N.E.C.C.A

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«Actions to protect, conserve and promote biodiversity. Field studies of endemic, endangered and nationally important species of Greece». Funded by the Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency (NECCA)

TITLE

Rediscovering one of the most elusive small mammals of Greece, the Balkan Pine Vole, Microtus felteni

(Project ID: 14857)

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ABSTRACT

Greece possesses one of the richest mammalian faunas in Europe and the study of mammals of Greece has, over the years, attracted many researchers. However, several of these species still suffer from scarce and outdated knowledge. These are mostly small mammals, such as shrews, dormice and voles: the little previous data, their often distant and hard to reach habitats, their shy nature and the need for specialised knowledge, regarding trapping techniques/equipment that need be adapted to each species unique behaviour, demand extended (and thus difficult to fund) field trips, rendering research on these elusive species quite challenging. One such example - the target species of this proposal - is the vole Microtus felteni, a Balkan endemic, nationally assessed as Endangered. A notable part of its distribution is in Greece, albeit still largely unknown. Even though the latest IUCN global assessment lists the species as Least Concern (Data Deficient in previous assessments), the assessors admit this to be a rare species, with only about ten known localities of presence, poor knowledge of its ecology and virtually none on its behaviour. The scanty knowledge on M. felteni makes accurate assessment of its threat and conservation status very problematic and this is a gap to be filled. The proposed project, that strongly relies on field work, aims at updating/enriching knowledge on the distribution of M. felteni in Greece, by confirming older sites of species presence and discovering new ones. Data will be gathered on its biology and behaviour (e.g. burrow system architecture) that will facilitate locating and studying it in the future. Also, an attempt will be made to detect potential threats and pressures on its populations, and, using our expertise, the ectoparasite load of collected specimens and its potential threat on their survival will be studied. We aspire that the end-product of this work will be a significantly better knowledge of this littlestudied species.