



## A new species of mole-rat (Rodentia, Bathyergidae) from the Horn of Africa

SPARTACO GIPPOLITI<sup>1</sup> & GIOVANNI AMORI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Viale Liegi 48, I-00198 Rome, Italy. E-mail: spartacolobus@hotmail.com

<sup>2</sup>CNR, Institute of Ecosystem Studies, c/o Department of Biology and Biotechnology “C.Darwin” Viale dell’Università 32 - 00185 Rome, Italy. E-mail: giovanni.amori@uniroma1.it

### Abstract

A new species of mole-rat with a striking colour pattern is described from a single mounted specimen in the historical collection of the ‘Museo Civico di Zoologia’ in Rome, Italy. The lack of skull and original collecting data does not allow the gathering of firm evidences about its taxonomic relationships, geographical range and ecological preferences. This taxon is provisionally allocated to the recently created genus *Fukomys* Kock, Ingram, Frabotta, Honeycutt and Burda 2006 on the grounds of pelage colour pattern and geographical origin. All the available evidence, including label and other fragmentary historical data, supports *Fukomys ilariae* **sp. nov.** as originating from the Lower Shebelle region near Mogadishu, Somalia, historically known as Benadir. This discovery highlights the relevance for biodiversity conservation of the Horn of Africa and the need of further faunistic research to describe its fauna.

**Key words:** Historical collections, Museo Civico di Zoologia, Mammalia, *Fukomys*, Horn of Africa

### Introduction

The mole-rat family Bathyergidae is endemic to sub-Saharan Africa. This family is commonly divided into two subfamilies, Bathyerginae (with grooved upper incisors) represented by the genus *Bathyergus*, and Georychinae (with ungrooved upper incisors), which includes *Heterocephalus*, *Heliophobius*, *Georychus*, *Cryptomys* and *Fukomys* (Woods & Kilpatrick, 2005). Two genera are restricted to southern Africa (*Georychus* and *Bathyergus*) and two other genera are distributed in eastern Africa (*Heterocephalus* and *Heliophobius*). *Cryptomys* and *Fukomys* are the most speciose and widely distributed genera with 16 species currently recognized (Ingram *et al.*, 2004). Nevertheless, with the growing contribution of genetics, it is probable that more species will be formally described in the future (cf Kock *et al.*, 2006; van Daele *et al.*, 2007). A brief description of each genus is provided following De Graaf (1981), Kingdon (1974) and Meester & Setzer (1977): *Bathyergus*—upper incisors not extending behind tooth-rows, foreclaws much enlarged for digging; *Heterocephalus*—cheekteeth either 3/3 or 2/2, fur reduced to a few scattered hairs, third digit of manus longer than fourth; *Heliophobius*—cheekteeth at full dentition 6/6, hairs of pelage about 20–25 mm in length, palate not extending behind tooth row; *Georychus*—cheekteeth at full dentition 4/4, black cap on head, white ring round ear, cheeks black and nose white; *Cryptomys*—cheekteeth at full dentition 4/4, simplified to ring-pattern in adult, face not contrastingly coloured. *Fukomys* has been separated from *Cryptomys* (= *Coetomys*) on molecular evidence by Ingram *et al.* (2004), but it cannot be separated from *Cryptomys* on the basis of morphological and/or morphometric characters (Kock *et al.*, 2006).

During the revision of part of the mammal collections stored at the “Museo Civico di Zoologia” of Rome (MCZR), one of us (S.G.) came across a mounted specimen of a mole-rat that could not be readily assigned to a known species. The absence of a skull and lack of detailed information on the origin of this specimen (MCZR 7016) greatly hampered its identification. However, the uniqueness of the skin colour pattern and the reliability of the few available historical data concerning its origin justified the description of a new species of mole-rat from the family Bathyergidae, with the aim also to encourage *ad hoc* efforts to secure more specimens. This record is noteworthy as north-east Africa is considered to be only inhabited by the naked-mole rat *Heterocephalus glaber* (Rüppell 1842).