



Sousliks

It is no easy task to understand fluctuations in population density and the mechanisms underlying the disappearance, (re)colonization and successful dispersal of species. Often tremendous efforts are necessary in order to gain insight in these processes, they include sampling many variables, radio tracking numerous individual animals, or the patience to wait for the outcome of observations consistently collected over a long time span. Insight into such ecological mechanisms is, however, indispensable to draw conclusions about population viability and the possibilities for the survival of a species.

In recent times our knowledge about the distribution of most species has improved considerably. However, all efforts to further improve our knowledge about species distribution remain highly relevant, especially in the case of rare or little known species. The collection of data on the distribution of the European mink in north-western Spain by Zabala et al. is a good example. Keeping track of the distribution and density of the species will be the next step. Ideally, when monitoring a species, different and consistent sources of information can be drawn on. Such possibilities are well utilized by Camphuysen, who discusses the situation of the harbour porpoise in Dutch coastal waters, based on data of stranded animals, recordings from birdwatchers and at-sea observations.

Insights into the level and success of dispersion are of equal importance. Some species can expe-

rience great difficulty in their attempts to reoccupy suitable habitat patches. Reintroduction may be an option, however, it should only be considered if spontaneous recolonization can be excluded for the near future. It is highly relevant to extensively discuss prerequisites for the reintroduction of a species, and to judge whether they meet international standards, as is done by Van 't Hof & Van Langevelde in the case of the release of otters in Overijssel (The Netherlands). However, such conditions are difficult to quantify, and only time will tell whether a reintroduction will be really successful or not.

In this issue, we are happy to host three articles, Millesi et al., Hoffmann et al. and Spoelstra et al., that result from a meeting on the ecology and conservation of the European souslik, that was organized in Madzharovo, Bulgaria, by BirdLife Bulgaria, October 25–28, 2002. The conference was held in response to the dramatic decline in European sousliks, an important food source for birds of prey in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains (southeast Bulgaria) during the summer season. Although much information concerning measures for habitat improvement was already available, the meeting was an excellent initiative, which was very productive in the establishing of contacts for future cooperation. The souslik papers that are included in this issue all originate from studies on a population in the municipal park of Langenzersdorf near Vienna, Austria. This area has a history as important resource for research on sousliks, but now apparently turns



Photograph: Edgar van der Grift

out to be an important sink for the species itself. Please get to know about these fascinating mammals: their mating behaviour in high and low population densities, the factors that determine the (minimal) chances for successful dispersion and the fine tuning of their daily activity patterns.

Together with Bauke Hoekstra, the editorial board has decided that, in the future, the list of Dutch publications on mammal research should be made available in a different format. The list of such publications from 2003 in this issue will be the last one. The tradition of annually printing such an overview in *Lutra* goes back to 1983, and the first list ran back to 1974! The annual publication of a similar list of Belgian papers on mammal research, assembled by Erik Van der Straeten, came to an end some years ago. A printed version in *Lutra* is, in our opinion no longer appropriate, since a printed list lacks the possibility to do, say, keyword searches. The ed-

itorial board is very grateful to Bauke Hoekstra and his co-workers for generating bibliographies for so many years. The Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals intends to continue to work together and to make the list available soon, in a more dynamic and interactive format.

We are pleased to announce that with this issue Goedele Verbeylen has joined the *Lutra* editorial board. Actually, she has worked with the board before as a guest editor for issue 45(2), helping us with the special issue on rodents that resulted from a symposium in Antwerp in 2002. Goedele works with mammals in her profession as a scientific officer at the Flemish Institute for Forestry and Game Management. In addition, she has close ties with the Flemish Natuurpunt movement (especially the Mammal Working Group). The editorial board surely will benefit from her knowledge on rodents, as well as her contacts with Flemish mammal researchers.