

Re-Discovery of the Grey Dwarf Hamster



Romania 1st – 6th September 2024

Introduction

I joined this unique Saker tours trip to Romania in search of the Grey Dwarf Hamster.

This is a very rare species in Europe and in the last 70 years the only records are deceased animals or from owl pellets. But earlier in the year Zsolt had picked a suitable spot to try trapping based on historical records and caught an adult female.

I flew with Wizz Air from Luton which was not too bad and stayed in an airport hotel overnight, everything else was organised by Saker Tours. They had two leaders Zsolt Hegyeli and Janos Olah and we travelled in 4x4



Grey Dwarf Hamster on the bucket list

I cannot disclose the locations we visited and our hotels were quite some distance (1hr in one site) from where we trapped as the trapping locations were quite remote and without local facilities.

Sunday 1st September

Early afternoon I was met at my airport hotel (I had arrived in the early hours) we popped to the airport to collect another participant before heading off to our first location Barlad. We checked into our hotel then headed off for some food, then headed out into the countryside for a night drive. Plenty of steppe mice, wood mice, fox, brown hare and a few bats a little owl and lots of crested larks



Steppe Mouse

Monday 2nd September

We had a leisurely breakfast during which Zsolt rang us to say he had caught something in the traps, we quickly headed off. Arriving at the trapping site Zsolt had trapped two small mammals a Lesser white toothed shrew and the prize a Grey Dwarf Hamster.

This was only the second live animal seen in the last 70 years, the first was also caught at this site earlier in the year. We took lots of photos and did the measurements, weights etc. It was a juvenile female, very nice to see. We before releasing it back into the grassland.

It was incredibly hot so we headed back to town for some cold drinks. I took a walk round the town visiting the local park which had dozens of hummingbird hawk moths in the flower beds.

After an ice cream I wandered down the dried up river where there were plenty of butterflies and a wall lizard. After dinner we headed out once again for another night drive, a little owl was the only bird of note, mammal wise fox, hares, roe deer and a few mice.



Grey Dwarf Hamster



Purple Barred yellow



Praying Mantis

Tuesday 3rd September

We checked the traps first thing then collected them up, We had a look round the grassland photographing Red backed shrikes, bee eaters and the plethora of insects in the area. We had a late breakfast before heading to a new location a couple of hours further north, we based ourselves in the town of Lasi. A bit of a distance away in an area of grassland we placed our traps.

After dinner we took a night drive it was particularly productive with nightjar, badger, scops owl, fox, hare and hazel dormouse. There were quite a few bats and we got the detector out and as expected most were *Nathusius pipistrelles* but there was also a noctule.



Red backed Shrike



Convolvulus Hawkmoth



Acrida ungarica

Wednesday 4th September

We checked the traps first thing wood mice, bi coloured white toothed shrew, lesser white toothed shrew and common voles. A wander round the area produced red backed shrikes, hoopoe, tawny pipit and buzzard. Driving back to the hotel we found a white stork feeding in a field.

We heard that the previous night a bat worker further north had photographed a small mammal that he had encountered during a bat transect walk and it turned out to be a Grey dwarf Hamster (3rd live sighting).

An evening walk putting down more traps at a new site produced a few butterflies, Eastern green lizard and sand lizard and a little owl.

We did a night drive finding roosting quail and whinchat, northern white bellied hedgehog, steppe mouse, roe deer and possible harvest mouse located with the thermal but we could not find the actual mouse during a search.



Quail



Clouded yellow on Bladder Hibiscus



Eastern Green lizard

Thursday 5th September

Great white egrets and grey herons argued on the pools as we headed to the first set of traps which held very little, the second set were more productive and we caught a nice Ural mouse as well as wood mice, common voles and bicoloured white toothed shrews.

We collected up all the longworth traps but left the pitfalls in place for one last night.

We did an afternoon drive and walk exploring new grassland areas and it held quite a few raptors including a nice red footed falcon, Montagu's harrier, hobby, buzzard and kestrel. Other things of note were roe deer and Silver studded blue.



Ural Mouse

During dinner the rain started so we needed to collect the remaining traps, pitfall traps and rain are not a good combination. We collected all the traps then did a night drive, the rain had brought out green toads, common spadefoots and marsh frogs. We found a fox, several hares and roe deer in addition to the mice and voles and another quail was of interest.

Friday 6th September

We took the long drive back to Bucharest, battling the heavy traffic. Only a few sightings of note during the journey white stork, buzzard, marsh harrier. My Wizz air flight was delayed 30 mins but we arrived back at Luton pretty much on time..



Scops owl



European Sousek

Lists



Birds - 37



Red footed Falcon

Little Owl	Crested Lark	Swallow
Rook	Little Egret	Collared Dove
House Sparrow	Raven	Kestrel
Bee eater	Tree Sparrow	Jackdaw
Red Backed Shrike	Scops owl	Nightjar
Hoopoe	Buzzard	Tawny pipit
White Stork	Corn Bunting	Quail
Whinchat	Great White Egret	Grey heron
Red footed Falcon	Montagu's Harrier	Marsh harrier
Skylark	Starling	Mallard
Yellowhammer	Magpie	Wood Pigeon
Moorhen	Pheasant	Greylag Goose
Hobby		



White Stork

Mammals - 13

Grey Dwarf Hamster	Ural mouse	Roe Deer
Wood Mouse	Red Fox	Yellow necked Mouse
Brown Hare	Lesser White Toothed Shrew	Bi Coloured White Toothed Shrew
Northern White Bellied hedgehog	Steppe Mouse	Common Vole
Noctule	Nathusius' Pipistrelle	European Souslik
Badger	Hazel Dormouse	



Bi Coloured White Toothed Shrew



Northern White Bellied Hedgehog

Herps - 5

Eastern Green Lizard	Sand Lizard	Common Spadefoot
Green toad	Marsh Frog sp	



Marsh frog Sp

Invertebrates - 8

7 Spot Ladybird	14 Spot Ladybird	Acrida ungarica
Acrosternum heegeri	Adonis ladybrd	Bishops Mitre Shieldbug
Blue Winged Grasshopper	Brown Marmorated Stink Bug	Brown spotted Bush-cricket
Camptopus lateralis	Codophila varia	Common darter
Crucifer Shieldbug	Exochomus nigromaculatus	Field Cricket
Harlequin ladybird	Mediterranean Banded Centipede	Praying Mantis
Pyrrhocoris apterus	scymnus sp	Spilostethus pandurus
Striped Shieldbug	Wasp Spider	



Pyrrhocoris apterus

Butterflies and Moths - 36



Spotted Sulphur

Cardinal	Hummingbird Hawkmoth	Common Blue
Silver Studded Blue	Adonis Blue	Long Tailed Blue
Lang's Short tailed Blue	Agriphila tristella	Aporodes floralis
Acontia candefacta	Agriphila inquinatella	Brown Argus
Centre-barred Sallow	Clepsid pallidana	Clouded yellow
Cochylidia rupicola	Common Heath	Convolvulus Hawkmoth
Eastern Bath White	European corn borer	Ephestia unicolorella
Flounced rustic	Four Spotted	Homoeosoma sinuella
Isturgia arenacearia	Lappet	Lesser Broad Bordered Yellow Underwing
Loxostege sticticalis	Meal Moth	Mecyna flavalis
Nutmeg	Orange Swift	Pediasia fascelinella
Pigmy Footman	Purple barred yellow	Ruby Tiger
Rusty Dot Pearl	Scarce Bordered Straw	Small Copper
Small Heath	Southern Smal White	Spotted Sulphur
Straw Underwing	Synopsia sociaria	tawny wave
Vines Rustic	Wall Brown	Small elephant hawkmoth
Euchromius ocella	Menophra japygiaria	



Cardinal

Selected Plants.

Yellow Alkanet	Yellow Star Thistle	Whorled Clary
Vervain	Tree of heaven	Travelers Joy
Thorn Apple	Toadflax	Tansy
Spiny Cocklebur	Spleen Amaranth	Small Caltrops
Sickle Medic	Sea Purslane	Rough Cocklebur
Red Bartsia	Prickly Sorrel	Procumbent Yellow Sorrel
Plumeless Thistle	Nettle Leaved bellflower	Hastate orache
Hoary Alison	Hairy Finger Grass	Giant Goldenrod
Green purslane	Galatella sedifolia	Forked larkspur
flax-leaved daphne	Fleabane	Field Eryngo
Field Dodder	Duke of Argyll's Teapant	Diffuse knapweed
Danewort	Common Sea lavender	Common Amaranth
Cocklebur leaved Iva	Chickory	Carthusian pink
Burnet Saxifrage	bladder hibiscus	Black Nightshade
Black Horehound	Black Bindweed	Birds foot trefoil
Balkan Clary	Asparagus	Albaida



Forked Larkspur

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