

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

May 11, 2021

Ronald J. Daniels, L.L.M., J.D.  
President  
Office of the President  
242 Garland Hall  
Johns Hopkins University  
3400 N. Charles St.  
Baltimore, MD 21218

Via e-mail: [president@jhu.edu](mailto:president@jhu.edu)

Dear President Daniels:

I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 6.5 million members and supporters regarding serious new concerns about taxpayer-funded experiments on barn owls conducted by Johns Hopkins University's (JHU) Shreesh Mysore. Specifically, after we supplied evidence to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) that from 2015 through 2018, Mysore failed to obtain permits needed to imprison and torture owls in his laboratory, Maryland Secretary of Natural Resources Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio confirmed to us in a letter dated May 5, 2021, that he had indeed been breaking state law for years.<sup>1</sup>

**Given that federal regulations and policies stipulate that National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant recipients must comply with federal, state, and local laws—and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the NIH Grants Policy Statement—we demand that Mysore and/or JHU immediately repay all of the disallowed taxpayer funds expended during the period in which Mysore violated Maryland state law. We also urge you to prohibit Mysore from continuing his experiments on owls, shut down his owl laboratory, and release the birds to reputable sanctuaries.**

Mysore is the recipient of National Eye Institute (NEI) grant # R01EY027718 for a project involving the study of the neural correlates of sensory selection and stimulus prioritization in barn owls (*Tyto alba*). To this end, he keeps approximately 30 barn owls in his laboratory, performs invasive neurophysiological experiments on them and

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<sup>1</sup>Haddaway-Riccio, J. Letter from Maryland Department of Natural Resources to PETA. May 5, 2021.

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ultimately kills them. A permit is required in Maryland “to possess a protected bird or parts of a protected bird for educational or scientific purposes, or for the purpose of propagation,”<sup>2</sup> and since barn owls are a “protected bird,”<sup>3</sup> Mysore violated the regulations implementing the state’s captive wildlife statutes while using federal and university funds. Evidence furnished to PETA by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) confirmed that, from 2015 through 2018, Mysore engaged in the regulated confinement of owls for experimentation without securing the necessary permits as is required by Maryland state law.

In Secretary Haddaway-Riccio’s letter to PETA, she states, “... Dr. Mysore’s original scientific collecting permit expired on December 31, 2014. A few years later, Dr. Mysore reapplied for a scientific collecting permit...,” and she notes that the DNR sent Mysore a letter on March 4, 2021, warning him “that he will need to renew the permit annually and that operating under an inactive permit is a violation and subject to potential enforcement action and foreclosure of the research project.”<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, the NIH Grants Policy Statement is explicit in disallowing the expenditure of taxpayer funds for costs resulting from violations of state law:

Costs resulting from non-Federal entity violations of, alleged violations of, or failure to comply with, Federal, state, tribal, local or foreign laws and regulations are unallowable, except when incurred as a result of compliance with specific provisions of the Federal award, or with prior written approval of the NIH awarding IC.<sup>5</sup>

The Statement also includes adherence to [Title 45 Section 75.441 of the Code of Federal Regulations](#), which states:

Costs resulting from ... violations of, ... or failure of the institution to comply with, Federal, state, ... local ... laws and regulations are unallowable except when incurred as a result of compliance with specific provisions of the Federal award, or with prior written approval of the HHS awarding agency.<sup>6</sup>

Mysore used federal and university funds to conduct experiments on owls while in violation of Maryland state law. The permitting provisions for scientific collection are not optional—they are a basic legal prerequisite to keeping these owls, who would otherwise be protected under the law, confined for use in invasive brain experiments. Mysore’s failure to satisfy a basic requirement of Maryland’s wildlife regulations casts serious doubt on JHU’s integrity as a research institution. **Furthermore, Mysore’s experiments on owls do not pass a harm-benefit analysis, given that NIH itself has reported that**

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<sup>2</sup>Md. Code Regs. 08.03.09.06(B).

<sup>3</sup>Md. Code Regs. 08.03.01.01.

<sup>4</sup>Haddaway-Riccio.

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. *NIH Grants Policy Statement*. National Institutes of Health; April 2021.

<sup>6</sup>45 CFR §75.300. Statutory and National Policy Requirements.

**Mysore’s animal-based projects have a shockingly dismal 5% “approximate potential to translate” to human health, determined by the very low likelihood that his published papers will be cited in later clinical trials or guidelines.<sup>7</sup>**

It is incumbent upon your office to make a strong statement in support of state wildlife protection laws and sound human-relevant science by permanently barring Mysore from conducting experiments using owls, paying NIH back the disallowed expenditure of taxpayer funds, and closing down his owl laboratory.

You can contact me directly via e-mail at [ShalinG@peta.org](mailto:ShalinG@peta.org). Thank you for your time. I look forward to receiving your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shalin G. Gala". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "S".

Shalin G. Gala  
Vice President, International Laboratory Methods  
Laboratory Investigations Department

cc: Nancy Ator, IACUC Chair  
Alexandra Albinak, Associate Vice Provost for Research Administration

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<sup>7</sup>iCite, Hutchins BI, Santangelo G. iCite Database Snapshots (NIH Open Citation Collection) [Internet]. figshare; 2019. doi: 10.35092/yhjc.c.4586573. Search terms “mysore, shreesh, owl” were inputted and the average approximate potential to translate (APT) was determined.