

AN EXTRAORDINARILY PRESERVED FOSSIL SPECIMEN
OF EOGLIRAVUS, THE OLDEST KNOWN GLIRID GENUS

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Grube Messel near Frankfurt, Germany, is renowned for the diversity and completeness of its early Middle Eocene (around 49 million years old) mammalian fossils. Their extraordinary preservation allows an opportunity for unprecedented accuracy in reconstruction of anatomy and behavior.

Thus far, glirids are represented by a single specimen of 7 cm head-and-body length and 5 cm tail length. Its preserved elements include a completely articulated skeleton, the soft body outline of the pelage and bushy tail, gut contents consisting of vegetable matter, and even such a fragile structure as the baculum. On the basis of dental characters the fossil is assigned to *Eoglriravus wildi*, the oldest and most primitive glirid species known. Previously, this species was known only from a few isolated teeth found at French localities. Thus, glirids are the only existing rodent family worldwide with a fossil record dating back as far as 50 million years, and they obviously originated on the European continent. Analyses of the skeleton, in particular the distal limb segments, and the gut contents suggest that *E. wildi* was an agile arboreal animal feeding mainly on seeds, fruits, and buds.