

## Short Note

# First evidence of the occurrence of the Pygmy white-toothed shrew, *Suncus etruscus* (Savi, 1822), on the island of Lipari, Aeolian archipelago (Italy)

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The island of Lipari (38°29' N–14°56' E) is located in the Southern Tyrrhenian Sea, 30 km off of northeast Sicily and 80 km from the southwest coast of Calabria. Lipari is the main island (36.7 km<sup>2</sup>, 602 m a.s.l.) of the Aeolian Archipelago, a volcanic arc originated during the Middle Pleistocene, which also includes six other islands and several small islets.

The climate is typically Mediterranean, with an annual average temperature of 18.3°C and an average rainfall of 620 mm/year. At the present time, the vegetation is represented by Mediterranean maquis mainly referred to the *Erico arboreae*-*Arbutetum unedonis* Molinier, and some degraded aspects, due to the impact of previous agricultural use of the territory, which covered the ancient man-made terraces widespread on the island (Lo Cascio and Navarra 2003).

Despite the fact that several scientific investigations were carried out in the Aeolian Islands even during recent years, no report has ever been obtained on the occurrence of any representatives of the Erinaceomorpha and Soricomorpha taxonomic groups, with the exception of the western hedgehog, *Erinaceus europaeus* L., 1758, which was introduced in the island of Alicudi around the beginning of the 1980s (cf. Cristaldi et al. 1987, Lo Cascio and Navarra 2003). In particular, the mammalian fauna up to now recorded for Lipari was only represented by *Tadarida teniotis* (Rafinesque-Schmaltz, 1814), *Pipistrellus kuhli* (Kuhl, 1819), *Oryctolagus cuniculus* (L., 1758), *Eliomys quercinus liparensis* Kahmann, 1960, *Rattus rattus* (L., 1758) and *Mus domesticus* (Schwarz and Schwarz, 1943) (cf. Kahmann 1960, Cristaldi and Federici 1980, Cristaldi 1983, Cristaldi et al. 1987, Cristaldi and Amori 1988, Zava and Lo Valvo 1991, Zava et al. 1994, Lo Cascio and Navarra 2003). The aim of this short note

is to present for the first time the evidence of the occurrence of the Pygmy white-toothed shrew, *Suncus etruscus* (Savi, 1822) in the island, which was discovered during the present research.

## Material collected

### *Suncus etruscus* (Savi, 1822)

The animals were collected in two localities of Lipari Island: Piana Greca (4 specimens, viii.2002; 1 specimen, x.2003) and “Bagnamare” (B) near the main village (3 specimens, vii–viii.2002). Principal biometric measures (in cm) of the collected animals are presented in Table 1. The material is now kept at the Zoological Section “La Specola” of the Natural History Museum of Florence University (MZUF).

*S. etruscus* is one of the shrews more widespread among the circum-Sicilian islands, such as Levanzo (Sarà 1998), Favignana (Sarà 1998), Isola Grande dello Stagnone (Lo Valvo and Massa 1999), Pantelleria (Zava and Lo Valvo 1990), Lampedusa (Toschi 1960, Felten and Storch 1970) and Malta (Lanfranco 1969, Storch 1970). The origin of the presence of the species on Lipari is still doubtful. In fact, it is necessary to argue that Pygmy white-toothed shrews have not been yielded by any of the fossil deposits of the island. In this regard, it is convenient to note that in the Mediterranean region it occurs often in human settlements, where it is as a rule sympatric with other anthropochorous micromammals, such as rats, mice, and other species of shrew. It is not immediately apparent why man should have wanted to introduce the Pygmy white-toothed shrew onto Lipari, as well as on other Mediterranean islands. The evidence suggests that it could well have been transported involuntarily by man, hidden for example within foodstuffs (cf. Masseti 1998). On Lipari, as a matter of fact, no records of Pygmy white-toothed shrew were found from the pellet's analysis of the Barn Owl, *Tyto alba* (Scopoli, 1769), which is considered one of its primary predators (cf. Sarà and Zanca 1988); on the other hand, the existence of a vernacular name, “*suricicchio*”, ordinarily adopted in the island to indicate this animal (F. Famularo, personal communication), suggests that its occurrence is not due to a recent introduction. Furthermore, *Suncus etruscus* seems to be well known by local people who distinguish it from mice and rats due to the peculiar small size and the sharp morphology of its muzzle.

**Table 1** Biometrical data (length in mm) of eight specimens of *Suncus etruscus* (Savi, 1822) from the island of Lipari (Aeolian archipelago, Italy).

	Sex	Head-body	Tail	CB	Foot
Piana Greca, viii.2002	M	4.52	2.39	1.78	0.80
Piana Greca, viii.2002	F	4.41	2.46	1.75	0.86
Piana Greca, viii.2002	F	4.38	2.59	1.63	0.85
Piana Greca, viii.2002	F	4.11	2.76	1.74	0.85
Piana Greca, x.2003	F	3.99	2.60	1.57	0.79
Bagnamare, vii.2002	M	3.83	2.35	1.76	0.79
Bagnamare, viii.2002	M	4.43	2.57	1.74	0.75
Bagnamare, viii.2002	F	4.29	2.52	1.65	0.82

CB, condylus basalis tibiae.

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