



Conference Abstract

Bridging environment, physiology and life history: stress hormones in the Edible Dormouse (*Glis glis*)

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Received: 03 Apr 2022 | Published: 15 Apr 2022

Citation: Havenstein N, Langer F, Fietz J (2022) Bridging environment, physiology and life history: stress hormones in the Edible Dormouse (*Glis glis*). ARPHA Conference Abstracts 5: e84811.

<https://doi.org/10.3897/aca.5.e84811>

Abstract

The performance of wild animals is impacted by diverse challenges imposed by the environment and distinct life history stages such as breeding and hibernation. Glucocorticoids (GCs) are hormonal mediators that reflect the response to these challenges, exerting their far-reaching effects on numerous processes such as energy allocation, immunity and behavior. Whereas short term elevations of GC levels are crucial for survival, by activation of the emergency life history stage, chronically increased GCs are capable of impairing various body functions and ultimately hamper survival and reproduction. The aim of this study was to disentangle the effects of reproductive activity, prolonged food limitation and hibernation on stress hormone levels in the Edible Dormouse (*Glis glis*) and to link them to formerly observed survival rates. We therefore measured urinary cortisol levels in wild Edible Dormice in South-western Germany during their active season (2012-2014). Results of our study revealed that reproductive activity was associated with high cortisol levels. During the mating season, particular individuals with a low body mass had high stress hormone levels. Elevated levels of cortisol were also measured during pre-hibernation fattening and were increased in females that had formerly invested in reproduction. Thus, reproduction represents a demanding, potentially stressful, event for both sexes and is linked to distinctly lowered survival rates occurring during years of high reproductive activity. Prolonged food limitation occurring during years of mast failure, did not affect stress levels and were not associated with increased mortality, demonstrating the ability of dormice to predict and cope with food restriction.

Keywords

stress hormones, reproduction, food limitation, hibernation, *Glis glis*

Presenting author

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Presented at

Oral presentation at the 11th International Dormice Conference 2022

Grant title

FI 831/5-1, FI 831/6-1

Hosting institution

University of Hohenheim

Institute of Biology

Department of Zoology

Ethics and security

Our studies were conducted under the license form the Nature Conservancy (Permit Number: 55-6/8852.15-1) and the Committee on the Ethics of Animal Experiments of the Regional Commission of Tübingen (Permit Number: HOH 15/13)

Author contributions

NH: conceptualization, formal analysis, investigation, writing

FL: formal analysis, investigation

JF: conceptualization, formal analysis, investigation, writing, supervision, project administration, funding acquisition

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.