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### **FIRST RECORD OF SPHENODONTID LEPIDOSAURS FOR THE LATE CRETACEOUS<sup>†</sup>**

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*Sphenodon* is the only survivor of a group that was diverse during the late Triassic and Jurassic times to diminish toward the Early Cretaceous. The group was up to now completely absent from the fossil record of Late Cretaceous and Cenozoic times. Several toothed cranial and mandibular fragments, as well as possibly postcranial remains corresponding to Sphenodontia, were found in sediments of the Río Neuquén Subgroup (Upper Turonian-Coniacian), outcropping in the western slope of the Rentería Mesa, Río Negro Province. The present discovery constitutes the first worldwide record of the group for the Late Cretaceous. The abundant fragments correspond to several specimens, reaching the adults about one meter in length. The referral to Sphenodontia is based on the peculiar tooth morphology: the tooth row, tight enough to almost mask the individuality of every tooth, show wide worn surfaces on its lingual and labial sides, being this way defined an extensive, sharp and sawed crest which is anteroposteriorly continuous. This two-sided symmetrical wearing of the mandibular teeth, evidence its occlusion among the two parallel rows of both maxillary and palatine teeth. This way, the maxillary teeth show only a lingual wearing, whereas the palatine teeth has it on the labial side. These features allow to infer proplinal movements, a condition shared with the extant *Sphenodon*. Additionally, the straight direction of the palatine dentition shows its derived phylogenetic position. The tooth implantation would be acrodont, and every mandibular remain show the wide Meckelian groove on its lingual side; being both features present in sphenodontians. The present discovery contributes to fill the gap and to enlarge the morphological variation of this interesting group.

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