

Dear Members of the NOW Advisory Board and other Friends of NOW,

This is to keep you all up to date with some important NOW activities and especially to request the support of Taxonomic Coordinators -- primarily at this point still for the Old World Neogene.

Some time ago we launched a project in Helsinki to construct a supertree for the NOW taxa, so far only comprising the main orders of large mammals. The person in charge of this ambitious undertaking is Dr. Laura Säilä. The supertree project has brought into focus a problem of which we have been long aware: the proliferation of taxonomic synonyms that plagues the NOW data. We are now initiating a concerted effort to come to grips with NOW synonyms, and this is also coordinated by Laura. An important part of this undertaking is a parallel effort in Leiden, not taxonomically restricted in any way and coordinated by Lars van den Hoek Ostende with the help of Mr Jelle Zijlstra, who has already produced long lists of observed probably (in most cases dead certain) synonyms. I shall be distributing these lists to the relevant Coordinators soon. I hope you can spend some time on this and probably future requests of a similar nature. It's hopefully a relatively minor task for each of you, but one that only you can manage (since you have, as you know, dictatorial powers in this matter). A nice feature of this operation is that the database will henceforth "remember" your decision and warn about synonyms during data entry.

This is a golden opportunity to improve our data quality in a very important way and I hope you will find a little time for it in your busy schedules!

Best wishes from Helsinki,

Mikael