

CONTRIBUTION TO THE KNOWLEDGE
OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF *RHINOLOPHUS MEHELYI*
MATSCHIE, 1901 SPECIES
(CHIROPTERA: RHINOLOPHIDAE) IN ROMANIA

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The paper reassesses the spreading of *Rhinolophus mehelyi* in Romania by including the SW zone of the country in the species distribution area and the threats are analyzed and protection measures are proposed for Peștera Gura Ponicovei, a shelter with a bat population of over 7,000 ind., inside which, recently, a heterospecific colony of *Rhinolophus mehelyi*, together with five other species (newly recorded here) has been discovered. In all, the variety of the Chiroptera from this site numbers 16 species.

INTRODUCTION

In the framework of the study concerning the “Conservation of the subterranean bat habitats from the South-Western Carpathians” (Natura 2000 LIFE Programme) systematical observations were made in 23 caves with chiropterological potential. In Gura Ponicovei cave (Figs. 1 and 4) a permanent colony of *Rhinolophus mehelyi* Matschie, 1901 was identified. This species is known under the common name of the “*Romanian rhinolophe*” (DECU *et al.*, 2003). *Rhinolophus mehelyi* has a SW Palearctic distribution (HORACEC *et al.*, 2000) being recorded in S Europe (Fig. 2): Portugal, Spain, S France, Sardinia, Sicily, S Italy, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, then in the Caucasus and Transcaucasus; in Asia Minor: Turkey, Syria, Israel, Jordania, Irak, Iran, Afghanistan. The protection status of the species, according to the eight threat types established by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN, 2001), includes it in the category of the 14 European species considered as vulnerable (VU: A2C) with a high risk degree.

For the description of *Rhinolophus mehelyi*, Matschie had at his disposition three individuals in alcohol received from Bucharest and the volume “*Monographia Chiropteroorum Hungariae*” published by Mehely in 1900. In his Monography, Mehely emphasizes the presence also of *Rhinolophus euryale* collected from the Danube Valley from four localities (Harshegy, Hamor, Coronini and Pecsényeszka) in some individuals with anomalies which were not recorded in the description of this species made by Blasius in 1853 and completed in 1857. Also, Matschie noted the presence of these anomalies in three individuals of bats received from Romania (Bucharest and Dobrogea) and described a new species dedicated to Mehely – *Rhinolophus mehelyi* (TUPINIER, 2001).