

Perpetuating ambiguity: a review of Garden Dormouse (*Eliomys quercinus*) records from Romania

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Abstract

Published records of species are often uncritically cited by other authors. However, when such records are based on uncertain data, reproducing them can misrepresent species distribution or conservation status. This, in turn, may result in misguided management decisions for threatened taxa. While still widely distributed in southwestern Europe, eastern populations of the Garden Dormouse (*Eliomys quercinus*) are small and isolated, and the species has seen a serious decline in recent decades. Given the patchy nature of this eastern range, as well as a general confusion regarding its Romanian presence, our study aimed at critically reviewing all Garden Dormouse records from this country. The mammal collections of several Romanian museums were inspected for Garden Dormouse specimens, and literature data were reviewed to assess the validity of records. Aspects such as presence of voucher specimens, photographic or biometric evidence, type of record, ecological or behavioural data were considered when analysing published records. Eleven museum specimens and 31 literature records of alleged *E. quercinus* were identified. All museum specimens were re-determined as being forest dormice (*Dryomys nitedula*). None of the publications provided either photos, measurements or detailed description of individuals, which might have excluded confusion with the Forest Dormouse. Another peculiar aspect was the frequent lack of Forest Dormouse records, even in regions where the species is presently known to occur. In conclusion, our study failed to detect unambiguous evidence of past or present Garden Dormouse occurrence in Romania, which raises new questions about the range and status of this species.

Keywords

occurrence, museum specimens, species misidentification

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