might make would be some puzzled truck drivers wondering how the toads climbed into their truck. After a day at Cinco Cerros, Don had to return to his screw worm fly work, so we all went back to Tuxtla. Two days remained before we had to leave, and these were spent at or near Sumidero Park during the day and at another small park-like area called el Aguacero where we ran our lights; both Neoathyreus and Bolbolasmus, along with a number of other scarabs came to our light there, a very pleasant way of ending a great trip. The next day, June 25, I flew to México City and the following day arrived in Ottawa.

Winter meant the usual classes, meetings and, when time allowed, working with beetle projects. Spring produced the usual itchy feet. Don Thomas had made the mistake of issuing another invitation, so in late May of
1990, Bruce Gill, Anne, and I flew to Tuxtla and spent three weeks there. Upon arriving, we rented a car, collected briefly at Sumidero, and that evening went to a farewell party held for one of Don's coworkers. The evening held at least one surprise - the hors d'oeuvres served with drinks consisted of a typical native delicacy served only at that time of year: fried abdomens of queen leaf-cutting ants (*Atta*). These ants swarm in the spring after some good rains and hundreds of the large queens can be collected at that time. The abdomens, almost the size of a small marble, are fried or roasted and then eaten. The taste was hard to describe - mostly that they were fried and crunchy, the taste possibly determined by what a person had to drink! What the ants tasted like didn't really matter, they added something to the conversation; it was an interesting evening.

The following day we again collected at Sumidero, obtaining several genera of cetonids (*Photo 7*), *Apeltastes*, four species of *Trigonopeltastes* and a number of other flower feeding scarabs. Later in the day we shopped for supplies. The next morning we left for San Cristobal de las Casas. The road on the escarpment wound through some very hilly terrain, some clear cut (*Photo 8*) since I was there in the 1960's. We were warned by Don that the downward slope of the road just before the town was very slippery. We did not think too much about this, as the road was dry and the surface good. Bruce, who is an excellent driver,
had the wheel as we neared San Cristobal de las Casas (Photo 9). As we started down the hill into town the car started to slide, acting like we were driving on ice! For a minute we were all over the road. Fortunately there was no traffic and Bruce was able to keep the car on the road. It turned out that oil and grease spilled from trucks over the years, combined with a very smooth road surface made that section into a skating rink. Later we noted a number of wrecked vehicles in the bushes near the road. It did seem odd that no one had bothered to sand the slippery parts or even put up warning signs. Perhaps someone in the town government owned an auto repair or sales company? Such was México at that time!

We found lodging at a nice motel just south of town on a wooded slope with an open field in the front. It was called the Motel Molino (Photos 10 and 11) and I had stayed there briefly the year before. It was often cool at night, so each room had a fireplace. Firewood was furnished at a small price - oak logs cut from the forest behind the motel. The small forest was considerably thinner than it had been the year before! The next day we had reasonable collecting, as usual Anne's weevils being the most numerous. The following day we returned to Tuxtla, and then left for Laguna Belgica. Several traps and a flight intercept trap were set out before dark, then at dusk our lights were turned on, attracting *Phileurus, Spodistes, Anomala, Phyllophaga*, and a number of other scarabs and various other beetles.

A day was spent collecting near Tuxtla; then Don, Bruce, Anne and I went to Lago Montebello (Photo 12) near the Guatemala border, stopping on the way to book rooms at a motel in Comitán. We collected in the afternoon along a seemingly rainforest trail, results were rather poor with only one *Strigoderma* and several ceratocanthids taken, along with
numerous weevils (as usual). We set out our lights in the same area at dusk, but a short time later it started to rain. Three species of *Phyllophaga*, one specimen each of *Cyclocephala*, *Isonychus*, and *Anomala* came to my light before we had to pick up when it really started to rain. On the way back to Comitán we were stopped by the “Federales”. Don was quite worried, as he said some of them were worse than the “banditos”; we were fortunate that we did not seem worth their time; the rest of our trip to town was uneventful. The next morning was spent near town beating along a trail in thorn forest, collecting nothing of note in scarabs, but numbers of buprestids and weevils. In the afternoon we returned to Tuxtla.

A few days were spent collecting near Tuxtla. Our black-lighting was good, except when it rained. One night it looked like it would rain at any moment, so we set our light near the main road just west of Tuxtla, I chose a flat spot in some torn scrub and shortly began collecting the usual genera of scarabs that came to light, *Anomala*, *Diplotaxis*, *Phyllophaga*, etc. All was fine, no rain and some good beetles, when my sheet was suddenly covered with moderate sized black ants. When several of the ants started to chew on me, I realized that I was in the front of a foraging swarm of army ants (*Eciton*). Since I had no desire to feed the ants, my light and sheet were taken up in record time. Since the miserable animals were headed toward Bruce’s light, we all decided it was time to stop, head for town, and quench our thirst.

During our stay we revisited the small motel at Cinco Cerros with the usual results - great collecting. Also, more toads got to enjoy riding in the beds of passing open trucks! During our stay there, we took an afternoon to drive beyond the motel to the Oaxaca State border. Just beyond the border Bruce found the refuse dump from an *Atta* (leaf cutter) ant nest. The road cut went close to the *Atta* nest and rather than excavate a chamber for refuse, the ants took the easy way and about six feet down the face of the cut opened a tunnel and dumped out their refuse of old leaves, fungi, etc. Sifting through the refuse pile was very rewarding for Bruce, yielding species of *Onthophagus*, and others collected mainly from *Atta* nests. The road cut saved a lot of digging, as well as not having to worry with angry ants!

The last week was spent collecting...
at Sumidero, Lago Belgica, and several other localities near Tuxtla. We made a quick overnight trip to San Cristobal so that Bruce could pick up some traps. Anne and I ran a light at the Motel Molino as there was some rain and the evening was cool; nothing unusual appeared.

On June 15 we said goodbye and thanked Don and his family for lodging us and putting up with us. We then left for an overnight in México City. The next morning, after checking in for our flight to Canada, we started to wander around when we spotted a mountain of equipment; associated with this was Bill Warner, Art Evans, Rich Cunningham and several others—all going to visit Don! I could not help thinking that both Don and the local beetles should be careful for the next week or so. Later that day we arrived safely back in Ottawa.

**Coenonycha testacea Cazier**

Some collectors think that *Coenonycha testacea* Cazier is actually a complex of individual species. The type series was collected in Santa Barbara County, California on wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum* (Benth.).

As with other members of the genus, this scarab is common on plants at night, but is rarely attracted to light - flightless species excepted. These photographs were taken in April, 1992 in Fontana, San Bernardino County, California. The host plant is *Adenostoma fasciculatum* Hook & Arn.

Submitted by Barney Streit.
At $60 U.S., the 2008 second edition of this two-volume set is a bargain. Its binding is somewhere in between soft and hardcover, and the set comes with a nice slip case. The books measure 7.6” x 10.8” and are written in English and Mandarin Chinese. All told, there are 468 pages and 850 high-quality color photographs. The text provides thorough and accurate coverage of all aspects of beetle rearing and breeding. Its step-by-step instructions explain specific techniques for breeding, egg laying requirements, and larval care.

Volume I discusses the materials and conditions necessary for a successful substrate. It covers the major rhinoceros beetles (Dynastidae) including *Megasoma* and *Chalcosoma*, with an extensive chapter on *Dynastes hercules*. Other single chapters cover flower beetles (Cetonidae), the *Goliathus* beetle, Rutelini scarabs, and long-arm scarabs (Euchirinae).

Volume II is primarily devoted to stag (Lucanidae) beetles. It includes identification keys to help differentiate the different subspecies. Other chapters cover mating and oviposition, larval sex determination, and mites.

Available from BioQuip Products (http://www.bioquip.com/), item # 9698.

Our librarian Andrelica likes to kick off her shoes and relax with a good book - in this case, Volume I of *For the Love of Rhinoceros and Stag Beetles*. This is a welcome break from the incessant book ordering, cataloging and symmetrical book stacking we subject her to. We make her clock out, though.
Do you know who this coleopterist is? The answer is at the bottom of this page.

This man is a native of Indiana, and holds a BS in Agriculture, Purdue University, 1951; an MS in Entomology, 1956; and a PhD in Entomology, 1961, University of Illinois. He was a Research Entomologist, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 1962-1990. He is now a Research Associate, Florida State Collection of Arthropods 1994-present. His interest is the taxonomy and host plant associations of the coleopterous family Bruchidae (seed beetles) of the Western Hemisphere. He is especially interested in Caribbean and circum-Caribbean and Chilean faunae. He is presently collaborating with taxonomists in Chile, Western Australia, South Africa, Argentina, and Brazil.

Answer: John Kingsolver