

FOREWORD

Mammals are difficult to study or count in the field because of their secretive habits and their prevailing nocturnal activity. For many species, direct observation is occasional and in few cases their presence is recognised by tracks, trails and other signs. This restriction may be the main reason why mammals do not receive particular attention from researchers and naturalists. In general, only the specially attractive species, like carnivores or ungulates, catch the interest of people and some are so popular that have become an emblem used to promote wildlife conservation either to local level or international level. The otter is one of the most significant cases.

In Italy, knowledge of the status and distribution of mammals is still poor, especially when we compare it with the birds; this is particularly evident for bats and in general for small mammals.

The Italian Mammal Atlas Project (P.A.M.I.), started in 1990, has allowed the collection of much information on the geographic and ecological distribution of species. This knowledge is also used in the European Mammal Mapping Atlas (EMMA), whose publication is foreseen in 1998.

The 3rd Business Meeting on EMMA, held in Pavia in October 1993 and organised by the Dipartimento di Biologia Animale (University of Pavia) and the CNR Centro di Genetica Evoluzionistica (Rome), has been an important step in co-ordinating the collection of distributional data of mammals at an European level. This has been the occasion for promoting a review on the status of knowledge in European countries.

The first fourteen contributions included in this volume provide a general picture of the distribution of mammals with information on endemic, extinct, introduced and reintroduced species; for two reports, the classification of threatened mammals according to new IUCN categories and criteria is also added.

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