

27th Meeting of the International Hamster Workgroup

CONSERVATION AND ECOLOGY OF THE COMMON HAMSTER, A CRITICALLY ENDANGERED RODENT

Jaworzno 23–25.10.2020

CONFERENCE RESOLUTION



In 2020, the European hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) was identified as Critically Endangered (CR) in the Red List of Threatened Species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)¹. This is a dramatic change from the previous assessment, in which the species was listed as of Least Concern (LC), i.e. the lowest risk category. A detailed assessment carried out by the IUCN highlighted that both the areas of occupancy and population sizes of European hamsters shrunk dramatically in the vast majority of countries within its distribution range. If decisive action is not taken, we will see the species go extinct in the next few years in successive regions and countries, until it disappears completely from the wild. According to estimates, this would likely happen before 2038 on a global scale, whereas populations in Western countries may go extinct much earlier².

The sixth mass extinction of wildlife is accelerated by climate change, the degradation and fragmentation of wild habitats and changes in agricultural practices that lead to standardisation of landscapes, which are the main threats to ecosystems resilience and thus to human health, food security and human well-being in Europe and around the world³. To overcome these challenges, both individual countries and the global community must implement all the possible actions to prevent the irreversible loss of biodiversity⁴. Conservation measures for the European hamster, an umbrella and keystone species for many natural habitats and other species associated with farmland and urban areas, should be among the priorities.

For this reason, we, the participants of the 27th Meeting of the International Hamster Workgroup⁵ express great concern about the future of the European hamster in Eurasia. We urge the Council of Europe, the European Commission and all the states where the species is present⁶, and their respective nature conservation bodies, to fulfil the obligation to safeguard this unique species for current and future generations. Taking into account the current most important threats to the European hamster and its habitats, as well as the best current knowledge of its effective conservation methods, we point out that it is particularly urgent to adopt and consistently implement the following measures:

1. Preparing and implementing **regional, national and international⁷ strategies or programmes for the conservation of the species**, in accordance with the national and international legal requirements. These documents should be based on the latest scientific knowledge and include both active conservation tasks and measures to reduce conflicts and promote the coexistence of the European hamster with local communities. Protection should cover not only residual, endangered populations but also those that are still relatively stable, to preserve the natural genetic variability of the species in its natural environment and the resilience of those populations. The conservation needs of the European hamster should also be taken into account in **spatial planning, to prevent the fragmentation and loss of its habitat**. It is important to preserve representative populations of all the phylogeographic lineages.

2. Establishing **breeding programmes for different European hamster phylogeographic lineages**, as well as supplying the genetically impoverished populations with new individuals and restoring extinct populations, in order to prevent the irreversible loss of their unique local characteristics and adaptability.
3. The protection requirements of the European hamster in all the projects and activities which could have an adverse impact on the maintenance or restoration of the proper conservation status of this species must be respected and enforced by national and regional nature conservation authorities. In particular, **a reliable wildlife survey, a proper environmental impact assessment and implementation of necessary preventive, mitigation and compensatory measures**, appropriate to the magnitude of the threat, must be guaranteed for all such projects.
4. **Taking into account the arable land biodiversity** (which includes the European hamster) **in the European sector policies**, e.g. by promoting and implementing specific conservation tools such as hamster-friendly farming or Common Agricultural Policy greening measures to diversify crop rotation. This should also create a link between the conservation needs of mammalian species associated with agricultural habitats and agri-environmental payments.
5. **Monitoring** the status of European hamster populations; rapid, timely **and effective incorporation of monitoring results into protective measures** at a national and global scale.
6. The European Commission, the Council of Europe as well as the Secretariat, the Bureau and the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention must **ensure that the conservation requirements of the European hamster are met in individual member states** and contracting parties, and promote European hamster conservation in the states which do not comply with these requirements.
7. **Supporting scientific research on the European hamster**, with priority given to issues such as identifying all the causes of extinction, testing hamster-friendly agriculture practices at both field and landscape scales to restore hamster habitat to a favourable conservation status, developing effective methods of releasing individuals from breeding programmes and monitoring the effectiveness of various protective measures.

25.10.2020, Jaworzno, Poland

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- ¹ Banaszek, A., Bogomolov, P., Feoktistova, N., La Haye, M., Monecke, S., Reiners, T. E., Rusin, M., Surov, A., Weinhold, U., Ziomek, J. 2020. *Cricetus cricetus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2020: e.T5529A111875852: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2020-2.RLTS.T5529A111875852.en>.
 - ² Surov, A., Banaszek, A., Bogomolov, P., Feoktistova, N., Monecke, S. 2016. Dramatic global decrease in the range and reproduction rate of the European hamster *Cricetus cricetus*. *Endang Species Res* 31: 119–145. <https://doi.org/10.3354/esr00749>.
 - ³ Díaz, S., Fargione, J., Chapin, F. S. III, Tilman, D. 200) Biodiversity Loss Threatens Human Well-Being. *PLoS Biol* 4(8): e277. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.0040277>.
 - ⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – The European Green Deal (COM/2019/640): <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1596443911913&uri=CELEX:52019DC0640#document2>.
 - ⁵ The 27MIHW took place between 23-25.10.2020 in Jaworzno, Poland, and online. It was attended by about 90 hamster researchers and conservationists from 11 countries <http://www.salamandra.org.pl/27MIHW>.
 - ⁶ This also applies to the countries that are not part of the European Union and that are non-signatories of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention).
 - ⁷ This point also includes the updating and adoption of the European Action Plan for the conservation of the European Hamster: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275340185>.