

ARTICLE

Exploring the garage's arachnofauna: first record of *Psilochorus simoni* (Berland, 1911) (Araneae: Pholcidae) in Madrid (Spain), with an updated discussion of its worldwide distribution

Explorando la aracnofauna del garaje: primer registro de *Psilochorus simoni* (Berland, 1911) (Araneae: Pholcidae) en Madrid (España), con una discusión actualizada de su distribución mundial

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Abstract: Urban ecosystems can harbor a surprising diversity of arthropods, including spiders that have adapted to human-modified environments. As part of a *bioblitz* conducted by the spider seminar at the Complutense University of Madrid, a survey was carried out in an underground parking lot to document synanthropic spider species. Among the six species recorded, *Psilochorus simoni* (Berland, 1911) was identified for the first time in the province of Madrid. This American-origin cellar spider is considered both troglophilic and synanthropic, and has spread across much of Europe, yet records from the Iberian Peninsula remain scarce. An updated distribution map was generated using literature records and data from BOLD and GBIF. The species' presence in a garage, along with its limited dispersal capacity, suggests passive introduction via vehicles. These findings expand the known distribution of *P. simoni* in the Iberian Peninsula and suggest that other populations may be going unnoticed. Further monitoring of human-associated environments is encouraged to improve our understanding of arachnid biodiversity in cities.

Keywords: Araneae, Pholcidae, *Psilochorus simoni*, Synanthropic spiders, Urban biodiversity, Species distribution, Arthropod monitoring.

Resumen: Los ecosistemas urbanos pueden albergar una sorprendente diversidad de artrópodos, incluidas arañas que se han adaptado a entornos modificados por el ser humano. En el marco de un *bioblitz* realizado por el seminario de arañas de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, se llevó a cabo un muestreo en un aparcamiento subterráneo con el objetivo de documentar especies de arañas sinantrópicas. Entre las seis especies recogidas, *Psilochorus simoni* (Berland, 1911) fue encontrado por primera vez para la provincia de Madrid. Esta araña de origen americano, considerada tanto troglófila como sinantrópica, se ha expandido por buena parte de Europa, si bien los registros en la península ibérica siguen siendo escasos. Presentamos un mapa de distribución actualizado a partir de registros recogidos en la literatura científica y datos obtenidos de BOLD y GBIF. Su presencia en un garaje, junto con su limitada capacidad de dispersión, sugiere una introducción pasiva a través de vehículos. Estos hallazgos amplían el rango de distribución conocido de *P. simoni* en la península ibérica y ponen de manifiesto la probabilidad de que otras poblaciones estén pasando desapercibidas. Se anima a incrementar el monitoreo de ambientes asociados al ser humano para mejorar nuestro conocimiento sobre la biodiversidad de arácnidos en las ciudades.

Palabras clave: Araneae, Pholcidae, *Psilochorus simoni*, Arañas sinantrópicas, Biodiversidad urbana, Distribución, Seguimiento de artrópodos.

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Supplementary information ↓

1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the activities conducted in the “Seminario de Arañas” of the “Grupo de Seguimiento de la Biodiversidad” (<https://www.ucm.es/segbiodiversidad/>) at the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), a *bioblitz* was conducted in the garage of the Faculty of Biological Sciences to identify synanthropic spiders. This initiative aimed to both familiarize students with the most common spider species coexisting with humans in urban settings such as the university campus, and to expand the existing knowledge of synanthropic arachnofauna in the area, including data on species composition and their phenological stages.

Although urban environments pose challenges for many organisms, some species, particularly those adapted to stable, low-light habitats like caves or underground spaces, find suitable conditions in cities. Troglomorphic spiders are a notable example, many of which have successfully colonized human-made structures (Huber & Acurio, 2022). Nevertheless, despite increased attention to urban ecology and considerable research on some groups such as birds, pollinators or ants (Cabrero-Sañudo *et al.*, 2023), synanthropic spiders remain comparatively understudied, especially in Southern Europe (Fusco *et al.*, 2024).

Among the species identified during the *bioblitz*, *Psilochorus simoni* (Berland, 1911) was particularly noteworthy. This troglomorphic species, considered native to the Americas, is believed to have been accidentally introduced in Paris in the early 1900s (Fürst & Blandinier, 1993). Since then, it has expanded across much of Europe (Benhadi-Marín, 2010), though records from the Iberian Peninsula remain scarce (de Biurrun *et al.*, 2025).

This study aims to contribute new data on synanthropic spiders obtained from the *bioblitz*, thereby enriching the arachnological catalog of the Community of Madrid. Additionally, it provides a brief analysis of the geographic expansion of *P. simoni* at global, European, and Iberian scales, accompanied by an updated distribution map.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Specimens were collected manually and using an entomological sweep net on February 12 and 26, 2025, between 11:20 and 11:40 AM, in the garage of the Faculty of Biological Sciences at the Complutense University of Madrid (Madrid, Spain) (40°26'55.7" N, 03°43'36.8" W; 638 m a.s.l.), a space with constant human activity. All specimens were preserved in 70% ethanol and deposited in the entomological collection of the Department of Biodiversity, Ecology, and Evolution. Identification was carried out using the taxonomic keys provided by [Nentwig et al. \(2025\)](#).

A literature review was conducted focusing on synanthropic spider species, with special emphasis on records of *P. simoni* at the global, European, and Iberian levels ([de Biurrun et al., 2025](#)). For the distribution map, historic records were extracted from open-access scientific literature, along with georeferenced data obtained from the Barcode of Life Data Systems ([BOLD, 2025](#)) and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility ([GBIF.org, 2025](#)). All records were filtered, and only those with precise coordinates, based on collected specimens and identified by recognized experts, were included in the map. As a result, some countries where the species is known to be widespread —such as the United Kingdom ([Lavery, 2019](#))— are represented by only a few citations, due to the lack of precise coordinates given in the available literature. In this regard, we highlight the importance of providing accurate and detailed data, including coordinates, collection dates, and identification references, when reporting species occurrences.

Morphological examination and imaging were performed using a Motic® SMZ-171 stereomicroscope equipped with a Motic® Motacam S6 digital camera. Photographs were taken using Motic Images Plus 3.0 software, and image compositions were processed with Adobe® Photoshop 2022.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The two sampling sessions yielded six synanthropic spider species ([Table 1](#)), belonging to three families. Among them, Pholcidae C. L. Koch, 1850 was by far the most abundant, representing the majority of collected individuals. Commonly known as cellar spiders, pholcids can be easily recognized by their markedly long legs in proportion to their body size ([Nentwig et al., 2025](#)). These spiders are typically sedentary, inhabiting cryptic environments such as beneath rocks, logs, and within caves. Certain species have adapted to human dwellings, where similar conditions are replicated, facilitating their global spread ([Huber & Acurio, 2022](#)).

In the Iberian Peninsula, the family comprises only 13 cited species ([Nentwig et al., 2025](#)), three of which are considered endemic ([World Spider Catalog, 2025](#)). Within the Community of Madrid, five species have been recorded to date ([de Biurrun et al., 2025](#)): *Holocnemus caudatus* (Dufour, 1820), *H. hispanicus* Wiehle, 1933, *H. pluchei* (Scopoli, 1763), *Pholcus phalangioides* (Fuesslin, 1775), and *Spermophora senoculata* (Dugès, 1836). Three of these species were detected during the present survey, along with *P. simoni*, which constitutes a new provincial record.

P. simoni can be easily distinguished from other Iberian pholcid species by its morphology ([Huber, 1994](#); [Slowick, 2009](#); [Nentwig et al., 2025](#)). It differs from *Holocnemus* and *Pholcus* in its small size (<3 mm), a globose opisthosoma and the anterior position of the spinnerets ([Fig. 1A](#)). Unlike the similarly sized genera *Spermophora* and *Spermophorides*, *P. simoni* possesses a pair of median eyes between the lateral groups and a prominent median furrow on the prosoma ([Fig. 1B-C](#)). Regarding its differentiation from other species within the genus, the genitalia and male chelicerae play a fundamental role ([Slowik, 2009](#)). Male individuals have a characteristic spur on the central part of the chelicerae ([Fig. 1D](#)) and, in the pedipalp, the procurus has a sinuous tip ([Fig. 1E-F](#)). In the females, the epigyne is simple, not bisected nor ridged ([Fig. 1G](#)). Since juveniles lack these structures, they are theoretically impossible to identify at species level. However, as *P. simoni* is currently the only species recorded on the Iberian Peninsula and adults were found in the same location and on the same date, the juveniles were assigned to this species.

Table I. Results of the *bioblitz*. Key for the abreviatures: (f) adult female, (j) juvenile, (m) adult male, (sf) subadult female, (sm) subadult male.

Tabla I. Resultados del *bioblitz*. Clave para las abreviaturas: (f) hembra adulta, (j) juvenil, (m) macho adulto, (sf) hembra subadulta, (sm) macho subadulto.

Family	Species	Date	Specimens
Filistatidae Ausserer, 1867	<i>Filistata insidiatrix</i> (Forsskål, 1775)	12/II/2025	1j
	<i>Holocnemus hispanicus</i> Wiehle, 1933	12/II/2025	2f, 1j
		26/II/2025	3f, 1sf 2j
	<i>Holocnemus pluche</i> (Scopoli, 1763)	12/II/2025	2m
		26/II/2025	1m, 4j
		12/II/2025	2f, 2j
	<i>Pholcus phalangioides</i> (Fuesslin, 1775)	26/II/2025	4f, 11j
Pholcidae C. L. Koch, 1850	<i>Psilochorus simoni</i> (Berland, 1911)	12/II/2025	1f
		26/II/2025	1f, 1m, 1sm, 1j
		26/II/2025	1m, 3j
Theridiidae Sundevall, 1833	<i>Steatoda grossa</i> (C. L. Koch, 1838)	26/II/2025	1m, 3j

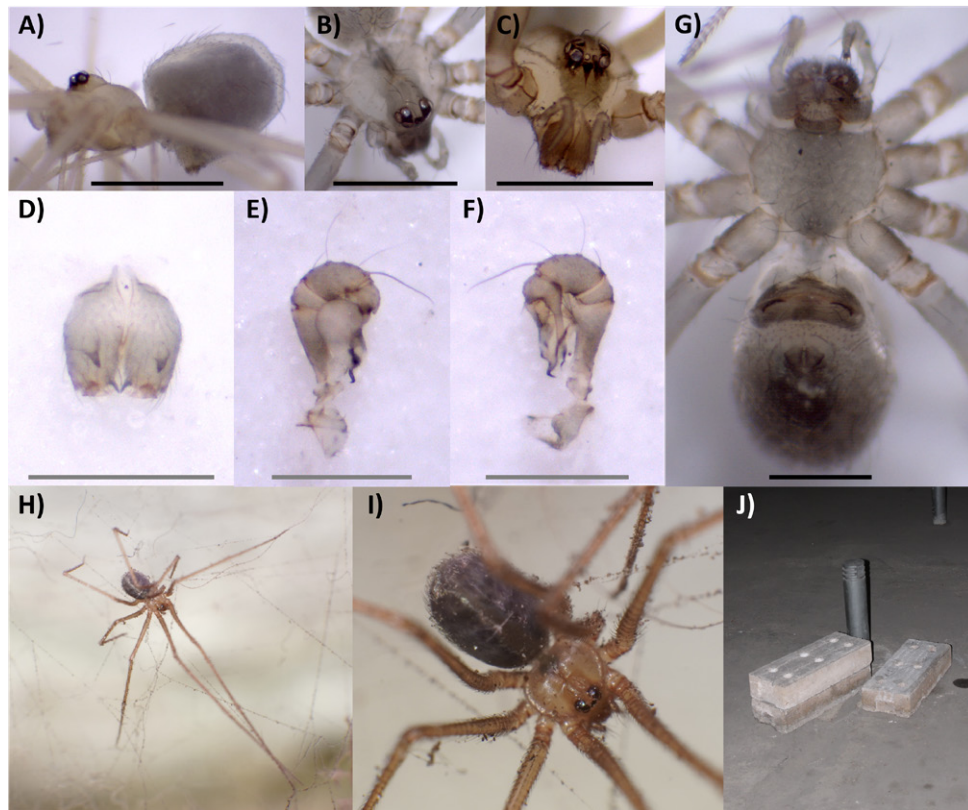


Figure 1. Morphological structures of *P. simoni* (A-G), along with photographs of a live juvenile (H-I) and a microhabitat where individuals were predominantly found (J). The depicted structures correspond to a subadult male (A), two different females (B,G; C) and a male (D-F). A) Lateral view of the body. B) Dorsal view of the prosoma. C) Frontal view of the prosoma. D) Frontal view of the chelicerae. E) Left pedipalp, prolateral. F) Left pedipalp, retrolateral. G) Ventral view of the female; epigyne. H) Juvenile individual on its irregular web. I) Zoom on the individual. J) Some bricks where the species was predominantly found. Scale: 1 mm (black), 0.5 mm (grey).

Figura 1. Estructuras morfológicas de *P. simoni* (A-G), junto a fotografías de un juvenil vivo (H-I) y el microhábitat en el que la mayoría de los individuos fueron encontrados (J). Las estructuras representadas se corresponden con las de un macho subadulto (A), dos hembras distintas (B,G; C) y un macho (D-F). A) Vista lateral del cuerpo. B) Vista dorsal del prosoma. C) Vista frontal del prosoma. D) Vista frontal de los quelíceros. E) Pedipalpo izquierdo en vista prolateral. F) Pedipalpo izquierdo en vista retrolateral. G) Vista ventral de la hembra; epigino. H) Individuo juvenil en su telaraña irregular. I) El mismo ejemplar visto de cerca. J) Los ladrillos en los que la mayoría de ejemplares fueron encontrados. Escala: 1 mm (negro), 0.5 mm (gris).

This species was first described in the basement of the Sorbonne University in Paris by Berland (1911), who suspected it to be an alien species of American origin, based on its initial classification in *Physocyclus* Simon, 1893, a genus native to the Americas (World Spider Catalog, 2025). Since then, *P. simoni* was documented throughout France and other European countries (de Dalmas, 1915; Bristowe, 1933; Fürst & Blandenier, 1993), as well as in the United States (Chamberlin & Ivie, 1942), supporting its presumed American origin. Interestingly, despite this, there have been very few additional records in North America (Slowik, 2009).

The species has since expanded across Europe, where, although initially thought to be restricted to urban structures, it has also been reported from caves (Kostanjšek & Ramšak, 2005; Isaia *et al.*, 2011). Its distribution now spans additional continents, including the Middle East (Ghavami *et al.*, 2007; Bayram *et al.*, 2008) and Oceania, with records in New Zealand (Paquin *et al.*, 2010) (Fig. 2).

Additionally, we report here a record of *P. simoni* from northwestern France, based on material provided by Alberto González Casarrubios. The specimen, an adult female, was collected in October 2022 inside a house in Brest (Finistère, France) (48°22'56.7" N, 4°29'55.9" W; 19 m a.s.l.)

In Spain, the first report of *P. simoni* was by Benhadi-Marín (2010), based on specimens collected in 1984 but only identified decades later during a revision of the spider collection at the University of León. Since then, additional records have emerged from residential buildings (Benhadi-Marín & Ferrández, 2012; Ferrández, 2023) and in caves in the north of the Peninsula (Fernández-Pérez *et al.*, 2014; Fernández-Pérez & Prieto, 2023).

The present finding expands the known distribution of *P. simoni* into the central Iberian Peninsula and suggests that the species may be more widespread than currently documented, likely going unnoticed due to its small size (1.9–3.0 mm) and cryptic habits. Unlike *Pholcus* or *Holocnemus*, *P. simoni* does not construct extensive webs but rather small ones close to the ground (Huber, 1994). Consistently, individuals were observed in inconspicuous webs in floor-wall junctions and, notably, inside brick holes (Fig. 1H–J). Since the species does not rely on ballooning for dispersal (Huber, 2023), its occurrence in a garage suggests that it may have arrived via private vehicles. Similar patterns have been reported in other Araneae species (Chapman & Braig, 2018). Due to its small size, it could have been transported within vehicle bodywork, as it can easily fit into small gaps close to the ground.

These findings underscore the need for further exploration of urban environments, where despite their proximity to us, many species can remain undetected. The discovery of *P. simoni* in Madrid expands the known range of this species in the Iberian Peninsula, demonstrating the potential for further undocumented records in similar environments of the region. Continued research on synanthropic arachnids is essential for understanding their ecological roles and distribution patterns in urban ecosystems.

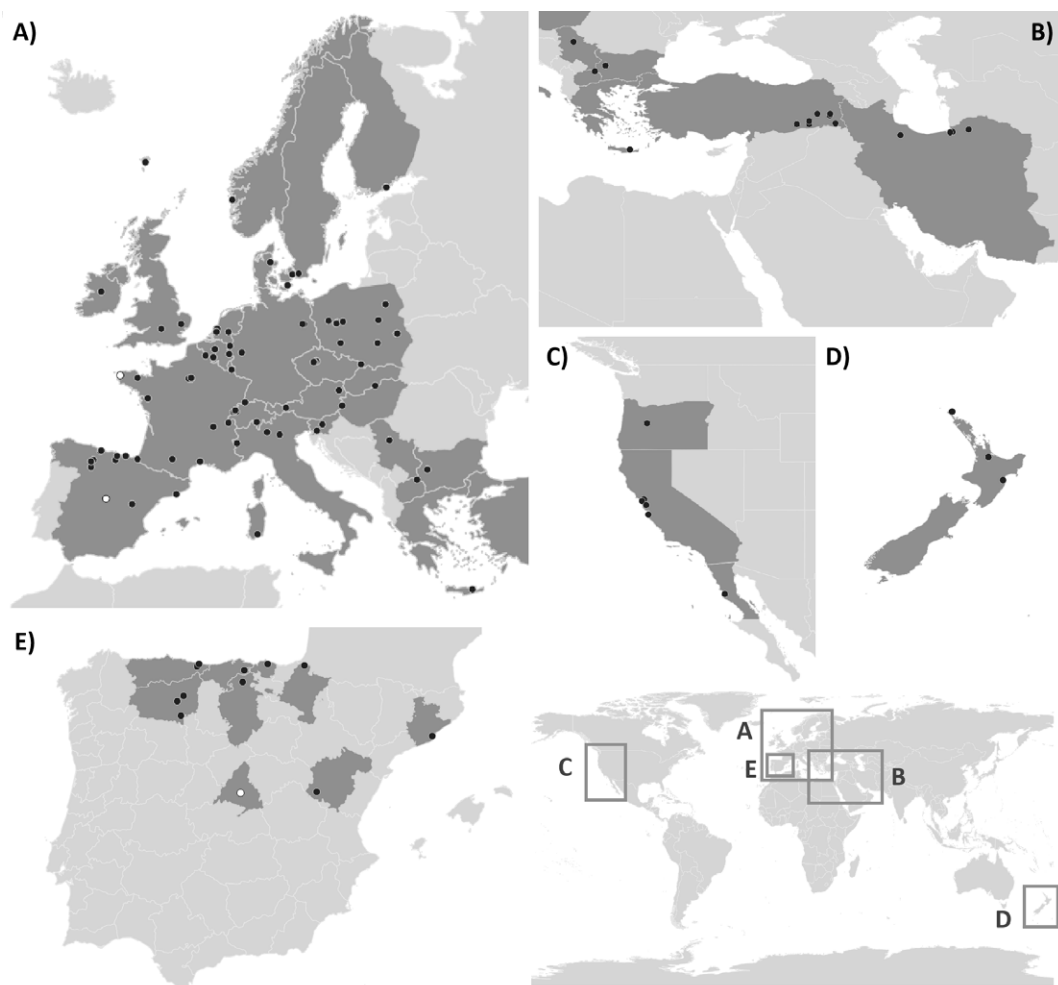


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of *P. simoni* worldwide. Black dots represent previous citations, while the two white dots are the new records presented here. For a better visualization of the local presence of the species the map was divided into geographical regions: Europe (A), the Middle East (B), the Western Coast of the United States and Mexico (C), New Zealand (D) and the Iberian Peninsula (E). References of the mapped points: Austria: Kritscher, 1970; Huber, 1994; Thaler, 2000. Belgium: Kekenbosch & Ransy, 1976; Fraiture, 1973. Bulgaria: Naumova *et al.*, 2017; BOLD, 2025. Czechia: Rezác *et al.*, 2021. Denmark: Brændegaard, 1966; Scharff & Gudik-Sørensen, 2006. Faroe Islands: Lissner *et al.*, 2016. Finland: Huhta, 1972; BOLD, 2025. France: Berland, 1911; de Dalmas, 1915; Comellini, 1954; Bristowe, 1933; Ledoux, 1967; le Peru, 2011; Fernández-Pérez & Prieto, 2023. Germany: Moritz, 1973; BOLD, 2025. Greece: Bosmans *et al.*, 2013. Hungary: Szinetár, 1992. Iran: Ghavami *et al.*, 2007. Ireland: BOLD, 2025. Italy: Brignoli, 1979; Caoduro *et al.*, 1994; Isaia *et al.*, 2007; Isaia *et al.*, 2011. Luxembourg: Kreuels *et al.*, 2019. Mexico: Slowik, 2009. Netherlands: Vossen, 1983; Koomen, 1988; Prinsen, 1989; Helsdingen, 2010; Bloem & Noordijk, 2021. New Zealand: Paquin *et al.*, 2010. North Macedonia: Komnenov, 2014. Norway: Klausen, 1972. Poland: Dziabaszewski, 1967; Bielak-Bielecki & Rozwaska, 2007; Rozwaska *et al.*, 2013; Rozwaska *et al.*, 2016. Serbia: Komnenov & Pavičević, 2009. Sweden: Jonsson, 1990. Switzerland: Comellini, 1954; Fürst & Blandenier, 1993; Altherr, 2007. Slovakia: Svatoň *et al.*, 2009. Slovenia: Kostanjšek & Ramšak, 2005; Čandek *et al.*, 2013; BOLD, 2025. Spain: Benhadi-Marín & Ferrández, 2012; Fernández-Pérez *et al.*, 2014; Fernández-Pérez & Prieto, 2023; Ferrández, 2023. Turkey: Bayram *et al.*, 2008. United Kingdom: Bristowe, 1933. United States of America: Slowik, 2009.

Figura 2. Distribución geográfica global de *P. simoni*. Los puntos negros representan citas previas, mientras que los dos puntos blancos son los nuevos registros presentados en la presente publicación. Para una mejor visualización de la presencia de la especie a nivel local, el mapa está dividido en varias regiones: Europa (A), Oriente Medio (B), la costa oeste de Estados Unidos y México (C), Nueva Zelanda (D) y la península ibérica (E). Referencias de los puntos del mapa: Alemania: Moritz, 1973; BOLD, 2025. Austria: Kritscher, 1970; Huber, 1994; Thaler, 2000. Bélgica: Kekenbosch & Ransy, 1976; Fraiture, 1973. Bulgaria: Naumova *et al.*, 2017; BOLD, 2025. Chequia: Rezác *et al.*, 2021. Dinamarca: Brændegaard, 1966; Scharff & Gudik-Sørensen, 2006. Eslovenia: Kostanjšek & Ramšak, 2005; Čandek *et al.*, 2013; BOLD, 2025. España: Benhadi-Marín, 2010; Benhadi-Marín & Ferrández, 2012; Fernández-Pérez *et al.*, 2014; Fernández-Pérez & Prieto, 2023; Ferrández, 2023. Estados Unidos: Slowik, 2009. Finlandia: Huhta, 1972; BOLD, 2025. Francia: Berland, 1911; de Dalmas, 1915; Comellini, 1954; Bristowe, 1933; Ledoux, 1967; le Peru, 2011; Fernández-Pérez & Prieto, 2023. Grecia: Bosmans *et al.*, 2013. Hungría: Szinetár, 1992. Irán: Ghavami *et al.*, 2007. Irlanda: BOLD, 2025. Islas Feroe: Lissner *et al.*, 2016. Italia: Brignoli, 1979; Caoduro *et al.*, 1994; Isaia *et al.*, 2007; Isaia *et al.*, 2011. Luxemburgo: Kreuels *et al.*, 2019. Macedonia del Norte: Komnenov, 2014. México: Slowik, 2009. Nueva Zelanda: Paquin *et al.*, 2010. Noruega: Klausen, 1972. Países Bajos: Vossen, 1983; Koomen, 1988; Prinsen, 1989; Helsdingen, 2010; Bloem & Noordijk, 2021. Polonia: Dziabaszewski, 1967; Bielak-Bielecki & Rozwaska, 2007; Rozwaska *et al.*, 2013; Rozwaska *et al.*, 2016. Reino Unido: Bristowe, 1933. Serbia: Komnenov & Pavičević, 2009. Suecia: Jonsson, 1990. Suiza: Comellini, 1954; Fürst & Blandenier, 1993; Altherr, 2007. Turquía: Bayram *et al.*, 2008.

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Supplementary material

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Data availability

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Authorship contribution statement

JSA: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing –original draft, Project administration, Writing –review & editing.

PO: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

ABCA: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

MG: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – review & editing.

LSS: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – review & editing.

EM: Conceptualization, Investigation, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Competing interests

Not applicable

Statement on the use of Artificial Intelligence

Not applicable.

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