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ENTOMOLOGICAL STUDY OF *Culicoides* (DIPTERA: CERATOPOGONIDAE) POTENTIAL VECTORS OF THE BLUETONGUE VIRUS IN SAO PAULO STATE, BRAZIL.

VENDRAMEL, B.*¹; SANTILLI, A.²; OKUDA, L.H.¹; ROMALDINI, A.H.C.N.¹; PITUCO, E.M.¹; SAVINI, G.²; GOFFREDO, M.²; CHIEBAO, D.P.¹; ¹Instituto Biológico de São Paulo, Centro de Pesquisa de Sanidade Animal, Laboratório de Viroses de Bovídeos, Avenida Conselheiro Rodrigues Alves 1252, CEP 04014-900, São Paulo, SP, Brasil. ²Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise 'G. Caporale', Campo Boario, 64100 Teramo, Italy. E-mail: vendramelb@gmail.com. ***Estudo entomológico de Culicoides (Diptera: Ceratopogonidae) prováveis vetores do vírus da Língua Azul no estado de São Paulo, Brasil.***

Bluetongue (BT) is a disease of ruminants caused by the Bluetongue virus (BTV), transmitted by biting midges of the genus *Culicoides*, and considered endemic in many regions of Brazil. It is a notifiable disease to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), therefore its occurrence needs to be diagnosed and controlled to prevent economic damage for the animal transport, as well as losses due to clinical symptoms in susceptible hosts such as sheep and goats. To establish control programs, epidemiological information about the disease still needs to be established. The objective of this work was the study of insect collections to identifying *Culicoides* species with defined epidemiological importance and others that may be involved in the transmission of viruses. Combined identification keys were used in accordance with the specifications of the OIE reference laboratory for Bluetongue in Europe, evaluating collections previously obtained at the Biological Institute of São Paulo. From 2018 to 2019 23 samplings at six sites from two locations were assessed and a total of 407 *Culicoides* spp. was obtained. The highest number of *Culicoides* was reported in Cananeia municipality (56%). Considering both locations, the most abundant species identified was *C. insignis* (26 specimens). Five species of *Culicoides* spp. were identified, including *C. insignis*, which is the only species already proven as a vector for the BTV in Brazil. The training developed human resources for morphological identification of BTV vectors and will assist in the establishment of epidemiological vigilance in the State of São Paulo.

* Bolsista CNPq/PIBIC/IB