New records of the grey dwarf hamster (*Nothocricetulus migratorius*) from Romania

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Abstract

The grey dwarf hamster (*Nothocricetulus migratorius*) is a poorly known rodent at the western edge of its distribution range, which extends through the Balkans and eastern Romania. First recorded in Romania in 1962, its historical records are relatively few, and only a handful of observations confirm its current presence in the country.

Between 2022 and 2025, we investigated the distribution of small mammals in eastern Romania using owl pellet analyses and live trapping. We collected owl pellet samples in 21 localities and conducted small mammal trapping surveys at 8 localities across the Moldavia region.

Remains of 11 individual grey dwarf hamsters were identified in four little owl (*Athene noctua*) pellet samples collected from three counties. Near two of these pellet sampling sites in Vaslui County, a female grey dwarf hamster was captured by a pitfall trap in a grassland habitat in March 2024. Four additional individuals were subsequently captured at the same site in September 2024 and May 2025 by both pitfall and Sherman traps within the grassland and an adjacent alfalfa field. To our knowledge, these represent the first confirmed cases of live trapping this species in Romania. Other small mammals recorded in the same habitat or in adjacent areas included six rodent species and two shrew species.

The new records suggest that the grey dwarf hamster may still be relatively widespread in the region, and that its apparent scarcity may largely result from insufficient survey effort rather than from a genuinely restricted distribution.

Keywords

Nothocricetulus migratorius, owl pellet analysis, live trapping, distribution records, grassland habitats