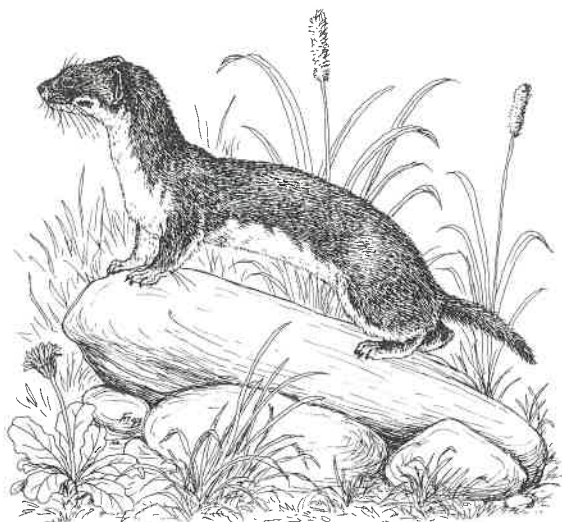


Mustela nivalis LINNAEUS, 1766



F. Müller

Distribution

World: Holarctic. A broad circumpolar distribution from northern North America via Asia into Europe and northern Africa. Naturalized in New Zealand.

Europe: the whole of mainland Europe, Great Britain, many Mediterranean islands and the Azores.

Geographic variation

There are two (or even three) subspecies in Europe and two in North America. The pygmy weasel, *M. nivalis nivalis*, is found in northern Fennoscandia and Russia, whereas the range of the common or least weasel, *M. n. vulgaris* Erxleben, 1777, covers central and western Europe (south of the range of the pygmy weasel) and the Mediterranean zone. The weasels of the latter area may constitute a third subspecies *M. n. boccamela* Bechstein, 1800. Specimens of the northern pygmy weasel are white in winter coat and smaller than the more southern common weasels, which are brown in winter. Weasels of the Alps and other high mountains are also white in winter.

Habitat

This small carnivore accepts a wide range of habitats from fields and meadows, and river- and lake-shores to different kinds of forests and mountain zones. It can even be found in the desert conditions of southern Russia. It is essential that there is enough food and shelter available. If there is a scarcity of food, these solitary weasels tend to seek a refuge with some prey

Weasel

AL	Nuselalja	LT	Žebenkštis
BG	Невестулка	LU	Klengt Wisel
CZ	Kolčava	LV	Zebiekste
DE	Mauswiesel	MK	Невестулка
DK	Brud	MT	Ballottra
EE	Nirk	NL	Wezel
ES	Comadreja	NO	Snømus
FI	Lumikko	PL	Łasica łaska
FO	-	PT	Doninha
FR	Belette d'Europe	RO	Nevăstuică; Helghe
GR	Νυφίτσα	RU	Ласка
HR	Lasica	SE	Småvessla
HU	Eurázsiai menyét	SI	Mala podlasica
IR	-	SK	Lasica myšožravá
IS	Snævesla	TR	Gelincik
IT	Donnola	YU	Ласица

for survival over the poor period.

Population status

The pygmy weasel is the smallest member of the Carnivora, its maximum weight being about 80 g. Thus it has had little or no significance in the fur trade. The population size is mainly dependent on the abundance of food and shelter. Population fluctuations are typical of this small rodent specialist. They are most remarkable in the northern part of its range.

International legal & conservation status

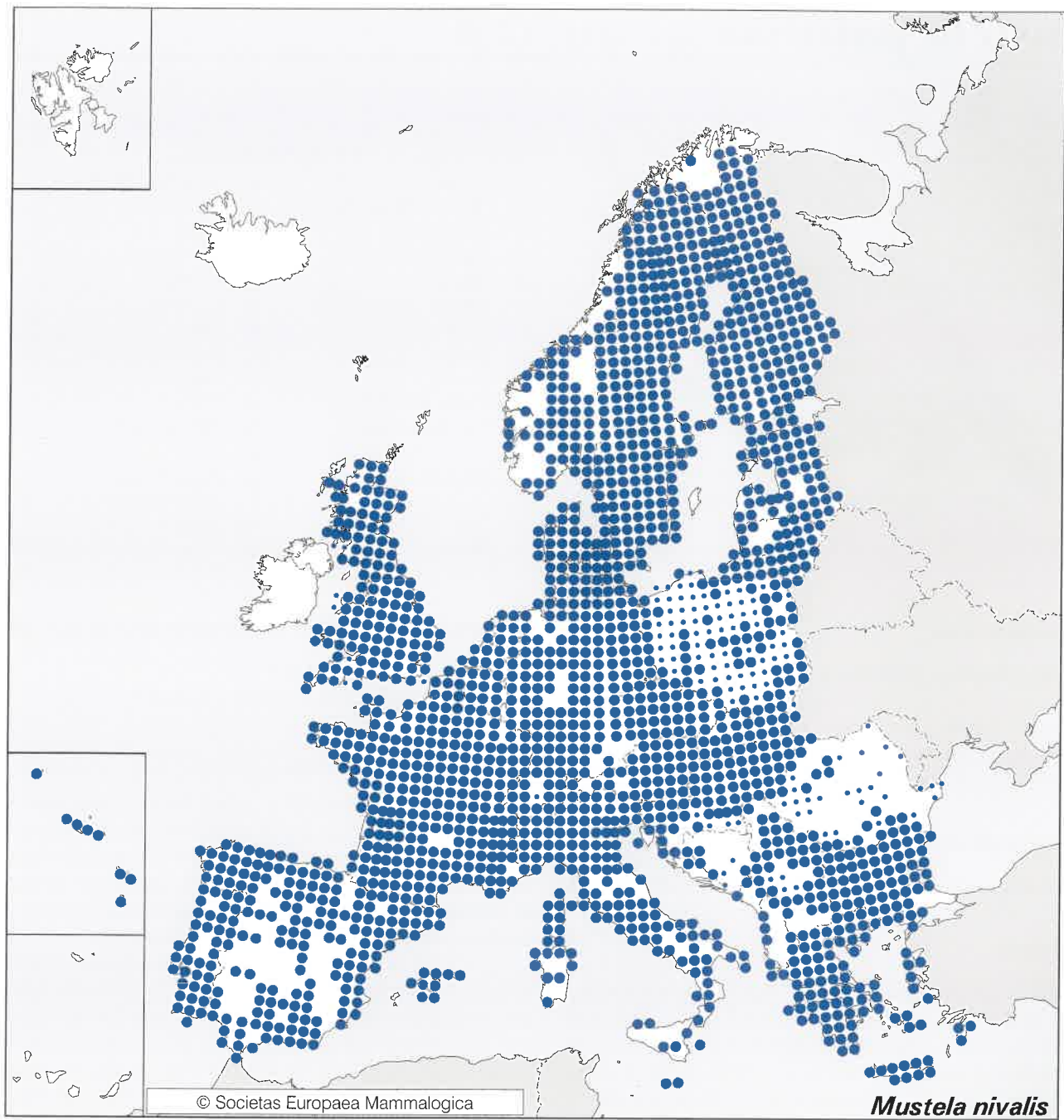
Bern Convention, Appendix III.

Other information

The pygmy weasel is adapted to produce as many offspring as possible when food is abundant and so has no delayed implantation like some larger mustelids. Thus it can produce two litters during the course of one summer. The first litter is born in April–May and the second in July–August. It can live for long periods inside the snow cover and even produce offspring there, if the local vole or lemming population is abundant.

Literature

King (1989)
Pulliainen (1981)
Reichstein (1993b)



Stubbe & Stubbe (1998)

E. Pulliainen