First Record of Romanian Hamster *Mesocricetus newtoni* (Mammalia: Cricetidae) in South-East Bulgaria

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**Abstract:** Remains of the Romanian Hamster *Mesocricetus newtoni* were found in Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*) pellets in South-East Bulgaria (UTM square NG09). This new locality for the hamster species lies 50 km south-west of the nearest previously known locality in the Aitos Mountain. It is located in a region with a hilly relief, an altitude of 50-150 m and prevailing open habitats. In this area the Romanian Hamster is a rare prey of the Eagle Owl (0.11% of the total number of small mammals, n=896 ind.), which most probably reflects its low population density. A great variety of small mammals occur in this region: 28 species or 72% of all small mammals identified in Bulgaria. The great species richness results from the co-occurrence of Steppe, Mediterranean, Boreal and Nemoral species in the area. The region is suitable for inclusion in the National Ecological Net.

**Key words:** *Mesocricetus newtoni*, *Bubo bubo*, small mammal’s community, South-East Bulgaria

**Introduction**

The Romanian Hamster (*Mesocricetus newtoni*) (Nehring, 1898) ranges across South-East Romania and North Bulgaria - the central and the eastern part of the Danube Plain, and in Dobrudzha (Peshev et al. 2004). Only three isolated localities are known in South Bulgaria at the foot of the Balkan Range or on its southernmost slopes: in the vicinities of Sofia, Kazanlak, and the village of Peshtersko in the Aitos Mountain (Popov 1955, Markov 1960, Georgiev, Ganev 2003). The Romanian Hamster is a steppe dweller, inhabiting open habitats such as barren lands, cereal croplands, clover fields, vineyards and orchards. Being a rare species with a low population density, it is included in the Red Data Book of Bulgaria and is protected by the Bulgarian Biodiversity Law (Hristov 1985, Peshev et al. 2004).

This study reports a new locality of the Romanian Hamster and presents data on the community of small mammals found in the area based on the analysis of pellets of the Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo* (Linnaeus, 1758)) and the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba* (Scopoli, 1769)).

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