

A new mammal species record for Oman, the Nile grass rat (*Arvicanthis niloticus*)

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The Nile grass rat (*Arvicanthis niloticus*) has an extensive range through the tropics and subtropics of Africa. However, this rodent was believed to have a very limited distribution in the Arabian Peninsula, having only been recorded from a handful of localities in south-western Yemen. Harrison & Bates (1991) raised the possibility that this species may be found to exist in the Dhofar of southern-most Oman.

In February 1998 we paid a visit to the monsoon-influenced forests of Jebel al Qamar, Dhofar, lying within some 25km of the eastern-most border with Yemen we were able to confirm the presence of the Nile grass rat within the Sultanate of Oman. The site is located within two kilometres of the small coastal settlement of Rakhyut (16° 45.16' N; 53° 24.37' E- WGS84) and lies in a fairly wide, rocky-bottomed wadi. The steep, rocky slopes on either side of the wadi are dominated by *Commiphora* woodland, with scattered large trees along the wadi bottom. The Nile grass rats were associated with succulent strewn boulders and small, dense thickets where burrows and runways were evident. The grass rats were abundant and were observed to be active throughout the daylight hours but during the hottest period they did not venture from deep shade.

Animals allowed close approach and a number of voucher photographs were taken. A single dead specimen was retrieved and the skull deposited in the Alexander Koenig Museum collection in Bonn, Germany.

Reference:

- Harrison, D.L. & Bates, P.J.J. 1991. **The Mammals of Arabia.** Harrison Zoological Museum, Sevenoaks, England.
- Dollman, J.G. 1932. Mammals. In: Bertram Thomas '*Arabia Felix*'. 339-341
- Pcoock, R.I. 1935. The mammals collected in South-east Arabia by Mr. Bertram Thomas & Mr. H. St. John Philby. *Annals Mag. Nat. Hist.* (10), 15: 441-467