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**SYSTEMATIC STATUS OF AFRICAN
POPULATIONS OF LONG-EARED BATS,
GENUS *PLECOTUS* (MAMMALIA:
CHIROPTERA)**

Dedicated to Professor Jiří Gaisler on the occasion of his 70th birthday

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Abstract

Long-eared bats of the genus *Plecotus* are widespread over most of temperate Eurasia, marginally reaching the African continent and Macaronesia. Previously, all African populations were assigned to one species, *P. auritus*, and later to *P. austriacus*. We analysed museum specimens of African long-eared bat populations using both morphologic and genetic techniques. Based on morphological evidence we recognise four well-defined allopatric populations in northern Africa. They differ in fur coloration, skull morphology and bacular traits. The molecular data support a division of the African populations into at least three well-separated evolutionary lineages. With a combination of these data we define three species of *Plecotus* occurring in Africa (incl. the Canary Islands) and describe a new subspecies. Small, very pale greyish-brown Egyptian long-eared bats (*P. christii* Gray, 1838) inhabit desert and semi-deserts habitats of eastern Sahara (Libyan Desert, Nile Valley of Egypt and northern Sudan). Smaller to medium-sized, dark brown Ethiopian long-eared bats (*P. balensis* Kruskop et Lavrenchenko, 2000) inhabit the Ethiopian Highlands above 2000 metres a. s. l. This form represents the only Afro-tropical species of *Plecotus*. Large, dark greyish Canarian long-eared bats (*P. teneriffae teneriffae* Barret-Hamilton, 1907) occur on the three western islands of the Canarian Archipelago. A medium-sized greyish-brown Gaisler's long-eared bat, *P. teneriffae gaisleri* subsp. n., is described from the Mediterranean region of Cyrenaica, north-eastern Libya. Due to the lack of substantial morphological differences we preliminarily consider the Maghrebian population of long-eared bats to be consubspecific with *P. teneriffae gaisleri* subsp. n. The systematic position of the population of Cape Verde Islands remains uncertain.

Key words: *Plecotus*, northern Africa, Maghreb, Cyrenaica, Canary Islands, systematics, taxonomy, 16S rDNA, morphology.

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