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## DETERMINATION OF THE SPECIES AND ECOLOGY OF THE DORMOUSES (MYOXIDAE) OF ARTSAKH AND NORTH AREAS OF ARMENIA

A.M. SARGSYAN

Scientific Center of Zoology and Hydroecology NAS RA  
hayk.s.mdd@gmail.com

This short communication is devoted to determination of the species and ecology of the dormouses (*Myoxidae*) areas of Northern Armenia and Artsakh. It was evident the presence of two species of dormouses for the mammalian fauna of Armenia: the edible dormouse (*Glis glis*) and the forest dormouse (*Dryomys nitedula*). The possibility of the third type of dormouse – garden dormouse (*Eliomys quercinus*) on the territory of the Republic of Armenia was discussed.

*Rodent group (Rodentia) – dormouse (Myoxidae) – edible dormouse (Glis glis) – forest dormouse (Dryomys nitedula) – garden dormouse (Eliomys quercinus)*

Այս կարճ հաղորդագրությունը նվիրված է Հյուսիսային Հայաստանի և Արցախի վանամկների (*Myoxidae*) տեսակների և էկոլոգիայի որոշմանը: Հայտնի է եղել վանամկների երկու տեսակի առկայությունը Հայաստանի կաթնասունների ֆաունայում՝ մեծ վանամկ (*Glis glis*) և անտառային վանամկ (*Dryomys nitedula*): Զննարկվում է վանամկների երրորդ տիպի՝ այգու վանամկան (*Eliomys quercinus*) հնարավոր առկայությունը Հայաստանի Հանրապետության տարածքում:

*Կրծողների կարգ (Rodentia) – վանամկ (Myoxidae) – մեծ վանամկ (Glis glis) – անտառային վանամկ (Dryomys nitedula) – այգու վանամկ (Eliomys quercinus)*

Это краткое сообщение посвящено определению видового состава и экологии представителей соневых (*Myoxidae*) Арцаха и Северных районов Армении. Было известно наличие двух видов соневых в фауне млекопитающих Армении: сони-полчок (*Glis glis*) и садовой сони (*Eliomys quercinus*). Обсуждается наличие 3-го вида семейства соневых – садовой сони (*Eliomys quercinus*) н территории Републики Армения.

*Отряд грызунов (Rodentia) – соневые (Myoxidae) – соня-полчок (Glis glis) – лесная соня (Dryomys nitedula) – садовая соня (Eliomys quercinus)*

The family of dormouse (*Myoxidae*) is the least studied group among the rodent group (*Rodentia*), as in the Republic of Armenia and throughout the world. All 26 described species of dormouse are included in the lists of international environmental organizations, as well as in the red books of the world, Russia, Armenia and Nagorno-

Karabakh. In most countries of the world, representatives of this family are considered “flagship species”. However, as noted above, the features of their ecology, ethology, embryonic and postembryonic development, diet, etc., remain poorly lit or unknown until now.

In Armenia, the Rodentia group is represented by 32 species [1], and the Myoxidae family, only according to the latest research, is represented by only 3 species, of which the units of garden dormouse (*Eliomys quercinus*) are noted and described in the beginning of the 21st century by our scientific group. In Armenia, representatives of this family have never been widely studied, despite the fact that the researchers of the teriofauna of our entire region were interested in the regional and geographical features of reproduction and the belonging of these animals to one species or another (variety). Genetic studies have not affected the Myoxidae family to date, so the reliability of the fact that the below-mentioned species of the family belong precisely to the status we give in our work need further proof.

Practically, until 2010, there was neither a description nor a proof of the species presence of these animals on the territory of Armenia, this again indicates that the family, genus and species of dormouse in Armenia have not been studied to date. In this regard, any data on their ecology, ethology, diet, parasitofauna, etc. are new in the matter of representing not only this family, but the whole detachment. So, in 1954, S.K. Dahl presented for the mammalian fauna of Armenia only 2 species of dormouse: the edible dormouse (*Glis glis*) and the forest dormouse (*Dryomys nitedula*) [2]. This was a short report about these animals, about which Martirosyan B.A. and Papanyan S.B. in 1983 almost duplicated what Dahl once wrote [3].

Only since 1900, the researchers began periodically to note in their writings sketchy data about the representatives of the family of dormouse (Myoxidae), the data most often concerned the places of their findings, a brief description of a particular problem related to the biology of these animals. From 2003 to 2007, and after and in 2010, the scientific group and phd students of Professor E.G. Yavruyan discovered and described the third, previously unidentified species in Armenia: the garden dormouse (*Eliomys quercinus*).

In the north of the Republic of Armenia, we lead our research up to a height of 800 m, where desert and semi-desert light brown soils are located and from 1200-1800 m and mountain chestnut soils, which form dry steppes and foothill zones.

Just at these heights we often encounter all kinds of forest vegetation and convenient habitats of dormouse (Myoxidae). Here, too, are agricultural lands, pastures, extensive crops of cereals, vegetable and fruit orchards. These are the most favorable conditions for the habitation and nutrition of all 3 species of dormouse (Myoxidae). Above 1800 m and up to 2500 m there are subalpine zones with mountain meadow soils, where the presence of dormouse is recorded only in exceptional cases.

In our research we present data of places where we find these species (Artsakh and in the northern regions of Armenia), the way of their life, brief data on the features of reproduction, genetics and also conclusions about the reasons for the desire of these species to move to a synanthropic existence.

Initially, observations and material collection were carried out not only in the northern regions, but also in Gegharkunik and Kotayk Marz. This is due to the fact that the first find of the garden sony (*Eliomys quercinus*) was in the southeast of Gegharkunik marz, in the thickets of sea buckthorn and deciduous trees, between Noratuz and Lichkom.

In total, nearly during of 3 years of observation 19 specimens of dormouse were caught (under the license of the RA Ministry of Nature Protection, permitting the catching of these animals throughout Armenia): two of them were a garden dormouse

(*Eliomys quecinus*), 11 specimens – a forest dormouse (*Dryomys nitedula*) and 6 specimens edible dormouse (*Glis glis*). Besides, 2 specimens of the garden dormouse (*Eliomys quecinus*) were caught in the gorge of the river Bldanchay (Dilijan) and in the village of Yenokavan (Ijevan), photographed and released to freedom.

It should be noted that from the above-mentioned 3 species of the Myoxidae family, the edible dormouse (*Glis glis*) and the forest dormouse (*Dryomys nitedula*) were also found in the northern regions of the Republic of Armenia and in Artsakh, and the garden dormouse (*Eliomys quecinus*) was recorded only on territory of Armenia.

From these 19 specimens, 8 (5 of which the edible dormouse (*Glis glis*), 2 garden dormouse s (*Eliomys quecinus*), and 1 forest dormouse (*Dryomys nitedula*)) were sent to the Institute of Zoology of the PAN in Warsaw, where they were processed together with local staff. It should be noted that the material was numbered and recorded in the field according to accepted standards.

Anthropogenic transformation of natural habitats of these animals, which are broad-leaved, old age forest tracts, by reason of unregulated, sometimes predatory deforestation, led to a reduction in the total number, leading to a dangerous line. On the other hand, such anthropogenic influences have resulted in almost all 3 species (in any case, the 2 previously described species accurately), in particular, the more visibly edible dormouse (*Glis glis*), the desire to change habitat, diet, behavior, change in timing hibernation (both summer and winter), moving from the forest to human buildings and other shelters.

We hope to confirm by the method of genetic analyzes the presence of the third species of the family of dormouse – garden dormouse (*Eliomys quecinus*), which in itself will have an important scientific value.

## REFERENCES

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