

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 77 (2011)
Heft: [3]

Artikel: Siebenschläfer = Edible dormouse
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943365>

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HELVE⁺IA

Magazine for Members of the Swiss Society of New Zealand Inc

FAUNA IN SWITZERLAND

Siebenschläfer – Edible dormouse

The Siebenschläfer (*Glis glis*) is a small nocturnal rodent, with big black eyes and a furry tail, very much like a squirrel, but not even half the size of a squirrel. It has long whiskers and rounded ears. Siebenschläfer are excellent climbers; they can even climb walls.

The Siebenschläfer's name derives from the fact that it hibernates for seven months – but actually, the hibernation period is even longer, from about September till May.

The Siebenschläfer are endemic to Europe and to the east as far as Iran. They live in forests and gardens; their most favoured habitat are orchards. They choose hollow trees, birds' nest boxes and attics as their sleeping quarters. During the day they are quiet and go unnoticed, but at night they can create as much noise as a burglar – despite their weight of only 100 to 200 grams.

From spring to summer they eat mainly fruit, buds, flowers, insects, birds' eggs; towards autumn they feast on nourishing food, such as oily nuts and seeds, so they go into winter well prepared – with almost double their normal weight.

After a gestation period of around 30 days, 4-6 young are born, usually in August. They open their

eyes about 3-4 weeks later and only then begin to eat solids – which doesn't leave them much time to get fat for winter.

During hibernation the Siebenschläfer's heart slows down from 300 to only 5 heartbeats per minute, and their body temperature reaches 5°. Siebenschläfer wake up once or twice during winter to keep their bodies going. Many Siebenschläfer don't make it through winter, especially if the winters are

harder or longer than usual or if they haven't been able to stock up before hibernation.

Apart from winter, the Siebenschläfer's enemies are stoats, cats and owls – and sometimes humans who don't like the Siebenschläfer's noise at night.

In ancient times the Siebenschläfer were farmed and eaten by the Romans, usually as a snack. The dormice were kept and raised

either in large pits or, in less spacious urban surroundings, in clay containers, something like contemporary hamster cages.

To this day, wild Siebenschläfer are consumed in Slovenia, where they are considered a rare delicacy.



Siebenschläfer – edible dormouse – *glis glis*

from the internet