

Status and conservation of hamsters in Bulgaria

Three hamster species inhabit Europe – the common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*), Romania hamster (*Mesocricetus newtoni*) and grey dwarf hamster (*Cricetulus migratorius*), as only in Bulgaria and Romania they co-occurred. Here we review and summarized all available information about distribution of all three species in Bulgaria. Distribution of the first two species is overlapped in north Bulgaria – the Danube plain and Dobrogea, but the cases of syntopic occurrence are rare. The population of *M. newtoni* is fragmented within its range, as there is a small isolated population in SE Bulgaria. The Bulgarian population of *C. cricetus* is isolated from the neighboring ones – those in Serbia and Romania. *Cr. migratorius* is distributed only in SE Bulgaria, there is only one record north from Stara planina (the Balkan mountain), which has not been confirmed for 60 years, probably extinct from north Bulgaria.

Reduction in both in distribution and numbers of hamsters are detected, which might have been started in 1950's with intensification of agriculture (introducing of new technology and methods) and probable it still is going on process. All hamster species are listed as Vulnerable in the Bulgarian Red data book (2015), but still no active conservation measurements have been taken. Threats and conservation plans are discussed.

Urgent conservation activities should be applied for protecting and improving population of all tree hamster species in Bulgaria

Nedko Nedyalkov

E-mail: nnedko@gmail.com