



MOŠĆENIČKA DRAGA,  
CROATIA  
9-12th OCTOBER, 1996

### WELCOME ADDRESS

I am very pleased to see you all here and to welcome you to this third international conference on dormice. We extend a particular welcome to Shusako Minato who has come the greatest distance, all the way from Japan.

I must start by expressing our thanks to the organising committee for arranging this meeting and especially thank Nikola Tvrtković, the local organizer who has worked very hard to make all the necessary arrangements.

The idea of a meeting to discuss work on dormice began with Heiko Müller-Stiess. He arranged the first international workshop which was held in Bavaria in November 1990. Heiko had done important ecological work on dormice in Bavaria and was anxious to share his experiences and to learn from others working in different areas on the same species. It was an excellent meeting and, although much delayed, the proceedings have at last been published this year (1996).

The second international dormouse meeting was held in Italy in May 1993. This meeting brought together more than seventy people from many countries including Japan and South Africa, as well as Europe, to discuss not only the ecology of dormice but also other dimensions of Glirid biology such as Palaeontology and Genetics. A lot of good ideas and information were exchanged and many excellent papers were published earlier this year in the Italian journal *Hystrix* (1996).

Thus, much has already been achieved: new alliances have been formed between dormouse researchers, fresh efforts have been stimulated and new publications prepared. Now we have the third international dormouse conference here in Croatia. What are we here for and what do we hope to achieve?

Firstly we are here to meet each other, exchange ideas and information and to feed on the enthusiasm and support of others through talks, posters and in the bar. In this connection I bring greetings from Paul Bright who has done so much work on *Muscardinus* but cannot join us for this meeting.

We are also here to see dormouse habitats in what is a new country for many of us. We look forward to seeing new habitats and perhaps some dormice on our excursions.

Finally we are here to develop new ideas and fresh approaches to our own studies. As part of this I would like to suggest that we might agree on an International Programme for Dormouse Studies. This would be a coordinated enterprise, perhaps attracting EU money to support it. To this end we should try to identify important themes where international cooperation and comparison would be valuable; in tune with currently fashionable ideas: e.g.

- Biodiversity studies
- Habitat fragmentation
- Conservation management
- Distribution of dormice and effects of climate change.

These are all themes in which the Gliridae are particularly significant. They are also areas in which we could all contribute. I will enlarge on this later, but ask you all to think about the possibilities during the next few days.

I therefore extend a very warm welcome to you all and wish you an enjoyable and interesting meeting here in Croatia.

October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1996

Pat A. Morris

## CONCLUSIONS

### The dormouse conferences

As I am one of those who have participated in three dormouse conferences I would like to develop my discussion in three steps

- a review of the first two conferences
- a résumé of our conference in Mošćenička Draga
- to ask what we achieve by such a meeting and what we should do next.

I. GRAFENAU 1990 (Germany): The first conference took place thanks to the invitation of Heiko Müller-Stiess and Dr Scherpinger. There were only a few participants characterised by the coming together of different worlds with no common language but a common passion: the dormice. It was wonderful. The scientific programme included:

- Many reports on distribution,
- First reports on chromosome evolution,
- Reports on chromosome evolution,
- Reports on ecology including strange situations such as *Eliomys* as a rock dweller in the Alps and the same species living among vineyards on the bank of the Rhine,
- Technical discussions mainly concerned with radio-telemetry.

It is a pity that there has been such a long delay in the appearance of the proceedings but at last they are available thanks to Holger Meius.

II. FUSCALDO MARINA 1993 (Italy): This meeting was organised by, among others, Maria Grazia Filippucci and Maria Cagnin. It was characterised by a large number of participants including a big delegation from Italy but also many from other countries, including those of Eastern Europe.

Scientific subjects included

- Systematics and evolution, with unforgettable contributions on enamel by von Koenigs wald and on affinities by Storch and on allozymes and chromosomes by Filippucci and Zima.
- Morphology and physiology, including memorable pictures of phalli and bacula, stimulating hypotheses more fantastical than realistic on their functional significance. Physiology was discussed by Haim for *Eliomys melanurus* in Israel.
- Biogeography: many reports on dormouse distribution.
- Conservation and management: an important review by Paul Bright and Pat Morris on what is going on in England.

Technical discussions

The usefulness of nest boxes as developed by Pat Morris for the study and conservation of dormice was clearly established.

On one day the conference proceedings moved to the headquarters of the neighbouring National Park where participants were also able to view the habitat of Italian *Dryomys nitedula*.

The post conference excursion to the Monte Polino National Park visited a number of splendid sites, both ecological and historical, and served to cement the camaraderie of those who participated.

The proceedings of the second conference were published in a special volume (26) of the Italian journal *Hystrix*.

III. MOŠĆENIČKA DRAGA 1996 (Croatia): This conference was characterised by a much greater proportion of younger researchers, all seeking contact with other researchers on dormice.

Scientific programme

- Paleontological problems – an important fossil presented by Storch
- Systematics – a new interpretation of the attribution of geographic forms by Kryštufek et al, particularly *Eliomys* from Morocco leading to a complete destabilisation of my systematic world which is based on fig. 3 of Filippucci & Kotsakis' paper in *Hystrix* (1994 p. 91).
- Hibernation – an important topic much discussed at this meeting. Wilz discussed daily torpor versus hibernation in laboratory studies of *Myoxus* and his paper was complemented by that of Vaterlaus who is studying *Eliomys* during its deepest hibernation period in the wild.

- Distribution – several papers/posters were presented including from Poland and Hungary plus a presentation by Pat Morris of the fantastic results of the »Great Nut Hunt of 1993« in England and Wales to which many thousands of members of the public contributed.
- Ecology – several papers and posters were concerned with habitat use, including population densities of different species in different types of forest. The use of caves by *Myoxus*, described by Andrej Mihevc, and on-going studies on *Eliomys* presented by Sandro Bertolino and Christian Vaterlaus must be mentioned, as must the general picture of the ecology of *Glirulus* (the Japanese dormouse), who often runs upside down along branches, presented by Shusako Minato.

Of particular significance were the results of Claudia Bieber on reproductive failure in *Myoxus* and the density dependent breeding strategies of *Muscardinus* presented by Juškaitis. The underlying triggers resulting in avoidance of future food restrictions may be of general interest far beyond the Gliridae.

- Ethnological and cultural aspects of dormice – Several important reports showed us incredible data on the harvesting of *Myoxus* in the Slovenian and Croatian forests and described the use of their products. Descriptions of delicious recipes of Roman origin at 1pm on Saturday was more stimulating to the salivary glands than thoughts of a Big Mac!

Technical discussions:

The utility of nestboxes is now widely confirmed and Passive Identification Tags (PIT) are increasingly used but in general tattooing is the best and most widely used method.

### The aims of our conferences:

Now we come to the final question – what do we hope for from such a meeting, did we attain this goal, what should we learn for the next meeting?

#### 1. The new state of our science

In order of importance:

- The unique demonstration of *Myoxus* as a hunted species (small mammals as a game species with all the problems of game management).
- Reproductive biology: important data resulting from 315 litters of *Muscardinus* analysed.
- Population dynamics and ecology: with the exception of the British programme which is continuing, our understanding is only progressing slowly and we are a long way from being able to make predictions. There may be many studies of local significance but they are not coordinated towards a common goal.

## 2. »Reciprocal illumination« – exchange of knowledge, ideas and observations

The exchange of ideas and observations leads to better understanding. From this point of view the meeting was a great success.

## 3. Development of collaboration

In a period when fund raising is difficult, the best strategy is collaboration. This meeting gave us the opportunity and I think and hope that collaborations will now start.

## 4. Transfer of technologies

I regret that at the moment there is no technical revolution and perhaps no money for expensive systems. We are not in a period where high tech can substitute for good ideas.

In conclusion: the aims of the scientific meeting were to a large extent attained. For the next meeting it would be stimulating if some fundamental topics could be specified. For example:

- Mating systems
- Population genetics
- Dispersal strategies

Population genetics particularly could be a useful theme for all areas as well as for Conservation Biology.

Peter Vogel

Reprinted from MORRIS, M. & MORRIS, P. (1996): Dormouse Update. Dormouse News.\*

\* In this issue of *Nat. Croat.* the first group of the Conference papers is printed. Only the reviewed articles are published. Others will appear in the next issue (September 30, 1997). *Editor*