

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

October 06, 2020

Nancy Ator, Ph.D.  
Chair  
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee  
Johns Hopkins University/Johns Hopkins Medicine

Via e-mail: [ator@jhmi.edu](mailto:ator@jhmi.edu)

Dear Dr. Ator,

We are a veterinarian and a neuroscientist and are writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and its more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide to follow up on our March 5, 2019, letter to you,<sup>1</sup> in which we presented serious scientific and ethical concerns regarding experiments conducted on barn owls by Johns Hopkins University (JHU) faculty member Shreesh Mysore.

Below, we describe disturbing new information that we've obtained that strongly calls into question the purported scientific validity and legality of these experiments. Accordingly, we urge you to investigate this information and, if it is corroborated, cancel Mysore's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) approval, prohibit him from resuming the experiments, and refund the National Institutes of Health for all invalid expenditures on activities occurring in the four-year period in which it appears that Mysore's state permit allowing him to use barn owls in experiments lapsed.

### **Mysore Admitted That Experiments Using Animals in Head-Fixed Positions Could Be Misleading**

As we have stated, we believe that the limited benefits of any data obtained from Mysore's experiments cannot justify the serious harm that he inflicts on owls. They are subjected to craniotomies, in which a bolt is attached to their skulls in order to hold their heads in a fixed position within a restraint apparatus, and then restrained in plastic tubes or jackets for up to 12 hours at a time. Experimenters implant and then relocate electrodes within the birds' brains for various phases of the experiments, causing significant damage to their neural tissue. They are then killed and dissected.

<sup>1</sup>Taylor I. Letter to Ronald Daniels and Nancy Ator. March 5, 2019.  
<https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2019-03-05-Letter-Daniels-and-Ator.pdf>

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Mysore has tried to justify the use of these extremely invasive and harmful procedures by claiming that data obtained from them may provide insight into the human attention span and disorders associated with it. However, at a seminar at Albert Einstein College of Medicine on September 2, he admitted that his experiments using owls in a head-fixed position could be misleading, stating:

Almost all the work in attention so far has been done in head fixed animals and there are lots of reasons that are emerging now, even more so than before, indicating that really if possible you should be doing things in freely-behaving animals because the way they engage with the environment, the way locomotion for instance affects neuro-responses, is is [sic] quite significant, and it could change the way the brain is solving problems and we might misinterpret what's happening, or misunderstand, if we do this in head-fixed animals (54:29).<sup>2</sup>

This admission is deeply troubling. The serious translational limitations of using head-fixed animals in attention experiments should have been taken into consideration when the IACUC reviewed these harmful procedures.

Given that these experiments cause extreme harm and are of little value, which Mysore himself confirmed, the IACUC should not allow them to continue.

### **Mysore's Experiments Apparently Violate Maryland State Law**

[Maryland Code Ann., Natural Resources § 10-902\(a\)](#) requires that a permit be obtained in order to possess, import, breed, or raise any wildlife native to the state.<sup>3</sup> Because Mysore keeps barn owls in his laboratory, he is required to obtain an annual scientific collection permit to possess a protected bird for educational or scientific purposes from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR).<sup>4</sup> However, records that PETA received from the DNR pursuant to the Maryland Public Information Act<sup>5</sup> show that Mysore does not appear to have acquired the necessary permits for the period of January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2018. If this is corroborated by your office, it means that he was not legally permitted to conduct experiments on owls during that time.

As the chair of the IACUC, you are responsible for ensuring that investigators have acquired necessary state and federal permits before any experiments on animals occur.

You can contact us via e-mail at [DrTaylor@peta.org](mailto:DrTaylor@peta.org). Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. We look forward to your response.

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<sup>2</sup>Mysore S. Neural control of stimulus selection and spatial attention: circuits, computations, coding. Lecture presented at: Albert Einstein College of Medicine; September 2, 2020; Bronx, N.Y. [https://www.dropbox.com/s/xog9gfv43l282kr/exp\\_1191609\\_shreesh\\_mysore\\_jhu\\_neuroscience\\_seminar\\_9\\_14.2020.mp4?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/xog9gfv43l282kr/exp_1191609_shreesh_mysore_jhu_neuroscience_seminar_9_14.2020.mp4?dl=0).

<sup>3</sup>MD Nat Res Code § 10-902 (2013) <https://law.justia.com/codes/maryland/2013/article-gnr/section-10-902/>.

<sup>4</sup>MD Nat Res Code § 10-909 (2013) <https://law.justia.com/codes/maryland/2013/article-gnr/section-10-909/>.

<sup>5</sup>MD Gen Provisions Code § 4-101 (2015) <https://law.justia.com/codes/maryland/2015/article-ggp/title-4/subtitle-1/section-4-101/>.

Sincerely,



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cc: President of Johns Hopkins University Ronald Daniels  
Dean of the Medical Faculty of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine  
Dr. Paul Rothman  
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