

## **Annamite striped rabbit *Nesolagus timminsi* in Vietnam**

Dang N. CAN, Alexei V. ABRAMOV\*, Alexei N. TIKHONOV  
and Alexander O. AVERIANOV

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The distribution of a new species of striped rabbit *Nesolagus timminsi* Averianov, Abramov et Tikhonov, 2000 is restricted to the central part of the Annamite Mountains, along the border between Vietnam and Laos. A low density of separated populations and hunting pressure in Vietnam already makes this species critically endangered.

Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources, Nghia Do-Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam (DNC); Zoological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, Universitetskaya nab. 1, St. Petersburg 199034, Russia (AVA, ANT, AOA)

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Until recently the genus *Nesolagus* contained only one species, the Sumatran striped rabbit *N. netscheri* (Schlegel, 1880). This species is restricted to montane forest (600–1600 m altitude) in the Barisan Mountains, west and southwest Sumatra. It has always been a rare animal, and only about a dozen museum specimens are known to exist (Flux 1990).

In 1996, biologist Rob Timmins found similar striped rabbits offered for sale in a food market in the town of Ban Lak, Laos. Since that time some records of the striped rabbit have been reported from the Annamite Mountains alongside the border between Vietnam and Laos.

Our survey to the eastern border of the Ha-Tinh Province of Vietnam during April 2000 confirmed the occurrence of the striped rabbit in this region. The taxon was described as a new species, *Nesolagus timminsi* Averianov, Abramov et Tikhonov, 2000. The type specimen (a complete skull and partial skeleton deposited in the Zoological Institute, Russian Acad. Sci., St. Petersburg, No. 84 772) was collected near a hunting line in a secondary forest on the slope of the left bank of An River (Huong-Son District, Community Son-Kim) at an altitude 200 m (18°22'N, 105°13'E). The skeleton belongs to an adult animal of unknown sex. The skull is in a good state of preservation, bearing a complete dentition. The postcranial skeleton lacks the distal parts of the limbs and the skin was destroyed by scavengers. The

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\* Corresponding Author

animal was captured by a trap and probably was found by a local hunter too late to be consumed. In a nearby trap some pieces of skin with hairs were collected.

The Annamite striped rabbit differs from the Sumatran species, *Nesolagus netscheri*, by its greater skull length, smaller foramen lacerum, and longer  $P^2$  with two folds on its anterior face (Averianov *et al.* 2000). Further, an analysis of mtDNA confirms a species level divergence between the Sumatran and Annamite striped rabbits (Surridge *et al.* 1999).

The Annamite striped rabbit was photographed by camera trap in the Khe Khang sector of the Pu Mat Nature Reserve, Nghe-An Province (Timmins *et al.* 1998, Surridge *et al.* 1999). One live specimen was collected in a hunter's snare in the Phong Nha – Ke Bang Proposed National Park, Quang-Binh Province (Timmins *et al.* 1999). Mr Pham Duc Tien (Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources, Hanoi) received a skin and skull of *Nesolagus timminsi* female on February 2001 from local hunter in Community Son-Hong (Huong-Son District, Ha-Tinh Province) north of the type locality. It was the last known find of the striped rabbit in Vietnam. Some local hunters told us that two species of leporids occur in the Vu Quang Nature Reserve (Huong-Khe District, Ha-Tinh Province), and the second one is apparently *Lepus peguensis*. Hunters said that the striped rabbit is relatively common at higher elevations in the mountains. Otherwise we found our specimen at lower altitudes (200 m). The Sumatran species is known from 600 to 1200 m above sea level.

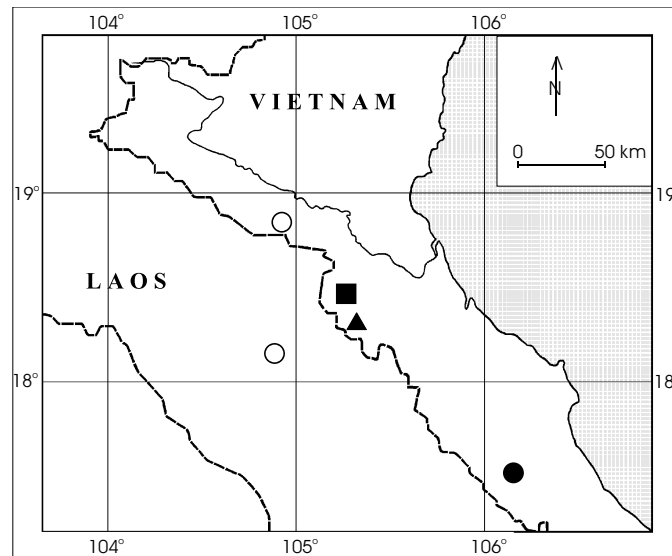


Fig. 1. Map showing known localities of the Annamite striped rabbit *Nesolagus timminsi*. The black triangle is a type locality, the empty circles are findings reported by Surridge *et al.* 1999, the black circle is a finding reported by Timmins *et al.* 1999, and the black square is a new find in 2001.