

Dormice (Gliridae) in the diet of predators in Eurasia: a review

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Abstract

Dormice are widely distributed through Eurasia and Africa, but their abundance varies considerably. In many regions, dormice are rare, and their role in ecosystems is considered to be unimportant. The aim of this study was to evaluate the significance of dormice in the diet of predators in the Palaearctic (excluding Japan). A total of 540 sources, containing information on dormice in the diet of predators was analysed. Countries of Southern and Central Europe had the largest numbers of target sources. Dormice were recorded in the diet of 57 predator species: 21 mammals, 13 owls, 18 diurnal birds and 5 reptiles. Owls hunting in the forests, particularly the Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*), are the main dormouse predators. The highest proportion of dormice in the diet of predators was recorded in the Mediterranean region, where Edible Dormice (*Glis glis*) are abundant and some other dormouse species are sympatric. In particular periods, dormice may be an alternative prey for predators such as Tawny Owl and even Lynx (*Lynx lynx*). It was supposed previously that predation was an important cause of high winter mortality in dormice, but analysis of publications showed that dormice were rather seldom recorded in the winter diet of predators. Thus, the exact impact of predators on winter mortality of dormice remains unclear. The role of dormice in the diet of predators depends on dormouse abundance. In areas where dormice are rare, it is trivial. However, predators catching even individual females, may have a significant impact on dormouse reproductive success.

Keywords

diet, dormice, mammalian predators, owls, predation

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