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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

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**Implementation of Recommendation No. 136 (2008) on
improving the conservation of the Common hamster
(*Cricetus cricetus*) in Europe**

REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENTS

*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage*

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AUSTRIA / AUTRICHE

Follow-up of Recommendation No. 136 (2008) on Improving the conservation of Common Hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) in Europe

Hamsters only occurs in the Länder Burgenland, Lower Austria and Vienna

Burgenland

Since 2008 Burgenland updates its knowledge of the distribution of the hamster. In this programme necessary management activities will be formulated. Main aim is to decrease the habitat fragmentation and isolation by establishing migration corridors or wildlife passages.

Lower Austria

Together with an NGO an action plan for the conservation of the Hamster was established. This action plan includes especially activities to inform and educate the public.

<http://noe-naturschutzbund.at/PDF/Aktionsplan%20Feldhamster18122010.pdf>

<http://www.naturparkenoe.at/feldhamster>

Vienna

Knowledge of the actual distribution of the hamster in Vienna was updated 2010.

<http://www.wien.gv.at/umweltschutz/naturschutz/biotop/feldhamster.html>

CROATIA / CROATIE**Recommendation No. 136 (2008) on improving the conservation of
the Common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*)**

Common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) is a *strictly protected* species in Croatia according to the Nature Protection Act (OG 70/05, 139/08 and 57/11) and relevant Ordinance on proclamation of wild fauna as protected and strictly protected (OG 99/09).

Protection status is based on the data from the *Red book of mammals of Croatia* (Ministry of Culture and State Institute for Nature Protection, 2006). According to the Red Book, Common Hamster is classified as Near Threatened (NT) species, due to the data available at that time which were based mostly on the best expert judgment. Exact data on distribution, population size and trend is still not satisfactory.

For the moment the State Institute for Nature Protection is collecting data available from literature and from museum databases on various fauna species, including Common hamster, for the purpose of compilation of data on fauna species and their inclusion in unique database of Croatian fauna (CRO FAUNA).

Further data gathering and inventory of Common Hamster is planned in the framework of the World Bank financed project ***EU Natura 2000 Integration Project (2011-2015)*** that has started in June 2011. Biodiversity inventory is one of the many other activities planned in the framework of this project. The body in charge of Project implementation is the Ministry of Culture, Nature Protection Directorate, while the inventory as such, will be coordinated by the State Institute for Nature Protection.

CZECH REPUBLIC / REPUBLIQUE TCHEQUE

Conservation status of Common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) in the Czech Republic

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The Czech Republic implemented the requirements of the Habitat Directive, resp. Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and concerned recommendation, by issuing the Ministerial Decree No. 175/2006 which is completing the list of legally protected species by adding the IV-annex species into. According to above mentioned Ministerial Decree, the conservation status of the Common hamster was re-evaluated from endangered to highly endangered category. However, the species is not included in the Red list of endangered mammal species of the Czech Republic, due to relatively steep population increase recorded in recent decades (Anděra and Beneš 2001).

The protection of the species biodiversity is also included in the National Biodiversity Strategy of the Czech Republic, which is the compendium of the needs, problematic issues and main objectives. The main issues of species protection are mentioned in Chapters devoted to *In situ* as well as *Ex situ* Biodiversity Conservation, Sustainable use and Identification, Monitoring of Biodiversity and Research Biodiversity strategy. The above mentioned framework strategies were incorporated also into the National strategy for Species and Landscape protection in the Czech Republic (updated in 2009), which sets priorities for the upcoming period.

With respect to recently known species distribution Action plan for Common hamster is not in preparation by the competent national authorities. Since 2010 a study on social behaviour and demography of common hamster has been under way taking into account possible implications for conservation measures. Common hamster is still rather well distributed within the whole Czech territory (stable occurrence is reported from 36% mapping grid cells) and its population is rather increasing. By contrast European suslik (*Citellus citellus*) is one of the drastically declined mammalian species for which the Action plan was prepared and is still in process of fulfilment of it's measures by Agency for Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection of the Czech Republic.

Online mapping project regarding not exclusively Common hamster distribution in the Czech Republic is available on the website www.biolib.cz. This project is based on the public recordings of the species. Data are verified before publication and species occurrence is visualized into the map on the basis of grid mapping (Fig. 1.).

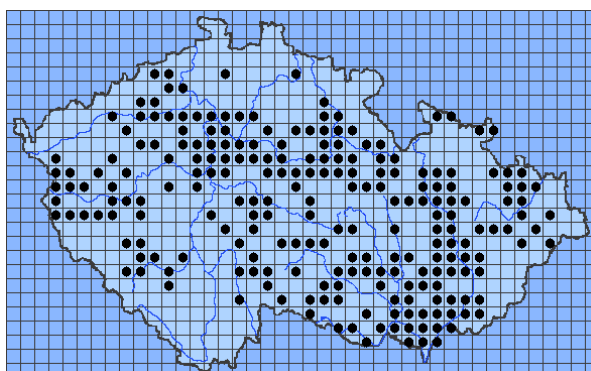


Fig. 1. Anděra M. (2011): Distribution of *Cricetus cricetus* in the Czech Republic. In: Zicha O. (ed.) Biological Library – BioLib. cited 14.06.2011. available on: <http://www.biolib.cz/cz/taxonmap/id15/>

References:

- Anděra M. & Beneš B. (2001): Atlas rozšíření savců v České republice. Předběžná verze. IV. Hlodavci (Rodentia) – část 1. Křečkovití (Cricetidae), hrabošovité (Arvicolidae), plchovití (Gliridae). – Národní muzeum, Praha.

FRANCE / FRANCE**Note sur le suivi de la Recommandation n° 136 (2008) sur l'amélioration de la conservation du Grand hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) en Europe****MEDDTL – juillet 2011**

Conformément à la recommandation n° 136 (2008) du Comité permanent, adoptée le 27 novembre 2008, sur l'amélioration de la conservation du Grand hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) en Europe, la France a élaboré et mis en oeuvre un plan national d'actions en faveur de l'espèce (annexe 1 et 2).

Ce plan est mis en oeuvre en complément de la réglementation nationale (article L 411-1 du code de l'environnement et arrêté du 23 avril 2007 fixant les listes des mammifères protégés sur l'ensemble du territoire et les modalités de leur protection du 2007) visant la protection stricte de l'espèce et de son habitat.

Ce plan comprend une série d'actions dont les principales visent :

- l'amélioration de l'habitat (et à ce titre l'objectif de 22% de culture favorable à l'espèce dans les zones noyaux a été fixé) ;
- la limitation du morcellement de l'aire de répartition, via l'interdiction de destruction des sites de reproduction et aires de repos par les projets d'urbanisation et d'infrastructures sauf dérogation ministérielle dont les conditions d'obtention restent strictes;
- le renforcement des populations pour prévenir toute aggravation du déclin de l'espèce;
- un programme de suivi des populations et d'amélioration de la connaissance sur l'espèce;
- une communication visant la sensibilisation du public et des acteurs socio-économiques.

Ce plan porte sur la période 2007-2011. Il sera prolongé jusqu'à la validation prévue en juin 2012 d'une nouvelle stratégie définie sur les bases du plan actuel.

En conclusion, la France a suivi la recommandation n°136 (2008) en validant un plan d'action se référant au plan d'actions préliminaire pour la sauvegarde du Grand hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) discuté par le Comité permanent [document T-PVS/Inf(2008)9] et adapté aux conditions spécifiques du territoire alsacien.

POLAND / POLOGNE

The report was prepared on the basis of Recommendation no. 136 (2008) of Standing Committee of *Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)*. Adopted on 27 November 2008, the Recommendation commits the Parties to the Convention which are host to small or disappearing populations of the common hamster to prepare and implement further conservation plans concerning this species.

The common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) is among the most endangered rodents in Europe. In Poland it is under protection since 1995 under the following documents:

- The Nature Conservation Act of 16 April 2004 (Journal of Laws of 2004 no. 151 item 1220, as amended)
- Regulation of Minister of the Environment of 28 September 2004 on wildlife species under protection (Journal of Laws of 2004 no. 220 item 2237)

In the past Poland provided a corridor joining Eastern and Western populations of the common hamster. Currently, the Polish population of the common hamster is isolated from populations existing in the territory of Germany, Czech Republic and Belarus. Certain degree of outside contacts with Ukrainian population is still possible between hamsters inhabiting the area of Torki village near Medyka and Hermanowice and Nehrybka south of Przemyśl. However, these representatives probably do not have contact with the rest of the Polish population.

In 1995-2005 research was conducted to evaluate the range of the common hamster population in Poland. 2421 questionnaires were sent to Nature Conservation Departments in Commune and Poviast Offices with questions concerning the existence of the species on their territories. Additionally, 1200 interviews with agricultural services and 600 field inspections were conducted, which aimed at verifying the collected information.

As a result of the research, 103 habitats of the common hamster in Poland were confirmed and 146 locations were considered as possible habitats. On comparing this research with the previous data, it appears that after 1980 a process of noticeable decreasing of the hamster population has started.

The largest concentration of the species can be found in the borderland between Lublin Upland and Roztocze and Małopolska Upland.

Since 2002 the common hamster is labelled as a data deficient (DD) species on the “Polish red list of animals”. Because of its decreasing population in Poland, which was confirmed by the aforementioned research, it was suggested to change its status to EN – endangered.

Owing to the large concentration of the common hamster on the area of Lubelskie province, the species is taken into consideration while preparing the conditions of investments development, especially in road building investments, where special passages for the animals enabling them to migrate are considered.

Since 2006 the Center for the Natural Heritage of Upper Silesia has run a scientific-educational programme “The common hamster distribution and population monitoring in Śląskie province”. It covers field research, classes with children and youth and data base management. The data base is updated with each new case of the common hamster existence in the province. The Center issued also a brochure *The common hamster. The most colourful mammal of our fields*. The educational activities taken up by the Center positively resulted in the change of farmers’ awareness. Many of them started treating the hamsters which appear on their fields more favourably, once they were informed that the species is endangered and under protection.

Nevertheless, the cases of chasing off the hamster by farmers still appear.

SERBIA / SERBIE**Report****on the implementation of the Recommendation No. 136 (2008) on improving the conservation of the Common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) in Europe in Serbia**

Regarding the Recommendation No 136 (2008) of the Standing Committee, adopted on 27 November 2008, on improving the conservation of the Common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) in Europe, several important projects, strategies and policies have been developed and some of them are established in order to take the necessary steps to conserve of wild fauna and natural habitats, with particular attention to endangered and vulnerable species, especially endemic ones, and endangered habitats.

1. The Current Legal Framework harmonized with EU Regulations and Bern Convention

- The National Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia (2010-2010)
- The National Environmental Protection Programme (2010-2019)
- The National Strategy on Biological Diversity (2011-2018)
- The Law on Nature Protection (Off Jour of RS, No 36/09 , 88/2010 and 91/2010-corr)
- The Law on Forest (Off Jour of RS No 30//10)
- The Law on wild fauna and hunting (Off Jour of RS No 18//10)
- The Law on Agriculture and Rural development (Off Jour of RS No 41//09)
- The Animal Welfare Law (Off Jour of RS, No 41/09)
- The Rulebook on criteria for selecting of habitat types including lists of priority natural habitat types and measures for their conservation (Off Jour of RS No 35/10)
- Regulation on Ecological Network(Off Jour of the RS No 102/2010),
- Rulebook on proclamation and protection of strict protected and protected wild flora and fauna and fungi (Off. Jour of RS No 5/10),
- The Rulebook on proclamation of protected game species in closed hunt season, duration of hunt season of protected game species in hunting ground, and measures of protection and number regulation on populations of permanent protected and protected game species in closed hunt season (Off. Jour of RS No 75/10)
- The Rulebook on particular technical and technological solutions which facilitate undisturbed and safe communication of wild animals (Off. Jour of RS No 72/10)

Although common hamster is not an endangered species in Serbia, it was placed on the list of strictly protected species, in Anex I of the Regulation on proclamation and protection of strictly protected and protected wild fauna, flora and fungi species (Official Jour of RS, No. 5/2010).

2. The Status of the Common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) in Serbia

The range of *Cricetus cricetus* in Serbia is located mainly in the province of Vojvodina represented by the plains of the rivers Danube in the west and southeast, Tisa in the East and Sava in the south. It also stretches southward of Belgrade following the valley of the river Morava, Pek and Mlava (PET ROV 1992, MILENKOVIĆ 1993). RUŽIĆ (1978) especially mentions the central and northern Bačka area (province of Vojvodina) containing the highest population density in former Yugoslavia. Hamsters are observed in the Serbian part of the Srem (Syrman) area and southern Banat but in low densities. The Serbian population of *Cricetus cricetus* directly borders the Croatian,

Hungarian - 21 - T-PVS/Inf (2008) 9 and Romanian ones and also belongs to the Pannonian population (NEUMANN et al. 2005). According to PAUNOVIĆ (pers. comm.) the population trend can be described as declining due to the loss of suitable steppe habitats being turned into arable land and the use of rodenticides in agricultural habitats, although it is currently still vital and fluctuating with the last population peak recorded in 2007 (PAUNOVIĆ pers. comm.). Its official status in Serbia is not protected and the IUCN-status is Low risk/near-threatened (LR/nt) (SAVIĆ et al. 1995). According to VASIĆ et al (1991) *Cricetus cricetus* is included in the preliminary Red list of vertebrates in Serbia.

No profound data on the population status is currently available and hence the situation in Serbia should be considered as data deficient.

Common hamster is a polyphage, adapted to life in agricultural biocenoses, where he is present from the sowing to harvest season, which is why most farmers consider common hamster a pest. High reproduction rate characteristic of rodents is another factor that contributes to its status of agricultural pest. During the mating, the female produces on average 4 litters per breeding season, with up to 10 young per litter. Over decades, the plant protection service in Vojvodina has conducted the monitoring of common hamster's presence and its population in agricultural crops. A large number of experts have looked into the methods for control of common hamster population, particularly in the years of its mass population outbreak.

Fluctuations in common hamster population appear at 9-year recurrence intervals. High hamster population was recorded in 2006, which was the year of floods and enormous increase in groundwater level, flooding the large agricultural land. This caused a premature awakening in hibernating hamsters and their mass migration to drier areas. In some areas, the common hamster population reached calamity values that year.

Common hamster is an extremely important species in food chains. It has many natural enemies, from fox, wild cat, skunk and weasel, to predatory birds. The more intensive development of agriculture, accompanied by the growing use of chemicals for agricultural crops, may endanger the natural predator-prey relationship. By drawing up a study "The Establishment of Ecological Network in AP Vojvodina – overview of the situation, analyses and possibilities" (Sabados et al., 2009), the Provincial Institute for Nature Protection has designated the main disturbance factors which affect, among others, various mammal species inhabiting the aquatic, wetland and steppe habitats in Vojvodina, as well as important habitats in the form of eco-corridors, spatially distributed between protected areas. Soon after that, the Regulation on Ecological Network (Off. Jour of RS, No. 102/2010) was adopted.

As a follow-up of the previous project, in 2011 the Project entitled "Application of the Principles of Sustainable Use of Important Areas for Biodiversity Conservation within the Ecological Network in AP Vojvodina" (Sabados et al., 2011) was initiated in which, among other things, the issues of habitat mosaics, eco-corridors for insects and their ecosystem roles, as well as inter-sectoral cooperation, are elaborated.

According to the Law on Nature Protection, monitoring of the Common hamster population should be carried out by the Institute of Nature Conservation of Serbia and Provincial Institute for Nature Conservation in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. Although the common hamster is a strictly protected species, it is necessary to develop a plan for management of its population, since in some years this species reaches the population outbreak.

REFERENCES:

- Report on implementation of recommendations on the European strategy for conservation of invertebrates by the Provincial Institute for Nature Protection;
- National Strategy on Biological Diversity of the Republic of Serbia;
- Draft European Action Plan for the conservation of the Common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*, L. 1758), by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, 28th meeting, 2008.

THE NETHERLANDS / PAYS-BAS

CONSERVATION PROGRAMME FOR THE COMMON HAMSTER IN THE NETHERLANDS

by
**the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture & Innovation; Department of Nature,
Landscape & Rural Affairs**

The Netherlands started a Conservation Programme for the Common Hamster in 2000, after the species became extinct in the wild in 1999. In this programme a number of practical protection measures were formulated with the aim of maintaining sustainable hamster populations in the Netherlands. The measures were focussed on the establishment of a breeding programme in captivity with the last remaining hamsters that could be captured in the wild and introducing hamster-friendly management in former habitats of the hamsters in the southern part of the province of Limburg on a total of 500 hectares.

In 2002 the first hamsters resulting from the captive-breeding programme were reintroduced in the former habitats. Since then a total of 762 hamsters were released in seven different core areas.

Until now, the hamster-friendly management seems successful. The number of burrows increased from one in 2002 to over 1,200 in 2007 (autumn). However, a sharp decline of the population in 2008 showed that the population remains vulnerable. It is not clear yet whether the hamster shows cyclical population fluctuations as other rodent populations do.

The hamster suffers from a high predation risk. Research shows that 90% of the male and 70% of the female hamsters die within one year. At least 80% of the mortality is caused by predation. Therefore it is important to optimise the management of the core areas in order to attain a maximal survival rate. Litter size and number of litters determine the survival of hamster populations. For a sustainable protection hamster populations will permanently depend on hamster-friendly farming.

In the coming years much effort is needed to arrange the clusters of core areas and the connections between those areas in such a way that they can offer sustainable protection to the hamster populations. This requires cooperation between all actors involved. For this reason an area coordinator has been appointed by the province of Limburg. Experience of recent years has shown that hamster protection is a process which is highly dependent on advancing understanding. Maximum flexibility is needed to move “management hectares” from areas where hamster protection appears to be unsuccessful to areas where prospects are more promising.

For the time being the breeding programme will remain necessary for the purpose of re-stocking in case wild populations become at risk and to secure all genetic variation in the north-western part of the distribution area of the hamster. The breeding programme in the Netherlands is, until now, the only European hamster programme with the aim of preserving and improving the remaining genetic variation. For the period to 2012 the breeding of 20 to 25 litters per year is needed to preserve the genetic variation within the breeding lines, to have a number of 80 to 100 animals available for re-stocking and to maximize the genetic variation in the existing wild populations.

In recent years the Netherlands succeeded in developing hamster-friendly farming which is widely accepted by both the agricultural and nature conservation sectors. Hamster –friendly farming practices include maintaining cover along field margins throughout the season outside the hibernation period. These practices are attained through management agreements with farmers, in this case funded from national resources.

On land without management agreements the survival rate is extremely low, due to a very low degree of protection against predation, this again due to the absence of cover during a much longer period. This low survival rate would not be enough for maintaining the population.

The Netherlands is now one of the few countries in Europe with a growing population. To maintain a sustainable Dutch population, cooperation with neighbouring countries is necessary, in

particular with Germany (Nordrhein-Westfalen). The populations of the Netherlands and those of Nordrhein-Westfalen form one meta-population.

Litterature:

<http://content.alterra.wur.nl/Webdocs/PDFFiles/Alterraraapporten/AlterraRapport2022.pdf>