

MITT.ZOOL.GES.BRAUNAU	Bd. 5 Nr. 9/12:189-190	Braunau a.I., 9.8.1990	ISSN 0250-3603
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The first records of predation on landsnails by rats

in Israel

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The two European species of the genus Rattus (Mammalia: Muridae) are rather omnivorous in their feeding behaviour. Both are among others well known predators of land and freshwater molluscs. WILD & LAWSON (1937) enumerate prey species of both the Black Rat: Rattus rattus, and the Brown Rat: Rattus norvegicus, from molluscs occurring in the British Isles. GANDOLFI & PARISI (1972 & 1973) and PARISI & GANDOLFI (1974) have described extensively the predation on molluscs by Rattus norvegicus in Italy, while FAUS (1988) has recently documented predation on landsnails by Rattus rattus in Spain.

Although both the Black and the Brown Rat are commonly encountered in large parts of Israel (MENDELSON & YOMTOV, 1987), not a single case of predation on molluscs has been reported from that area.

In this note I like to present the first records of rats feeding on landsnails in Israel.

Rattus rattus

On 30 November 1983 Black Rats were spotted under the roof of my house in Kibbutz Netzer Sereni. They were caught still the same day, which resulted in a proper identification. When the space under the roof was cleaned out thoroughly a nest was discovered, which was made up largely of pieces of paper and dry grasses. Near the nest large numbers of faecal pellets and damaged shells of Monacha haifaensis (Pallary, 1939) and Theba pisana (Müller, 1774) were found in considerable quantities.

Rattus norvegicus

In the last couple of years I was able to register three cases of predation on landsnails by the Brown Rat:

all in the vicinity of Nahal Gezer, a small stream carrying water only part of the year.

On 9 July 1982 large numbers of typical rat-damaged shells were found in burrows of this rat species on the former refuse dump of Ramle, west of Nahal Gezer. They belonged all to Monacha obstructa.

On 25 March 1988 two freshly eaten Helix engaddensis (Bourguinat, 1852) were found near a rat burrow on the east bank of Nahal Gezer, halfway between Ramle and Ahisamakh. On the same spot damaged shells of Monacha obstructa (Pfeiffer, 1842) were encountered on 4 April 1988.

Although the results are rather scanty, they prove that both the Black and the Brown Rat are occasionally also feeding on molluscs in Israel. More records may therefore be expected in the future.

Zusammenfassung

Hausratten und Wanderratten ernähren sich in Israel gelegentlich auch von Landschnecken. Monacha haifensis und Theba pisana sind für die Hausratte, Monacha obstructa und Helix engaddensis für die Wanderratte nachgewiesen worden.

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Zeitschrift/Journal: [Mitteilungen der Zoologischen Gesellschaft Braunau](#)

Jahr/Year: 1990

Band/Volume: [5](#)

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Artikel/Article: [The first records of predation on landsnails by rsts in Israel 189-190](#)