Chlorotalpa sclateri – Sclater's Golden Mole

Gary Bronner

Regional Red List status (2016)	**Least Concern**
National Red List status (2004)	Data Deficient
Reasons for change	Non-genuine change: New information
Global red List status (2015)	Least Concern
TOPS listing (NEMBA)	None
CITES listing	None
Endemic	Yes

In parts of Lesotho, villagers impale carcasses of Sclater's Golden-mole on spikes on top of hut thatch roofs in the belief that this will offer protection against lightning strikes.

Taxonomy

Chlorotalpa sclateri (Broom 1907)

ANIMALIA - CHORDATA - MAMMALIA - AFROSORICIDA - CHRYSOCHLORIDAE - *Chlorotalpa* - *sclateri*

Common names: Sclater's Golden Mole (English), Sclater se Gouemol, Sclater se Kruipmol (Afrikaans)

Taxonomic status: Species

Taxonomic notes: Although previously included within the genus *Amblysomus* by Petter (1981), the group, currently listed under the genus *Chlorotalpa*, were found to differ significantly in morphological, chromosomal and geographic traits (Meester 1974), and thus those genera are considered distinct (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). Based on geographic variation and cranial size and shape, four subspecies have been recognized: *C. s. sclateri*, *C. s. guillarmodi*, *C. s. montana*, and *C. s. shortridgei* (Bronner 2013). The apparent geographic discontinuity between these subspecies and the isolation of their preferred habitat appears to warrant this subspecific separation (Bronner 1995).

Assessment Rationale

Sclater's Golden Mole is a relatively widespread species that coexists and often thrives in close proximity to humans, provided that habitat disturbance is not too extensive; much of its range coincides with mountains where human influence on habitats is not substantial, so population decline is unlikely. The species is thus assessed as Least Concern.

Distribution

This species occurs in South Africa and Lesotho. It is restricted to montane habitats from Beaufort West and Sutherland in Western Cape north-eastwards to the Drakenberg Mountains of Eastern Cape, western KwaZulu-Natal and southern Mpumalanga, and the Maluti Mountains of Lesotho and western Free State (Figure 1). Distributional limits of the four subspecies are unclear owing to poor geographic sampling, but their known ranges are separated by seemingly inhospitable habitat suggesting that they may be geographically isolated (Bronner 1995).

Population

The species is locally abundant, but no quantitative data are available.

Current population trend: Unknown

Continuing decline in mature individuals: Unknown

Number of mature individuals in population: Unknown

Number of mature individuals in largest subpopulation: Unknown

Number of subpopulations: Unknown

Severely fragmented: No

Habitats and Ecology

This species is restricted to high-altitude grasslands, scrub and forested kloofs in the Nama-Karoo and Grassland biomes of South Africa. *Chlorotalpa s. shortridgei* occurs in Escarpment Mountain Renosterveld. *Chlorotalpa s. sclateri* and *C. s. guillarmodi* in south-eastern Mountain Grassland with marginal intrusion into Wet Cold Highveld Grassland. *Chlorotalpa s. montana* is known from only north-eastern Mountain Grassland where it favours scrub and thickets in kloofs rather than valley grasslands where the Highveld Golden Mole (*A. septentrionalis*) is the dominant species.

Occasionally located in association with African Mole-rat (*Cryptomys hottentotus*) (Lynch 1994), Sclater's Golden

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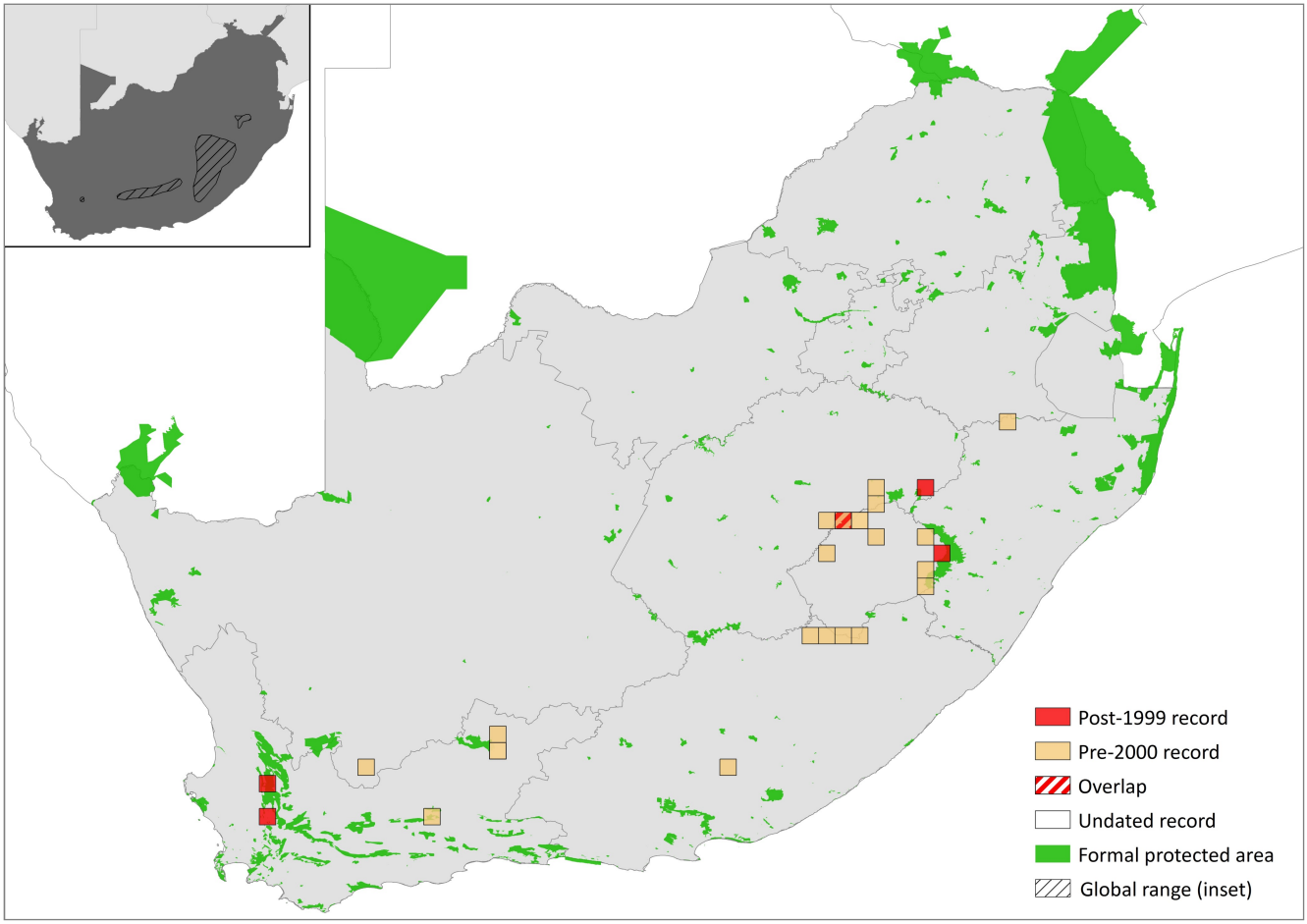

Figure 1. Distribution records for Sclater's Golden Mole (*Chlorotalpa sclateri*) within the assessment region

Table 1. Countries of occurrence within southern Africa

Country	Presence	Origin
Botswana	Absent	-
Lesotho	Extant	Native
Mozambique	Absent	-
Namibia	Absent	-
South Africa	Extant	Native
Swaziland	Absent	-
Zimbabwe	Absent	-

Moles construct both shallow foraging tunnels and deeper nesting chambers. They are predominantly nocturnal, but have been reported to be active following rainfall events during the day (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). One specimen collected in KwaZulu-Natal was found to have foraged almost exclusively on earthworms (Taylor 1998).

Use and Trade

This species may be culturally significant, and utilised traditionally in Lesotho. In some villages is believed that one's home is protected from lightning strikes, if a

Table 2. Threats to the Sclater's Golden Mole (*Chlorotalpa sclateri*) ranked in order of severity with corresponding evidence (based on IUCN threat categories, with regional context)

Rank	Threat description	Evidence in the scientific literature	Data quality	Scale of study	Current trend
1	*1.1 Housing & Urban Areas*: habitat alteration and/or loss owing to urbanisation.	-	Anecdotal	-	Increasing
2	*1.2 Commercial & Industrial Areas*: habitat alteration and/or loss owing to development.	-	Anecdotal	-	Increasing
3	*2.3.2 Small-holder Grazing, Ranching or Farming*: habitat loss and degradation from livestock ranching. Current stress *1.2 Ecosystem Degradation*: overgrazing reducing ground cover.	-	Anecdotal	-	Increasing with settlement expansion.
4	*2.1.3 Agro-industry Farming*: habitat alteration and/or loss owing to agricultural expansion.	-	Anecdotal	-	Unknown
5	*8.1.2 Invasive Non-Native/Alien Species/Diseases*: predation by dogs and cats in settlement areas.	-	Anecdotal	-	Increasing with settlement expansion.

Sclater's Golden Mole carcass is displayed on a stake outside the home.

Threats

There are currently no recognised major threats to this species. Habitat modification as a result of agricultural practices and urbanisation may have an impact on some subpopulations, but given the widespread distribution of this species and its ability to survive in mildly transformed habitat, these are considered to be low impact threats. Additionally, much of this species' habitat coincides with mountains where human influences are not substantial.

Current habitat trend: Stable

Conservation

Recorded from the UKhahlamba/Drakensberg Park (KwaZulu-Natal), Karoo National Park (Western Cape), Golden Gate National Park (Free State), as well as the Lesotho National Park. The species is not thought to be significantly threatened by human actions and thus no specific interventions are needed at present.

Recommendations for land managers and practitioners:

- Monitoring of subpopulations in existing conservation and peri-urban areas to assess trends.
- Field surveys to discover additional subpopulations.

Research priorities:

- Genetic analyses to assess validity of currently-recognized subspecies.
- Field studies to determine life history traits and ecological tolerances.
- Surveys needed to determine subpopulation size, trend and distribution limits of subspecies.
- Studies assessing the severity of threats.

Encouraged citizen actions:

- Report sightings on virtual museum platforms (for example, iSpot and MammalMAP), especially outside protected areas.
- Deposit any dead specimens found in a state or provincial museum, together with information on the date and site where found.
- Create native vegetation gardens.

Data Sources and Quality

Table 3. Information and interpretation qualifiers for the Sclater's Golden Mole (*Chlorotalpa sclateri*) assessment

Data sources	Museum records, field study (unpublished), indirect information (expert knowledge)
Data quality (max)	Inferred
Data quality (min)	Suspected
Uncertainty resolution	Expert consensus
Risk tolerance	Evidentiary

References

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Details of the methods used to make this assessment can be found in *Mammal Red List 2016: Introduction and Methodology.*