

## “THE DORMOUSE HOLLOW” – AN INTERNET FORUM PROMOTING RESEARCH ON THE GLIRIDAE

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“The Dormouse Hollow” ([www.glirarium.org/dormouse](http://www.glirarium.org/dormouse)) is an internet forum designed for zoologists with a special interest in the biology of the Gliridae. It also seeks to provide public awareness of dormice, furnish enjoyable “dormousing” and serve an educational purpose. The pages are composed of numerous contributions by many people who thought it worthwhile to share their experience, scientific records and illustrations. An electronic newsletter associated with the site, “Dormouse Talk”, at the time of writing goes out to over 173 registered recipients, including scientists, naturalists and the interested public. It is also a means of distributing the titles of new publications, thereby keeping the scientists and others who subscribe up to date with what is going on in the “dormouse world”.

Key words: Dormice, Gliridae, internet forum, bibliography

### INTRODUCTION

At the 4th International Conference on Dormice (at Edirne, 1999) the scientific committee proposed that a website and an e-mail newsletter dealing with dormouse matters should be established in order to facilitate contacts among scientists and to discuss standard methods for future dormouse research. Consequently, “The Dormouse Hollow” ([www.glirarium.org/dormouse](http://www.glirarium.org/dormouse)) with its corresponding newsletter “Dormouse Talk” was created (HABERL 2000). At that time another dormouse site existed (PASSIG 1999). After the 5th International Conference on Dormice in Hungary, we merged the two sites, and shared available data, resulting in the new edition of “The Dormouse Hollow”. Meanwhile, the design changed a little, some broken links were fixed and a bibliography was added (HABERL & PASSIG 2003).

Regarding the forum’s name, a “hollow” can be either an empty space inside something else (as in a hollow tree) or a shallow concave depression, a small dish or bowl shaped feature in the landscape. “We think about a hollow as being protective, having walls around it. We talk about something being safe in the hollow of one’s hand. A hollow may be enchanted too, although some people who have dormice in their roof probably do not consider them charming at all...” (P. MORRIS, pers. comm.).

This web site aims to be not only a place for zoologists specializing in the biology of the Gliridae and a scholarly forum, but also seeks to enhance public awareness of dormice, furnish enjoyable “dormousing” and to serve an educational purpose. Many visitors to the site enjoy reading in depth about scientific work with dormice. The pages are composed of numerous contributions by many people who thought it worthwhile to share their experience, scientific records and illustrations.

#### SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Ten renowned scientists form the scientific committee of “The Dormouse Hollow”:

Lithuania: Dr. RIMVYDAS JUŠKAITIS – Institute of Ecology, Akademijos 2, LT-2600 Vilnius, Lithuania.

Slovenia: Dr. BORIS KRYŠTUFEK – Slovenian Museum of Natural History, P.O. Box 290, 1001 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Japan: Dr. SHUSAKU MINATO – c/o The Dormouse Museum. Kiyosato Takanecho, Kitakoma-gun Yamanashi, 407–0311, Japan

England: Dr. PAT MORRIS – School of Biological Sciences, Royal Holloway University of London, Egham, Surrey TW20 OEX, U.K.

Italy: Dr. MAURIZIO SARÀ – Department of Animal Biology, Via Archirafi 18, I-90134 Palermo, Italy

Switzerland: Dr. PETER VOGEL – Institut d’Ecologie – Zoologie et Ecologie Animale, Bâtiment de Biologie, Université de Lausanne, CH-1015 Lausanne, Switzerland

Hungary: Dr. BOTOND BAKÓ – Department of Zoology and Ecology, Szent István University, Gödöllő, Páter K. u. 1. H-2103, Hungary

South Africa: Dr. ROD M. BAXTER – Department of Zoology, University of Fort Hare, P/Bag X1314, 5700 Alice, Republic of South Africa

Germany: Dr. GERHARD STORCH – Forschungsinstitut Senckenberg, Senckenberg-Anlage 25, D-60325 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Austria: Dr. WERNER HABERL – Hamburgerstrasse 11/17, A-1050 Wien, Austria

#### DORMOUSE TALK

An electronic newsletter associated with the site, called “Dormouse Talk”, (at the time of writing) currently goes out to over 175 registered recipients from 31

countries, including scientists, naturalists and the interested public. The contributions and questions posted on "Dormouse Talk" have covered a broad range of topics, from the care of captive dormice, to concerns about zoonotic diseases, parasites, conservation matters, behaviour and ecology, as well as posting conference announcements. Fruitful discussions carried out through "Dormouse Talk", have enabled scientists to establish new contacts, resulting in joint publications that help move one step closer to solving dormouse enigmas. Ideas are being shared and data can be compared before publication. Non-specialists (eg. breeders, naturalists, children etc.) have an opportunity to pose questions to the scientists, share their experience and establish contacts, or simply learn from the scientists' discussions.

The first issue of "Dormouse Talk" was sent out on August 16, 2000 (Vol. 1): 11 issues, 2001 (Vol. 2): 4 issues, 2002 (Vol. 3): 4 issues, 2003 (Vol. 4): 2 issues

The main topics covered were:

- presentation of results;
- discussion about diet and methods of study;
- bibliography: new publications;
- problems with dormice in the house;
- conference announcements;
- questionnaire results.

In June 2002 a questionnaire on the importance of "The Dormouse Hollow" was sent to all members. Possible ratings were: insignificant, important, very important. The majority replied that, in their view, "The Dormouse Hollow" is (very) important because (quoting anonymous examples):

"I have found a great deal of information about dormice on the site. It is the most detailed dormouse site I have found on the internet. I believe it is an interesting site for dormouse scientists and dormouse lovers. The first hand information I have learned helps me with my breeding programs..."

"This site provides information which cannot be obtained by any other method. Published scientific work often leaves out vital information about techniques and methods. Conferences are too brief and busy to deal with all the questions of interest. Traditional "personal communication" by mail is slow, laborious and can be too formal..."

"The newsletter offers important information for which one hasn't to search and spend too much time. It is a repository of information and a useful means of international contact..."

"The site enables easy access to unpublished sources and enhances connections to other scientists; It is a useful forum between zoologists working on dormice (networking, latest findings). It contains information otherwise not easily traced and creates contacts not easily found by internet..."

Questionnaire results stating that “The Dormouse Hollow” is insignificant can be summarized by the following statement of one of our members:

“I have e-mailed the group several times with reference to my dormouse studies and never received a reply. For me this obviously affects the way in which I view the website and regard its importance. I find it leans towards elitism for scientists...”

“The Dormouse Hollow” cannot guarantee that questions sent to the list will be answered by the specialists. Often nobody knows the answer to the question! All that we can do is to forward your e-mail.

### THE DORMOUSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

“The Dormouse Hollow” is also a means of distributing the titles of new publications, thereby keeping scientists and other subscribers up to date with what is going on in the “dormouse world”. Scientists working on dormice regularly send me (W. HABERL) reprints of their publications. In return, these references will be announced (together with an e-mail contact address) on “Dormouse Talk”. Hopefully, this will result in completing the “The Dormouse Bibliography”, and, depending on funds and interest, this will be published as a CD-ROM in the near future.

The currently available bibliography has over 500 entries. This “Dormouse Bibliography” was compiled by us with the help of many contributors, especially P. MORRIS and R. JUŠKAITIS. You can access the bibliography online (<http://www.glrarium.org/dormouse/bibliography>) or download a PDF version at <http://www.glrarium.org/dormouse/bibliography/dormousebibliography.pdf>. The PDF version is better suited to printing and archiving purposes. The online version contains abstracts where available and can be sorted either alphabetically by author or by year; the PDF version is sorted by species and does not contain abstracts. This bibliography is, of course, still far from complete.

### FUTURE

Currently we are collecting data in order to establish a FAQ (“Frequently Asked Questions”) page for the web site. “The Dormouse Hollow” is often the first site located by internet search engines looking for sites about dormice, and thus it is a first-line resource for people interested in information about these animals. We hope that this service and the FAQ page will directly help those people who care

enough to enquire about the wildlife they find in their gardens and at the same time will raise general awareness and appreciation of the dormice we have around us.

A tentative FAQ site is located at <http://www.glrarium.org/dormouse/faq.html> – your input is very welcome.

Further tasks are:

- update the "Dormouse Talk" archives;
- include reports and abstracts of former dormouse congresses;
- provide distribution maps;
- complete the bibliography;
- add more photos;
- regularly update list of members.

In order to achieve these goals, we depend on the help and input of the members and would like to encourage everybody to mutually share their data, photos and information with the group (see "Instructions for Contributors").

#### FUNDING AND MEMBERSHIP

Many members felt that this, hitherto unfinanced, project should be supported financially. Money is indeed a problem, since keeping the forum updated is time consuming and has running costs. However, "The Dormouse Hollow" should remain open to the public free of charge, but any support is much appreciated. We hope to find a way to finance this project in the future. From the returned questionnaires we gathered that several professional "dormousers" would be willing to voluntarily donate a small amount of money in order to keep this forum running. (The amounts tentatively offered ranged from 1–10 Euro per month). One problem is that many members who are essential for "The Dormouse Hollow" do not have any funds at all. We would not like to lose them...! A possible solution would be that members who can afford to do so should donate whatever they think that this forum is worth to them. This would also help to support others who cannot afford a subscription. However, seeking a grant provided by a governmental or non-governmental organisation would probably be the best alternative. A possible solution and the procedure of distributing funds will be discussed amongst the scientific committee of "The Dormouse Hollow". In any case, a treasurer should be elected.

## CONCLUSION

The “Dormouse Community” exists at different levels of expertise, and knowledge. The core group share the responsibility to perform as educators to the greater community, who in turn have the responsibility to perform as teachers. This education exists in a trickle-down motion, knowledge is disbursed to where it is needed. It is to this end that “The Dormouse Hollow” thinks there should be an increase in the manner and method of communication available to the areas where it is needed. The act of conversation and enjoyment can also serve as an educator. These days the internet is becoming ever more accessible to the public, but there are only a few internet communities that discuss dormice. Unfortunately, these do not have the educated knowledge base that “The Dormouse Hollow” does (M. BOND, pers. comm.).

By turning the attention of people away from the perception that wild animals (even dormice) are a nuisance to be eradicated and towards an appreciation of the critical role these shy, rarely seen animals play in the ecosystem, we hope to help educate the public to think about wildlife in a different way and thus become partners instead of adversaries in the battle to conserve wildlife. If people see scientists as partners in finding workable, environmentally sensitive solutions to everyday problems rather than ivory-tower theorists, the cause of conservation will be greatly aided.

With the excellent knowledge base that “The Dormouse Hollow” provides, it is hoped that this forum will be accepted and ideas put into practice, bringing to the public a recognised and trusted community of educators about the many facets of the “dormouse world” and its interactions with people all over the world. It is our belief that “The Dormouse Hollow” is well respected and trusted to fulfill this role.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR CONTRIBUTORS

### How to Subscribe to “The Dormouse Hollow”

Please send an e-mail to [dormouse@glirarium.org](mailto:dormouse@glirarium.org) and ask for membership. You can also visit our website and subscribe online (<http://www.glirarium.org/dormouse/application.html>). The latter is preferred, since this allows your data to be registered in a uniform format. You will receive the “Dormouse Talk” newsletter.

Registered members will find access to a list of “Dormouse Talk” subscribers at <http://www.glirarium.org/dormouse/emaillist.html>. For security reasons it is necessary to enter a password to view this directory. This password is sent to subscribed members. If you lose it or forget it, ask us at [dormouse@glirarium.org](mailto:dormouse@glirarium.org).

Please take the time to check whether your entry is correct. Other dormouse researchers might need the information to reach you with questions, invitations etc. If you find any mistakes, please fill

in the application form at <http://www.glrarium.org/dormouse/application.html> again. You don't have to enter everything, just your name and whatever has changed. Or you can simply mail all changes to [dormouse@glrarium.org](mailto:dormouse@glrarium.org).

*Sending photos and text* – We are grateful for any photos / illustrations of dormice, as well as for any texts or bibliographical information on dormice that can be displayed on the web-site.

Please send your photos (jpg-format) or texts and attach an accompanying letter, including your name, postal address, and e-mail, plus a certification that the photo / text may be used free of charge for "The Dormouse Hollow". Your name and copyright will accompany your contribution. For any photos or texts which are not by yourself, please provide the source, a contact address and a letter of copyright clearance by the photographer or author. Any text or photo you send to "The Dormouse Hollow" might be published on the internet. Already published texts or photos (e.g. in scientific journals) may be copyright of the respective journal. All contributions or questions should be sent to: [dormouse@glrarium.org](mailto:dormouse@glrarium.org). Contributions to "Dormouse Talk" should be sent as e-mail to the same address. Your letter will be distributed to all members, including your header and signature.

*Bibliography* – You can easily add new entries at <http://www.glrarium.org/dormouse/bibliography/index.html#announce>

Please bear with us if you already notified us of your publications but can't find them. We apologize for any inconvenience – please send them again and we will enter them into the bibliography. Additional abstracts would be welcome as well.

## INTERNET REFERENCES

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