



Strasbourg, 4 November 2002  
[Inf37e\_2002.doc]

**T-PVS/Inf (2002) 37**

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

22<sup>nd</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 2-5 December 2002

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**Report on  
measures for the protection of the common hamster  
(*Cricetus cricetus*)  
in the Federal Republic of Germany**

*Document  
prepared by  
the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany*

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Recommendation No. 79 of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (30 November - 3 December 1999, Strasbourg, France) recommends that the Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention with small or declining common hamster (*crictus crictus*) populations, and especially Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands

- a) continue their efforts to improve the conservation status of the hamster;
- b) continue their efforts to implement the existing action plans and adapt them if necessary to physical planning – and other new threats which could occur;
- c) detail during the next five years the results of the efforts made for these aims in an annual report to the Convention;
- d) facilitate the exchange of information on measures for the recovering of the hamster populations in organising at least one meeting of the concerning Parties and the (non-governmental) organisation concerned;
- e) improve implementation of agri-environmental measures for this species within the common agricultural policy.

The Federal Republic of Germany has drawn up a report [T-PVS (2000) 72] outlining its activities over the years. In connection with this, please note the following current development in the Federal Länder:

## **I. Baden-Württemberg**

The common hamster is “critically endangered” in Baden-Württemberg. It is planned to include it in category 1 of the red list of mammals in Baden-Württemberg.

In Baden-Württemberg only two common hamster populations (Rhein-Neckar district, Main-Tauber district) are known. The site in the Rhein-Neckar district in particular has long been populated by hamsters due to its favourable climate, its deep soils and its dry summers. It plays a key role in the **common hamster conservation programme** in Baden-Württemberg. This is all the more necessary as the hamsters populations in the Rhein-Neckar conurbation are exposed to a particular threat from municipal land use.

Therefore in 2001 a “*common hamster*” species conservation programme was introduced, initially restricted to the larger populations in the Rhein-Neckar district. Surveys are planned in the Main-Tauber district in 2002.

As a basis for targeted conservation measures, mapping was carried out this year in the main site. Two different mapping standards were used in this process (precision mapping, random sample mapping). In order to use the synergy effects and to reach a profound overall assessment of the population status in the Rhein-Neckar district, Dr Weinhold from the Zoological Institute at Heidelberg University was commissioned with two parallel expert reports, one containing surveys in the Mannheim local subdistrict, the other in the rest of the Rhein-Neckar district.

The total area of land surveyed for hamster populations was 8,803 ha; hamster populations were found on 4,448 ha (approx. 51%) of agricultural land. However, this was not a coherent, closed population; instead it was an area cut up by traffic routes and built-up areas. The average summer density of burrows amounts to a maximum 1.68 (Mannheim-Nord) and minimum 0.53 (remaining Rhein-Neckar district) burrows per ha populated area. The spring density of burrows is a representative density index and generally falls well below the values of the summer density.

Concrete **protection and maintenance measures** are also proposed for the respective areas as part of this surveying. On the whole, extensive (hamster-friendly) management is considered essential. This includes: harvesting fields strip by strip, leaving stubble, waiting until October to plough up stubble, leaving strips, wheat-legume fields.

At the same time as the mapping, a first round of negotiations was held with farmers in the Rhein-Neckar district with the goal of supporting the field hamster populations by means of contract-based nature conservation in certain areas (core zones). This project is to be accompanied by greater **public relations work**.

## **II. Bayern (Bavaria)**

In Bavaria, the common hamster is found in large numbers and over a large area in Unterfranken (approx. 50 km around Würzburg), and smaller populations within a smaller area in Oberfranken (Hof area). This species is classed as extinct in Swabia; the remaining populations are classed as endangered or critically endangered.

Since only deep, easily dug land can be populated, permanent common hamster populations are restricted to soil with high value numbers that are traditionally intensively farmed and for this reason are generally lacking in structure.

By means of random sampling of soils and landscapes, including local surveys, a review was carried out of earlier common hamster populations in Unterfranken in 2000/2001 in order to gain an overview of the development in the populations and of the current area of distribution.

The common hamster is categorised as “vulnerable” on the current list of endangered species.

At present a search is on for land users that are prepared to carry out hamster protection measures within the framework of a species protection concept on a voluntary basis. Examples of this could be

delaying ploughing or leaving stubble over the winter, leaving certain areas unused and extensification in its broadest sense. This should be used to illustrate to what degree elements of the existing contract-based nature conservation programme and the cultural landscape programme can be used, or whether it is necessary to supplement these with specific elements for the common hamster. Within a test phase the effectiveness and efficiency of these protection measures is to be reviewed by means of monitoring on contracted and comparable areas.

### **III. Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony)**

Since the entry into force of the FFH Directive, not only has the common hamster population had a favourable conservation status, it actually improved significantly throughout the 1990s.

The positive development in the common hamster populations in Lower Saxony is not least due to the diverse activities of the Lower Saxony State government with the goal of extensifying agricultural land use on arable land. As a result the common hamster's habitats have improved considerably. Reference is made here to the Guideline on granting payments for voluntary agreements to provide resting and feedings areas for northern visiting birds as well as for species protection measures on arable land (cooperation programme for conserving biological diversity). The measures listed for conserving and promoting plant species and communities that are endangered or critically endangered in Lower Saxony on field margins, parts of or entire arable areas are particularly beneficial for both the endangered plant species and all animal species living on extensively farmed land, especially the common hamster. These measures have been approved by the European Commission, and 50% of the costs are covered by the EU.

### **IV. Hessen (Hesse)**

#### **1. Introduction**

For centuries man tried to eradicate the common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*), its competitor for food, with every means possible. However, the common hamster survived all these attacks, until a radical change in agricultural farming methods over the past decades brought it to the brink of extinction. Thus the current situation in Europe is characterised by decline in populations and the isolation of the remaining populations (POTT-DÖRFER & HECKENROTH 1994, GODMANN 1998, STUBBE & STUBBE 1998). It is therefore a matter of urgency, together with the agricultural sector, to bring about an improvement in arable habitats.

The common hamster is categorised as “endangered” (2) on the red list of threatened species in Germany (BUNDESAMT FÜR NATURSCHUTZ 1998). According to Article 13 of the Federal Ordinance on the Conservation of Species, the common hamster belongs to one of the especially protected animal species and is protected by the European Flora-Fauna Habitat Directive (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 1992, Annex IV).

The Common Hamster Protection Working Group (Arbeitsgruppe Feldhamsterschutz - AGFHA) was commissioned by the Hesse Nature Conservation Foundation to map common hamster population in Hesse from 1998 to 2001 (GODMANN 2000a and b, GODMANN & GALL in progress). The surveys showed that the area of distribution of the common hamster in Hesse has decreased dramatically. Verifiable large populations appear to exist only in the area “lower Main level” between Wiesbaden and Frankfurt and in the Wetterau. These areas are characterised by particularly good soil and a favourable climate, which earlier resulted in huge populations of the common hamster. Within these areas there is a rapid rate of construction, so that the agricultural land is reduced every year. Due to a more consistent implementation of the European protection status of the common hamster, the need has arisen over the years to develop protection measures. One option is the direct promotion of “hamster-friendly” management, as practiced in other Federal Länder (Saxony, Thuringia, Rhineland-Palatinate).

These protected areas are to provide a habitat for other species as well as the common hamster, for example the partridge, the common hare, the corn bunting, the yellow wagtail and the queen of Spain fritillary. Small, semi-natural withdrawal areas or border strips are insufficient for these species. They profit much more from a large-scale extensification of agriculture and a general improvement in the

structural diversity of agricultural habitats, which should be reflected in the aforementioned areas (SPITTLER 2000).

## 2. The project procedure

### 2.1 Drawing up a project brochure

A prerequisite for the success of a project is to produce a small brochure explaining the opportunities for support and funding to the farmers and to the municipalities, and promoting the protection of the common hamster.

### 2.2 Information forums

A first information forum should be held to present the project to the competent authorities and relevant associations. Participants: environmental offices from the towns of Frankfurt and Wiesbaden as well as the competent district authorities in Wetterau, Main-Taunus and Gießen together with the competent landscape conservation associations.

### 2.3 Winning support among farmers

This phase of the project is particularly important as success depends on the participation of individual farmers. Our experience shows that the farmers should be addressed locally.

### 2.4 Implementing measures

During the implementation phase, i.e. establishing protected areas, experts must be available at all times as a local contact for farmers. They can deal directly with these detailed questions.

### 2.5 Monitoring success

Monitoring the measures laid out in contracts is particularly important, as is ascertaining the development in the respective common hamster population.

### 2.6 Timetable

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
<b>Drawing up a project brochure</b>												
<b>Information forums</b>												
<b>Winning support among farmers</b>												
<b>Implementing measures</b>												
<b>Monitoring success</b>												

## 3 Financial requirement

For a first effective step to protect the common hamster, at least 100 ha of agricultural land should be made “hamster friendly” in the first year. Thus at a cost of approx. DM 800/ha, DM 80,000 would be required for the year. The contracts should be fixed for at least five years. Approx. DM 20,000 are required in the first year for drawing up the brochure, winning the support of the farmers and monitoring implementation. A detailed financial plan for this can be found in the project application. Approx. DM 10,000/year are required for project management and success monitoring in the following years.

## 4 “Hamster-friendly” management of protected area - basis for contracts

It is becoming increasingly clear from recent surveys in Germany that the common hamster cannot survive by means of cultivating cereal fields alone (GUBBELS & BACKBIER 2000). The common hamster also needs a structurally diverse landscape which offers sufficient and varied food and cover during its summer activities. Sufficient cover in the case of “hamster-friendly” management involves: leaving stubble, cultivating clover plants and leaving a strip of wild growth. Cultivating at least 60% of cereal within the total area is important for the hamster's winter supply.

The following list of measures can, depending on the participating farm, be modified and brought into line with the operational requirements.

1. No slurry or manure may be applied.
2. No use whatsoever of pesticides (especially rodenticide).
3. No irrigation may be carried out.
4. No deep ploughing or subsoiling.
5. The following cultures are permitted: cereal, grain legumes (field beans, peas), arable feed or green fallow (lucerne, clover)<sup>1</sup>
6. 0.5 m wide strips to be left per ~8 m (double width of strip of the combine harvester) up to 1 October.
7. Tilling no earlier than 15 September (to reduce the drying up of soil, straw should be spread on the land) and then if possible flat soil cultivation (e.g. with straw spreading).
8. Ploughing after the harvest not before 15 September, if possible only every second year.
9. Creating additional structures (hedges, field margins).

#### **V. Nordrhein-Westfalen (North Rhine-Westphalia)**

North-Rhine Westphalia has elaborated the enclosed species protection programme (Annex).

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of crop rotation: clover - winter/summer wheat - winter barley/triticale - grain legumes - winter wheat farming without livestock: green fallow (with clover) - winter wheat (possibly underseed) - oats - grain legumes (catch crop) - winter rye/dinkel