

On the valid name of the Gliridae Desmarest, 1817

(Mammalia: Gliridae)

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Most authors attribute the name "Gliridae" to the encyclopaedia entry by Muirhead (1819). However, this entry is not an original work; rather, the system used by Muirhead is based on that of Desmarest (1804), which in turn dates back to the encyclopaedia by Vicq d'Azyr (1792). In this work, Vicq d'Azyr divides the group of "Quadrupèdes" into several "Classes", which are in turn subdivided into "Genres". The taxonomic rank of these subdivisions is difficult to assess; however, it appears that the "Classes" are ranked far above the family level as understood today, whilst the "Genres" correspond to the rank of a family. In selected "Genres", Vicq d'Azyr also introduces "Divisions", which then roughly correspond to the rank of genera in the current concept of the rank. The work cannot be directly described as "binominal", as no binominal names are used in the entire work. However, the work cannot be described as "non-binominal" either, because standard French names are used consistently for all the species. It is therefore impossible to judge whether Vicq d'Azyr's work is in fact non-binominal, or whether Vicq d'Azyr was a proponent of binominal nomenclature, but simply did not use any binominal names in this particular work, because his focus was on supra-generic systematics. In his work, Vicq d'Azyr introduces for the first time a group called "Glirini", classifying it at the rank of his "Genres" – which, from today's perspective, would presumably correspond to a family. However, the (modern) genus *Glis* does not belong to his "Glirini" at all, as he classifies the dormouse under its French name "Loir" within his "Genre Sciurii". Subsequent authors adopted Vicq d'Azyr's classification but modified it. The group of "Glirini" reappears as "Famille Glirins ou Loirs, Glirini" in Desmarest (1804), but this time it includes the dormouse, albeit as "Genre Loir, Myoxus" and "Le loir (*Myoxus glis* Linn.)". Thus, whilst Desmarest does introduce a new family, the "Glirini", the name of the family is not derived from the name of a genus contained within it and therefore does not comply with ICZN Article 11.7.1. (ICZN 1999).

In the revised edition of the encyclopaedia, published over a decade later, Desmarest (1817) then provides a modified definition in three consecutive headwords on p. 231:

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"GLIRES. V.[=vide] Glis. (Desm.)

GLIRIENS. Famille de mammifères que j'ai établie, dans le tableau méthodique qui termine la première édition de cet ouvrage, et dans laquelle je faisois entrer les gerboises, les gerbilles et les loirs, tous à molaires échancrées, sans abajoues, à extrémités postérieures plus longues que les antérieures, et souvent démesurément allongées; à queue longue et poilue, etc. (Desm.)

GLIS. Nom latin des loirs. Il a été quelquefois donné à des Gerboises. Au pluriel, glires, il a été appliqué à l'ordre entier des rongeurs. (Desm.)"

The new family name "Gliriens" now meets all the criteria set out in ICZN Article 11.7.:

1) "it must be a noun in the nominative plural"

The term "Gliriens" is the French-style plural of "Glis"; it therefore roughly corresponds to the English-style plural form "the Glirines" and is thus clearly a noun in the nominative plural.

2) "formed from the stem of an available generic name"

The generic name *Glis* as described by Brisson (1762) was declared available in ICZN Opinion 1894 (ICZN 1998), and is therefore an available name. Its grammatical stem is 'Glir-', so 'Gliriens' is clearly a derivation based on this grammatical stem.

3) "then used as valid in the new family-group taxon"

In the entry for "Gliriens", Desmarest (1817) uses only the French name for the dormouse ("les loirs"), but in the following entry he gives the Latin name for "le loir" as "Glis". He thus clearly uses "Glis" as the valid generic name for the dormouse within his family "Gliriens". It may be objected that, in the entry "Myoxus", he instead uses this name as the valid generic name for the dormouse. However, the volume of the encyclopaedia containing the headword "Myoxus" was not published until 1818 (Desmarest 1818), so that the time-limiting phrasing "then used as valid" allows only "Glis" – but not "Myoxus" – to be considered a name used as valid at the time of the publication of "Gliriens" in 1817.

4) "be clearly used as a scientific name"

Although Desmarest uses a French-style form ("Gliriens"), the name is clearly to be understood as a technical term, as Desmarest also uses truly colloquial forms such as "les loirs" elsewhere in the text.

5) "to denote a suprageneric taxon"

Desmarest explicitly classifies his "Gliriens" as a "famille", which makes it highly likely that they are classified at a rank above the genus.

6) The form "Gliriens" does not correspond to a Latinised form with a standardised family-group-name ending, e.g. -idae. However, as the name was published before 1900, it may be subsequently emended to the correct form, "Gliridae", in accordance with ICZN Article 11.7.2.

7) The fact that the encyclopaedia volume uses only genus-group names, family-group names or names of an even higher rank as headwords is, according to ICZN Article 11.4.1, not a reason to reject the work as "not consistently binominal".

8) Under Article 12, every new name must be accompanied by a description; this requirement is fully met here by the list of characteristics in the description of the "Gliriens".

This results in the following valid name for the family:

Gliridae Desmarest, 1817
= Myoxidae Gray, 1821

Sources and references

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