

CHAPTER 15

CRYPTOMYS NIMRODI (DE WINTON) 1896

This Cryptomys species was first collected by C.F. Selous in Matabeleland near Essex Vale in the vicinity of Bulawayo between August and October 1895. The specimens on which the species is founded were, however, all taken in November 1895. de Winton (1896,806) named this species in honour of the "mighty hunter" and based his description on four skins (one adult, three juveniles) and five skulls (two adults and three juveniles) (de Winton, op.cit., 808).

Although I have had access to a considerable number of Cryptomys study skins from Southern African localities, I could not convincingly refer any specimens to the species under discussion. Therefore, all further information pertaining to this species, to follow below, has been culled from the available literature.

As here understood, C. nimrodi is regarded as a monotypic species occurring mainly in the vicinity of Essex Vale and perhaps in the immediate surrounding districts. Hitherto, it is only known from the type locality (Roberts, 1951, 389).

Cryptomys nimrodi (de Winton)

Georychus nimrodi de Winton, Proc. zool. Soc. Lond., p. 808, 1896. Type locality: Essex Farm, Matabeleland.

Type specimen:

Housed in the British Museum, (Natural History)/...

History). de Winton selected as a type, a specimen marked as follows by the collector: "No. 46, Mole, ♂, caught 18 Nov., 1895".

Type locality:

Essex Vale, Southern Rhodesia.

Distribution: (Fig. 15.1).

Hitherto, known only from the type locality.

Diagnostic characters:

According to the original description the size of C. nimrodi is much as in C. hottentotus and C. darlingi, while it differs from the latter in the absence of the triangular white patch on the nape.

Colour:

A drab coloured species (no further information available) without the occipital patch found in C. damarensis and C. darlingi.

Size:

No comparative data is available for discussion in the present work. For the type specimen, H.B. and H.F. measurements were given as 147 mm. and 24.5 mm. respectively while the skull has a basilar length of 31 mm. and a greatest width of 27 mm. In a sample of adult males of C. darlingi the mean H.B. length was determined as 145 mm. in the present work, which indicates that the size of the type of C. nimrodi falls well within the range of size variation found in C. darlingi.

Skull and dentition:

de Winton (1896, 808) stated that the skull of C. nimrodi can at once be distinguished from its allies by "... the ascending processes of the premaxillaries not extending backward beyond the nasals, so that the suture between these bones and the/...

the frontals forms a simple slightly bowed line, very distinct from the complicated dove-tail pattern found in most of the Georychi." Furthermore, the sagittal crest is faintly developed, the interparietal bone rounded, the zygomata not so bowed out anteriorly as in C. hottentotus, while the outer walls of the infra-orbital foramina are thick. The size of these foramina vary, while the skull recedes to the narrowest point between the orbits rather abruptly from the lachrymal projections. The frontals show no posterior lateral inflation in the interorbital region. Still paraphrasing de Winton, it is stated that the postnasal aperture (internal nares) is rather wide while the back of the palate is slightly cut away on either side ".... leaving a projecting point in the middle line: ....." Finally, de Winton described the posterior opening of the alisphenoid canal as being larger than is found in C. hottentotus.

No information is available on the dentition of C. nimrodi and it may tentatively be assumed that it shows no marked differences compared to other Cryptomys species.

#### Discussion:

As was pointed out above, this species is hitherto only known from the type locality, which was described as Essex Farm, Matabeleland. In this case de Winton has quoted Selous' (collectors) label attached to the type specimen. On page 806 de Winton (1896) stated that a collection of nearly 50 specimens were made at Essex Vale near Bulawayo, Matabeleland. Essex Farm must however be in Essex Vale since Selous' collection was made there (Ellerman et.al. 1953, 232).

Ellerman et.al. (loc. cit.) have regarded C. nimrodi as a race (subspecies) of C. hottentotus, while Roberts (1951, 389) has retained its specific rank. Not having seen the type specimen or associated series of specimens, the present author is not in a position to judge.

It is evident that de Winton based this species mainly on craniological aspects. Specimens that have been collected in the vicinity of the type locality (e.g. on the Essex Vale road, Bulawayo) did not show the "simple slightly bowed line" of the suture between the premaxillaries, nasals and frontals and have been regarded as specimens of C. darlingi in the present work. In the sample available for study to me, only one specimen (RM 4777) showed this configuration described for C. nimrodi, but this specimen was collected at Khami dam to the west of Bulawayo falling within the distribution range of C. darlingi. In other specimens near the latter locality the normal 'dove-tail' arrangement is clearly present. This points to the possibility that this character, as described by de Winton for C. nimrodi may also be encountered in other species and can not as such be interpreted as a diagnostic character for nimrodi.

As was the case in C. damarensis (where C. ovamboensis was described from Ondongwa which is geographically situated in the middle of the distribution range of C. damarensis) it is not clear why C. nimrodi suddenly occurs in the typical geographical distribution range of C. darlingi. If Bulawayo is accepted as the furthest (hitherto known) western point of distribution for C. darlingi, and Matibi

in south-eastern Rhodesia (from whence C. darlingi is known) are connected by a line, the locality for C. nimrodi falls within the distribution range of C. darlingi. This could point to the possibility that C. nimrodi will eventually prove to be a synonym of C. darlingi, while for the purposes of the present work it is provisionally retained as a separate species. This possibility is also strengthened by the fact that de Winton stated that the zygomata resembled those found in darlingi while it also resembled darlingi in the thicker outer walls of the infraorbital foramen. The drab colouration (so characteristic for darlingi) is also described for nimrodi.

Finally, when one takes into consideration the amount of variation found in the shape, size and occurrence of the white occipital patch in both C. damarensis and C. darlingi it is clear that the absence of this patch in C. nimrodi need not necessarily be a diagnostic feature.

#### Biological:

Very little is known about biological aspects of this species. They appear on the surface of the soil after the onset of the rainy season (de Winton, 1896, 808).

#### Phylogenetic:

In view of the scarcity of information on this species, very little can be said about possible phylogenetic aspects. According to de Winton (1896, 808), the species is unquestionably related to C. darlingi as far as colour and craniological aspects are concerned.

#### List of localities:

Essex Vale (de Winton, 1896, 808).