

Dear member of the NOW Advisory Board,

Greetings from the Helsinki Office!

Many thanks to all who have contributed updates, corrections and additions! We try to update the main database as corrections come in, but there is a delay until they show up in the public version available at the web site. I am now trying seriously to improve our working capacity in order to minimise the delays and improve feedback, but so far it's still mostly my own hands on the keyboard, so please be patient. My main message here is that our database is alive and well, and it seems to me that our hard labours are finally beginning to bear fruit.

I say this for two reasons. Firstly, it is clear that people outside the mammal community are beginning to take notice of this. Our database is in fact available since some time in a nice context on the Biodiversity U.K. home page under the name "Eurasian Neogene Mammals" (see <http://member.biodiversity.org.uk/globalsearcher/>). While we wait for our own web version you can actually use their search engine to query the NOW database in a limited way. (I only recently found out about this and have to ask them to say more clearly that what they show is the NOW database, to indicate which NOW version they provide, and to request users to cite the original source!). I have also been contacted by the U.S. Paleobiology Database (see <http://paleodb.org/public/>) about using the NOW data in their programme, and by individual research projects who want to deposit their data with us. We seem to be on the map, and I believe that having our data publicly available is a major reason for this.

Secondly, The NOW data are being used in analyses that are beginning to catch the attention of the evolutionary biology community (and hopefully the climate modellers, though this seems uphill work!). I refer in particular to two recent papers:

Jernvall, J., and M. Fortelius. 2002. Common mammals drive the evolutionary increase of hypsodonty in the Neogene. *Nature* **417**:538-540.

(see http://www.nature.com/nlink/v417/n6888/abs/417538a_fs.html)

and:

Fortelius, M., J. T. Eronen, J. Jernvall, L. Liu, D. Pushkina, J. Rinne, A. Tesakov, I. A. Vislobokova, Z. Zhang, and L. Zhou. in press. Fossil Mammals Resolve Regional Patterns of Eurasian Climate Change During 20 Million Years. *Evolutionary Ecology Research*.

(see <http://www.evolutionary-ecology.com/forthcoming.html>)

For the *Nature* paper we used only public NOW data. For the *EER* paper we used a combined dataset that included non-public data for the Former Soviet Union and China. Both approaches are readily available to anyone. Therefore, and despite the well-known shortcomings of our data, I do believe that we already have a very powerful research tool that everybody can use!

I will be in touch again soon about progress with our own web-based user interface and other matters. Meanwhile please do use the NOW data and please do continue to supply error reports, updates and additions! With increasing use of our data outside our own group our common responsibility for the quality of our data is also increasing.

Very best wishes, and stay sweet!

Mikael