

A REVIEW OF NORTH AFRICAN SHORT-TAILED
GERBILS (*DIPODILLUS*)
WITH DESCRIPTION OF A NEW TAXON FROM TUNISIA

by

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Revue historique de la nomenclature des gerbilles à queue courte d'Afrique du Nord, et de la distribution des spécimens connus. On reconnaît maintenant 3 espèces : *Dipodillus maghrebi* au Maroc, *D. simoni* avec 2 sous-espèces (*D. s. simoni* du Maroc à la Libye occidentale, et *D. s. kaiseri* de la Libye orientale à l'Egypte). Une nouvelle espèce, *D. zakariai*, est décrite des îles Kerkennah, en Tunisie.

The short-tailed gerbils of North Africa are currently known from the Nile River in Egypt eastward to north-central Morocco. In all, only a very few dozen specimens have been reported from this region (see map). Taxonomically these have been named as three distinct species, one from Egypt, one from Algeria and one from Morocco.

The first, *Gerbillus simoni*, was named by Lataste (1881 : 497) who reported and described as new, 9 individuals taken from Oued Magra, between M'sila and Barika, north of Chott du Hodna, on the high plateau of Algeria. Soon afterward (1881 : 506) Lataste erected a new subgenus (*Dipodillus*) that included both *Gerbillus campestris* and the newly named *Gerbillus simoni*, without designating either as the type. The following year (1882 : 100) he used the subgeneric name *Dipodillus* in the generic sense when he reported that *Dipodillus simoni* reproduced well in captivity. He indicated that he had distributed to other scientists 24 living descendents from those that he had taken from Algeria to France. He further reported that, in captivity, the gestation period was 20 days, the females were again in heat 18 to 20 days later, and that a litter consisted of 4 to 6 young. Still later, Lataste (1882 : 126) clearly indicated that he considered *Dipodillus* to be a subgenus of *Gerbillus* and therein (*op. cit.* : 127) designated *G. simoni* Lataste as the type species of the subgenus.

About the turn of the century, *Dipodillus* became commonly used in the generic sense for all naked footed gerbils. Thus, by 1939, when Allen's "A checklist of African mammals" was published, the "genus" *Dipodillus* included some 36 taxa, 21 of which had been originally described as being *Dipodillus*. Heptner (1937) followed by Ellerman (1941) were successful, generally, in suppressing the use of *Dipodillus* as a