

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

May 11, 2021

Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio  
Secretary of Natural Resources  
Maryland Department of Natural ResourcesVia e-mail: [jeannie.riccio@maryland.gov](mailto:jeannie.riccio@maryland.gov)

Dear Secretary Haddaway-Riccio:

Thank you for your response,<sup>1</sup> dated May 5, 2021, confirming that Shreesh Mysore at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) failed for years to obtain legally required permits to possess barn owls for invasive brain experimentation, in violation of state law. **On behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide, we ask that you issue more stringent penalties against Mysore, as permitted by law.**

Specifically, your letter confirmed that on December 31, 2014, Mysore's scientific-collecting permit expired and he did not reapply until a few years later, indicating that for several years neither Mysore nor any other member of JHU possessed the necessary permits in accordance with Maryland law "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> Documents obtained by PETA from the Maryland DNR indicate Mysore lacked a permit until January 1, 2019. As your letter acknowledged, "operating under an inactive permit is a violation" of Maryland law. Mysore's history of scientific publications shows that his experiments on barn owls continued,<sup>3,4</sup> and some owls may have been killed during the time frame for which he did not obtain legally

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Secretary Haddaway-Riccio to PETA, May 5, 2021.

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

<sup>3</sup>Mahajan NR, Mysore SP. Combinatorial neural inhibition for stimulus selection across space. *Cell Rep.* 2018;25(5):1158-1170.e9. doi:10.1016/j.celrep.2018.10.022. Under methods, on page 15, Mysore writes: "We performed experimental recordings in 15 head-fixed, non-anesthetized adult barn owls [who] were viewing a visual screen passively (*Tyto alba*). Both male and female birds were used; the birds were shared across several studies."

<sup>4</sup>Johns Hopkins University. (2018, October 30). *Owls help scientists unlock secret of how the brain pays attention*. ScienceDaily.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/10/181030110632.htm>

## Affiliates:

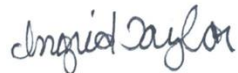
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- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Netherlands
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required permits from your agency.<sup>5,6</sup> Thus, Mysore violated the regulations implementing the state's captive-wildlife statutes for several consecutive years.

We are very disappointed to learn that after Mysore spent multiple years possessing and likely killing numerous protected birds in violation of Maryland state laws, the Maryland DNR determined that all he deserved was a letter sent by your agency warning him “to renew the permit annually.” Given the gravity of his repeat violations of state law over multiple years, which resulted in the mutilation and killing of owls, we urge you to consider imposing stricter penalties—including revocation of his permit—as deterrents against future noncompliance.

You can contact me via e-mail at [DrTaylor@peta.org](mailto:DrTaylor@peta.org). I look forward to your response concerning this urgent matter. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Ingrid Taylor, D.V.M.  
Research Associate  
Laboratory Investigations Department

**Enclosures**

- Exhibit 1: NEI Grant #R01EY027718. Multisensory competition and spatial selection:  
Neural circuit and computational mechanisms
- Exhibit 2: DNR Permit No. 55025, effective from December 10, 2013, to December 31, 2014
- Exhibit 3: DNR Permit No. 55025, effective from January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2019

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<sup>5</sup>Ex. 1, National Eye Institute Grant #R01EY027718. The following is stated in the grant on page 49: “Euthanasia. Animals will be euthanized with beuthanasia D (under 4% isoflurane), and perfused with saline followed by a fixative solution (paraformaldehyde) to recover brains for histology and tract tracing. Deaths will be documented in animal inventory records.”

<sup>6</sup>The permits that Mysore has obtained explicitly say that he is killing the owls. *See* Exs. 2 and 3. It is unclear how this is permitted when Maryland law states that proof that the permittee has killed wildlife (“every living creature, not human, wild by nature, endowed with sensation and power of voluntary motion,” Md. Code Ann., Nat. Res. § 10-101(dd)(1)) voids a scientific collecting permit, a provision that is also stamped on the face of the permit. *See id.* § 10-909(e)(1); Exs. 2 and 3.