

Dr David Harrison, 1926 – 2015

Taxonomist, Arabist, palaeontologist, medical practitioner, and founder of the Harrison Institute

David Harrison passed away unexpectedly but peacefully at his home in Kent, England in March, 2015. Although a medical doctor by profession, David was equally skilled as an Arabist, palaeontologist and distinguished classical taxonomist. His principal interest outside the field of medicine was the taxonomy of small mammals, both Recent and fossil, and he published over 230 scientific papers on the subject, his first in 1945 at the age of nineteen.

For 44 years, David was also the Chairman of Trustees and principal benefactor of the Harrison Institute (formerly the Harrison Zoological Museum). This charitable foundation, established by David, his father, James, and his brother, Jeffery, was dedicated to promoting a greater understanding of the world's biodiversity and particularly to training new generations of young zoologists in the developing world. Today, the Institute's collections, which comprise 40,000 Recent and fossil mammal specimens and 19,000 bird specimens, are of global significance.



David Harrison (2013), working on the description of a new paramyid rodent from the Eocene of Suffolk, England.

In 1953, shortly after the completion of his medical studies, David entered National Service with the Royal Air Force and was posted to Habbaniya in Iraq, where he took up the position of Deputy Medical Physician to Middle East Command. It was while he was in Iraq and, later, the Arabian peninsula, that David immersed himself in a study of the region's fauna, publishing an initial paper on his Arabian field work in 1955. Ninety papers followed, based on meticulous research and extensive field trips to Kurdistan, Oman, (South) Yemen, Syria, Jordan, and Israel. The results were summarised and published between 1964 and 1972 in a three volume monograph entitled *The Mammals of Arabia*. For this research, he was awarded a Ph.D. by the University of Cambridge.

Returning to England in 1955, David joined the family medical practice and worked as a general practitioner in Sevenoaks until his retirement from the profession in 1986. During this period, David balanced his medical duties with a rigorous study of small mammal taxonomy and it was for his contributions to the latter branch of science that he was presented in 1966 with the H.H. Bloomer Award by The Linnean Society of London and, in 1991, The Stamford Raffles Award by the Zoological Society of London.

In 1985, and in tandem with his study of Recent mammals, David began to develop his interest in the fossil faunas of Britain and continental Europe, a study he expanded later to include South-East Asia. He published a number of papers on the fauna of the late middle Eocene site of Creechbarrow in Dorset, England, including descriptions of a new genus of paroxyclaenid (*Paravulpavoides* Harrison, 2009), a new genus and species of ischyromyid rodent (*Patriarchamys batesi* Harrison, 2006), a new species of archyaeonycterid bat (*Archaeonycteris relictus* Harrison & Hooker, 2010) (with J.J. Hooker), and a new species of dormouse (*Glamys hookeri* Harrison, 2002).

David's other principal palaeontological publications comprised papers on Omomyid primates from the European Paleogene (with J.J. Hooker), the occurrence of the lemming, *Lemmus kowalskii* Carls & Rabeder, 1988 and the desman,

Galemys kormosi (Schreuder, 1940) in the lower Pleistocene of south-eastern England (with P. Bates and J. Clayden); fossil shrews (Soricidae) of the lower and middle Pleistocene of Britain (with J. Clayden); moles (Talpidae) and a shrew (*Paranourosorex gigas* Rzebik-Kowalska, 1975) from the lower Pliocene of Poland (with B. Rzebik-Kowalska); a new species of helmeted frog (*Thaumastosaurus sulcatus* Holman & Harrison, 2003) from southern England (with J. Holman); late Eocene snakes from southern Britain and early Oligocene snakes from Florida (with J. Holman); and the bat (Chiroptera), tree shrew (Scandentia), dermopteran and eulipotyphlan fauna of the late Pleistocene of Thailand, which included the description of a new species of fossil bat (*Eptesicus chutamasae* Harrison & Pearch, 2013).

In addition to the first descriptions of the two new genera and four new species of fossil mammals mentioned, David described seven extant mammal species new to science including bats from the Comoro Islands, Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel, and Oman and gerbils from the deserts of Tunisia and Iraq. One species of tube-nosed bat, *Murina harrisoni* Csorba and Bates, 2005, from Cambodia was named in his honour, as were a snake (*Headonophis harrisoni* Holman, 1993), a wasp (*Encarsia harrisoni* Polaszek, 2014), and a subspecies of sand cat (*Felis margarita harrisoni* Hemmer, Grubb, and Groves, 1976).

At the time of his death, David was working busily on the identification of a new species of paramyid rodent from the early Eocene site of Ferry Cliff in Suffolk, England.

Paul Bates

Malcolm Pearch

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