

Morphology and distribution of the Indian Gerbil, *Tatera indica* (Hardwicke, 1807), in Syria

(Rodentia: Gerbillinae)

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Abstract. Twenty-two specimens of the Indian Gerbil (*Tatera indica* Hardwicke, 1807) were collected during January and February 2009 from northeastern Syria near the border with Turkey. The external and cranial morphology and biometric measurements are given. Skull, structure, phallus and baculum were found to be similar to those reported from southern Turkey. The cranial and dental measurements closely resembled those reported for the Turkish population, but were larger than in Iranian specimens. Ecological and biological aspects are discussed. The range of the Indian Gerbil in Syria is restricted to rivers and irrigated lands in the northeastern parts of the country.

Key words. Indian Gerbil, *Tatera indica*, morphology, distribution, Mammalia, Rodentia, Syria.

Introduction

The distribution of the Indian Gerbil, *Tatera indica* (Hardwicke, 1807), extends from northern Arabia through Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to India and Sri Lanka (HARRISON & BATES 1991). In the 1950s and 1960s this species was recorded from the vicinity of Ceylanpınar in southeastern Turkey (KRYŠTUFEK & VOHRALÍK 2009) and was observed more recently by YIĞIT et al. (2001, 2006). This species was found in several localities in Iraq (KOCK & NADER 1983, NADACHOWSKI et al. 1990, HARRISON & BATES 1991, KADHIM 1998), but has not been reported from Jordan, Lebanon or Palestine.

In Syria, the Indian Gerbil has only been recorded in the northeastern part of the country (KOCK 1998). HARRISON (1972) reported it from the vicinity of Tell Abiad. KOCK & NADER (1983) reported on remains of *T. indica taeniura* recovered from Barn Owl (*Tyto alba* (Scopoli, 1769)) pellets collected at Qal'a ar-Rahaba, 45 km southeast of Dair az-Zur. SHEHAB et al. (2004) reported on the presence of *T. indica* in three localities (Qasret Mohamed Ali, Qkersheih and Heraqla) near Ar-Raqqa along the Euphrates River.

In this paper we report new data on the distribution of the Indian Gerbil in Syria and compare morphological features with specimens from neighbourng countries.

Material and methods

The material consists of gerbils collected during pest control operations at Al-Safeh cereal stocks centre near the Syrian-Turkish border, in the Al Hasaka Governorate. Six poisoned gerbils were found on 20 January 2009, one day after treatment of fields with an acute rodenticide (zinc phosphide) to reduce the damage caused by rodents. More specimens were collected alive from the same area from 21 January to 7 February 2009 using live traps.