IMPRINT

THE YORKSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP - NEWSLETTER

YORKSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP

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Contents:

EDITOR Barrie D.S. Smith, 72, Crab Lane, HARROGATE, HG1 3BG.

YMG CHAIRMAN Linda Collier, 17, Trentholme Drive, The Mount, YORK.

EDITOR'S REPORT

It has been encouraging in this, the second issue of Imprint, to see contributions from outside the immediate sphere of the Yorkshire Mammal Group. The Newsletter is primarily the mouthpiece of the YMG and a means of communication with friends and associates who have connections with the group. Nevertheless, it can be seen that this publication could become increasingly valuable for the interchange of ideas and information throughout the county.
In particular, reports from Mammal Recorders from the various Natural History Society regions would be interesting. Information on meetings in or beyond Yorkshire of relevance to the mammal watcher should be a particularly important aspect of Imprint. Correspondence for publication would be a valuable addition and I would welcome any critical comment on the Newsletter especially if it was constructive.

My thanks are extended to all contributors and to anyone who has assisted in the production of this issue, but particularly Edna Shann and Stewart Collier for their hard work.

May I take this opportunity to wish all readers a very happy Christmas and a successful and productive New Year!

Barrie D S Smith

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Since our first issue of Imprint the YMG members have been involved in quite a number of varied activities.

This is surprising, as we used to always believe that the summer months were quiet ones. Obviously nobody has informed the mammals about holiday time!

The Bat Section have had a very busy six months and for detailed reports see 'Bat News'.

A family field meeting to Thorganby was held in June. This was felt to be an area that had very little in the way of mammals on record.

During July our indoor meeting took to the great outdoors!
A most interesting evening was spent at Naburn Sewage Works, where we were given a guided tour around the grounds and works. Occasionally, in the filter beds, some noteworthy mammal "captures" can be found, one of the latest being a harvest mouse (Micromys minutus). Our visit was rounded off at the local hostelry - a meeting spent really getting to the bottom of things!

The six monthly programme of trapping at Black Woods, Wheldrake, was carried out, so completing ten years of this long-term project.

September heralded another outdoor meeting, this time to a Mink Farm in West Yorkshire. For details see the article by Beryl Cronin.

A vegetation survey was carried out on the trapping and at Black Woods, Wheldrake, and our second long-term trapping project was continued this month at Hopewell House Farm, Knaresborough.
YMG members trap for a period of three days and then similar work is carried out on the following five days by students from a local college.

October sees the beginning of our autumn programme. Indoor meetings restart and a weekend away is spent trapping on a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve. The one chosen this year was relatively new, Yellands Meadow in Swaledale. Although the weather turned out to be absolutely diabolical our mammal catches were excellent and a good, but soggy, time was had by all!

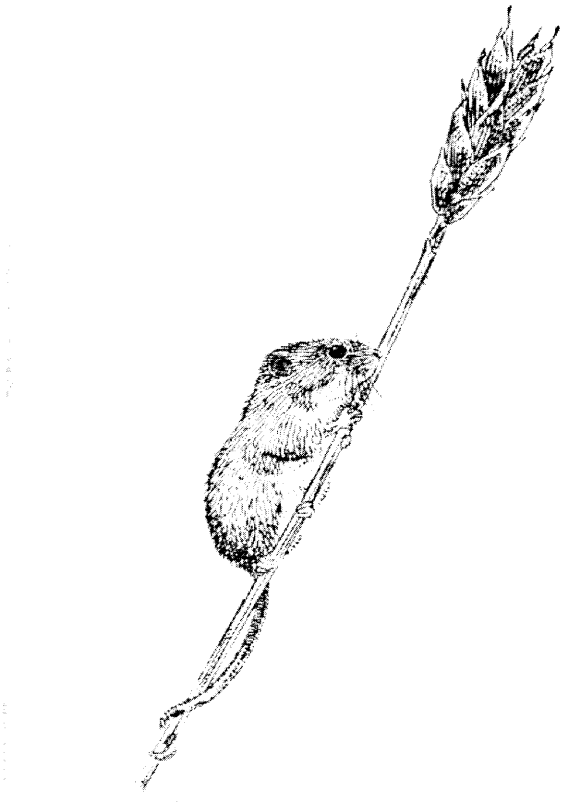
By the time you receive this Newsletter the following activities will also have taken place.

A visit behind the scenes at Doncaster Natural History Museum.

A rendezvous at Tickhill Castle, near Rotherham, to begin the organization of a trapping session which will be held in the New Year, plus trapping at Black Woods.

Our AGM in December will bring a busy, action-packed year, to a close but we look forward, with enthusiasm, to more mammals in 1984.

Linda G Collier

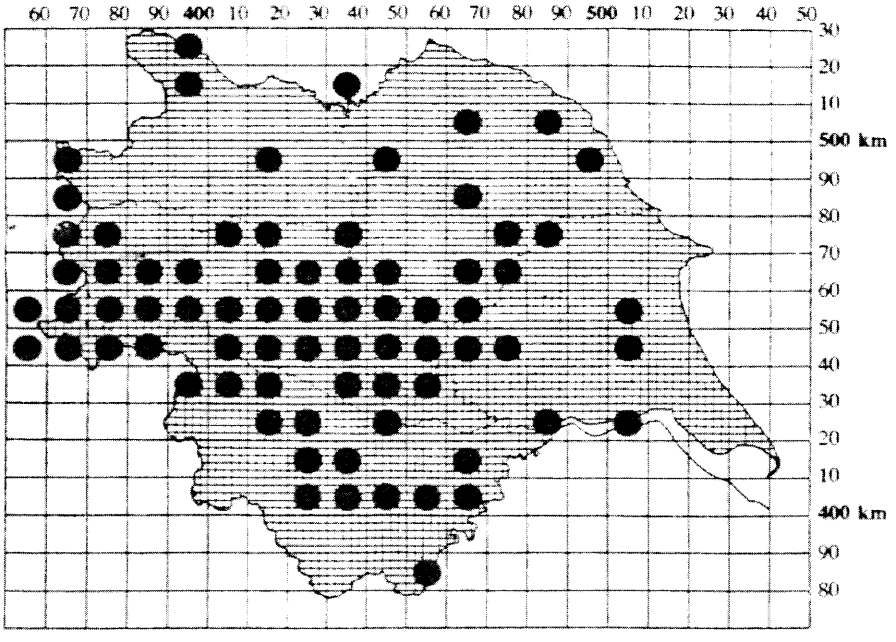


FERAL MINK IN YORKSHIRE

The American mink, Mustela vison Schreber, has been commercially bred for its fur in Britain since 1929. The industry expanded after the War and by 1962 there were roughly 700 mink farms of varying sizes spread throughout England and Wales. Inevitably mink escaped, but initially it was thought unlikely that enough would survive in the wild to meet and mate in the single short breeding season of late February to early April. But in 1957, a female and young were seen on the River Teign in Devon, and further sightings and captures of pregnant females and kits confirmed that feral mink were breeding in many parts, especially South Wales and South West England. Reports of damage to poultry and waterfowl led in 1962 to mink farms being brought under Government control by the Mink (Importation and Keeping) Order, but feral mink were already well established on many river systems. From 1965-1970 a team of 9 Ministry trappers were employed in England and Wales, and although catch returns indicated that locally numbers might be controlled, on the whole the spread of mink into favourable habitats, such as lakesides and along rivers, seemed unavoidable.

Initially feral mink were thought to be fairly uncommon in Yorkshire. MAFF records show that up to 1964 only 4 mink were caught in Yorkshire, all from the West Riding, mainly near Keighley, Bradford and Halifax, while 96 had been captured in Lancashire, mainly South of the river Wyre. But in 1965, 80 mink were trapped in the West Riding, mainly on the Ribble, and for the first time animals were recorded on the Ure, Nidd and Wharfe. Since 1965, mink have been trapped mainly from West Yorkshire but a British distribution map published in 1971 and a Yorkshire map in 1983 show isolated records of mink in North Yorkshire and an indication that mink have moved into East Yorkshire, probably along the Wharfe and by invasion of the Derwent, although in 1966-67 catch numbers did fall.

Fig 1. Distribution of mink in Yorkshire from Colin Howes 'An Atlas of Yorkshire Mammals 1983'.



American Mink *Mustela vison* Schr.

The 1971 map shows that the main strongholds of feral mink are in the South West (Devon, Dorset, Wiltshire), the South East (Sussex),

South West Wales (Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire) and the North West (Lancashire and West Yorkshire). Patchy distributions are shown elsewhere especially East Anglia, but it is highly likely that in the past 12 years, mink have expanded their range and colonized many new areas.

There are three main worries as it becomes obvious that feral mink are here to stay. One is their possibly damaging effect on native prey species. Dietary studies have been done both here and in Scandinavia where feral mink populations are widespread. The results indicate that mink are opportunistic predators and although diets vary with season and locality a rough guide is 20-40% small mammals - rats, voles, rabbits, etc., 5-35% waterfowl - ducks, coots, moorhens, 30% fish - especially eels, perch, etc., and occasionally trout and salmon. Crustacea, e.g. crayfish and shore crabs are taken when available, and toads and frogs have occasionally been recorded.

The second worry is damage to poultry, fish farm stocks, ornamental wildfowl, etc. This can really only be minimized by careful control of the local mink numbers and exclusion from pens. Baited traps such as the Imbra or Juby rabbit trap or cage traps were used for mink control, but details and advice should be obtained from the nearest MAFF divisional office.

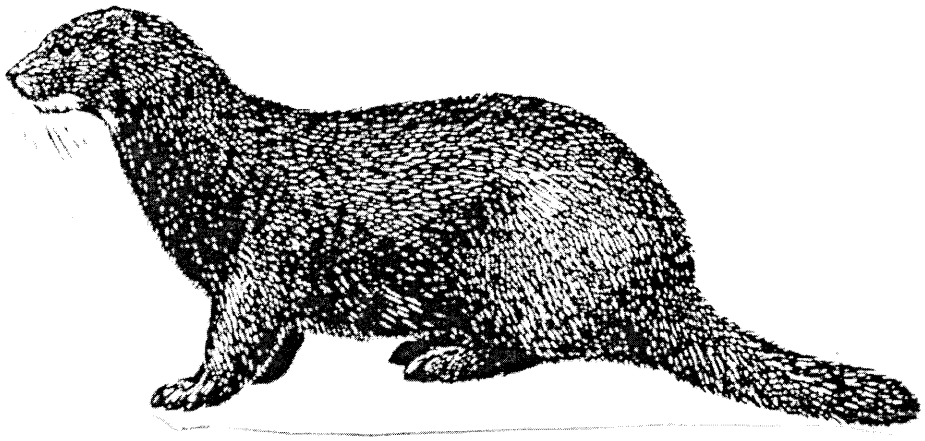
Finally there is the threat of competition with native carnivores. Like the mink, most of Britain's mammalian predators belong to the family Mustelidae. The closest in size is the polecast, Mustela putorius which is rare and mainly confined to Central and North Wales. Unlike the mink, the polecat prefers forest and farmland and mainly hunts small mammals, so competition is probably not very important. However one of the larger mustelids, the otter, Lutra lutra favours similar habitats to the mink. Also 90% or more of the otter's diet is fish and there could be serious competition between these two. However studies on the respective diets indicate that the otter takes larger prey items than the mink, which it actively hunts underwater. The mink prefers to hunt from the bankside since it can only stay submerged for up to 30 seconds. From studies in Sweden it does seem that where mink and otter co-exist, the otter is the superior competitor and mink are forced into more marginal habitat where its aquatic diet can be easily supplemented with mammals, etc. Nevertheless, more studies are needed on the possible competition between these three mustelids especially here in Britain where otters had been declining in numbers for some years before mink became established. It is possible that low otter numbers allowed mink to spread more rapidly than otherwise into new areas, and of course if otter numbers increase again, it is not known how the presence of mink will affect this, if at all.

Finally, there are a variety of signs which indicate the presence of mink on a river system. Sightings are rare, but best if you keep quiet and watch around dawn or dusk. Mink tracks closely resemble those of a polecat in size and shape. Characteristic features are clear pear-shaped indentations of pad and claws (except 5th inner toe which rarely leaves a good mark). Tracks are grouped in 4's if the mink is moving quickly when it uses the typical mustelid "bound" as do ferrets. If walking, tracks are in groups of 2/3 often with a tail print. Droppings or "scats" are cylindrical, about 3" x ½", twisted and drawn to a point at one end. They have a characteristic rank, unpleasant smell and can be found along riverbanks, among rocks, etc., and at the entrance to mink dens. These are often found in

riverbanks, under tree roots, rocks, etc. The mink rarely digs its own den but will use natural features or disused burrows with entrances about 10" across.

Lastly, if sign of mink is found, this should be reported to the local MAFF office.

Sharon W Davies
Department of Zoology
Durham University



YMG OUTDOOR MEETING - HAWKYARD MINK FARM

Our September outdoor meeting was a return visit to the Mink Farm near Halifax where we were once again warmly welcomed by Mr and Mrs Hawkyard. Our first task was to investigate a possible badger sett in their garden. Several holes were seen, but no positive identification was made and we moved on to the main reason for our visit, the farm itself.

30,000 animals are kept there, and after seeing several varieties including their own breed, Pearl Cross, we were shown the preparation side of the business. After skinning the mink, the pelts are cleaned and then dried on stretchers in a temperature controlled environment. They are then sorted by length and colour and packed ready for despatch to the auctions in London. In addition to the pelt preparation rooms, Mr Hawkyard has a small laboratory where tests are carried out to ensure his stock remains healthy.

Apart from a few nasty moments with a suspected Mustela 'escapus' which in the event turned out to be a harmless Erinaceus promenadus a most enjoyable evening was had by all.

Beryl Cronin

A YORKSHIRE FIRST!

J Counter, B Damper and R H Deaton.

Birders regularly record the unusual and unexpected at Gouthwaite Reservoir but, unfortunately, there's not been too much to excite mammal fanciers over the years.

It wouldn't be fair to say the Reserve hasn't had its moments. For example a roe deer (Capriolus capriolus) was observed swimming across the Reservoir on 29 April 1981 (J Haines : Harrogate and District Naturalists' Society Annual Report/1981) and the following year a stoat (Mustela erminea) was seen to raid a moorhen's nest on 5 June 1982 (A F G Walker : Harrogate and District Naturalists' Society Annual Report/1982).

But, interesting though these records are they neither set the local "grapevine" on fire nor resulted in coachloads of mammal "twitchers" descending on the Reserve!

Just as Gouthwaite was about to be put on the mammal watching map - we had it in mind to "invent" a Yorkshire rival to the Loch Ness monster - we actually live-trapped something equally unlikely. Well; almost!

As part of the ongoing small mammal survey being carried out in the HDNS study area the Yorkshire Water Authority and owners of the sporting rights gave permission to work the Reserve on 8/9 October 1983. Eighteen Longworth traps - baited with rolled oats, flaked maize and sunflower seeds - were laid and locked upon on the marsh at the northern end of the Reservoir (OS Ref. SE 123 709(5)) on 1 October 1983.

The traps were set at 21.00 hours on 8 October 1983 and blowfly pupa were added to sustain shrews. Intrepid trappers assembled at Gouthwaite at 09.00 the following morning in extremely wet and misty conditions but our rain-soaked spirits were bolstered when an albino ♂ short-tailed vole (Microtus agrestis) was disgorged from a trap which had been set in an area of phalaris grass.

That the animal survived long enough to find its way into a Longworth is in itself surprising as the marsh is host to various predatory birds and mammals. Surely a kestrel would espy an albino short-tailed vole as easily as the birders would espy an albino kestrel!

Enquiries suggest that this is not only a Yorkshire "first" (C Howes) but a national rarity (Dr J R Flowerdew).

Has anyone any records or information concerning the frequency of albinism in Microtus?

R H Deaton, 20 Hilltop Road, Harrogate, North Yorkshire.

THE HEDGEHOG AS PREY OF OWLS

In April 1983 my father, Dr D S Smith, watched an adult hedgehog (Erinaceus europaeus) walking across the tarmac of the drive to his house in Barrowford, near Nelson, Lancashire, shortly after midnight. Whilst the animal was spotlighted by the driveway light he saw a tawny owl (Strix aluco) swoop down on the hedgehog and, although he was unable to see the owl carry it off, the hedgehog had disappeared.

The animal was an adult and would undoubtedly be a prickly item for a tawny owl to deal with. Records of these interactions are rare and although Morris (1983) reports attempted attacks he believes tawny owls would have little chance of a kill. Skull remains of a hedgehog were found in a tawny owl pellet in West Germany and although there was speculation that it may have been a kill, scavenging remains a likely possibility (Klaas 1979). Spines found in a little owl (Athene noctua) pellet in South Wales were even more likely to be evidence of scavenging (Breconshire Nat. 18 1979: 29). A barn owl (Tyto alba) has also been reported on a hedgehog road kill in Midlothian (Dunsire & Dunsire 1978).

One European owl which is equipped to deal with hedgehogs is the eagle owl (Bubo bubo). They have been shown to comprise a significant part of the diet in Bavaria and one study in Sweden showed them to make up 8% of total items taken (Wardhaugh 1983). Normally the flesh is scooped out and the skin discarded but Münch (1958) reports one captive bird swallowing hedgehogs whole! The spines were regurgitated later in pellets. Further records of eagle owls taking hedgehogs are documented by Mikkola (1983).

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(My thanks to Dr Euan Dunn of the Edward Grey Institute, Oxford, for his assistance in the preparation of this note.)

Barrie D S Smith, M.Sc. M.I.Biol., 72 Crab Lane, Harrogate, HG1 3BG.

PRICKLES BY THE BACK DOOR!

This is the third year in succession that I have had hedgehogs feeding in my little back garden - close to the main road - so I feel particularly honoured!

The first year, 1981, started with only one, last year there were two, and this year four. And, although the experts tell us we would be surprised how many hedgehogs pass in the night visiting food bowls en route as an extra bonus, I liked to think that my hedgehogs were the same ones who visited me regularly in order to get a good feed before starting out on their nightly hunting expeditions! Sadly I didn't get round to spray-painting them for identification, but certainly one was easy to recognize for a while earlier this year - a rather pretty little creature which I imagined was a female because on several nights she had a tick swelling quite near to one of her eyes. This particular hedgehog always appeared first, trotting quickly down the same path to the bowl, followed shortly by a larger scruffy-looking fellow, darker in colour. He came from a different direction, and then two others came along later. One night there were three hedgehogs eating bread and milk together from the same bowl and not being averse to having company. Since hedgehogs have no territorial areas of their own to guard, no doubt that accounted for it. There was no jealousy and they looked much like three hungry puppies hurriedly scoffing their food! Last year there was much snorting, snuffling and backing to and fro when more than on hedgehog appeared, but not so this year.

I sometimes watched them through binoculars for closer observation - it was easy to see them in the light of the kitchen window - although the bowl was only about 10 feet from the back door, and if I crept out quietly I was able to get within eighteen inches of the little animals without disturbing their meal, so absorbed were they. Quite often, when a solitary hedgehog arrived, it would sit right in the middle of the food and the next visitor had to queue until the first had had its fill!

From May onwards I put out bread and milk at dusk, and every evening one or more hedgehogs never failed to appear. Car headlights down the back road, engines revving up, dogs barking, voices and other familiar sounds never worried them, but any unusual small noise such as a camera click or a loud bang, sent them scurrying into the bushes, only to return within twenty minutes or so to resume their feast.

The first year I put the food into a shallow pot bowl, but the hedgehogs pushed it about so much during the night rattling it along the wide concrete path that the noise awakened my "anti-animal" neighbour! She was unhappy about my feeding them at all as she said the food would attract rats! I retaliated by telling her it was not there long enough for that and explained that, in any case, the hedgehog was the gardener's best friend and by encouraging them they would help to keep down the slug population. I also started putting the food in a less noisy plastic dish, so I believe I won in the end!

The busiest time of each year was, of course, June, July and August when for a while I had to put out two helpings of food at once I tried minced meat as an alternative to bread and milk but they were not interested. But now all is quiet, they have ceased their visitations and I suppose have gone into their winter hibernation. But I do hope at least one or two of them escape being burnt in a rubbish heap and survive until next Spring when I shall certainly kee an eager eye open for the welcome return of these prickly little friends.

Edna Shann, 100 York Road, Tadcaster, North Yorkshire.

SEA FOOD GETS 'SEAL' OF APPROVAL

Although not the most scientific way of studying the food ecology of seals on the Yorkshire coast, watching seals dealing with their prey above water can produce interesting behavioural observations, new fish records and can form the highlight of a day's sea watching, 'at one time I only used to watch birds ..... then I discovered seals .....'.

The technique has certain advantages of convenience over studying the contents of seal droppings, and of course the alternative method of identifying the contents of seal stomachs does not do much for the seals concerned!

There are numerous often very ancient, references to seals taking salmon from fish traps in bays and estuaries on the Yorkshire coast though these accounts were usually written by those with a vested interest in the fishing industry. One of the first naturalists to record the feeding behaviour and prey of seals on the Yorkshire coast was W J Clarke of Scarborough and although rather limited, his observations threw light on a subject about which almost nothing was known.

On Filey Brigg 6 February 1907 he watched a common seal catch and eat a (Gadus collaris) estimated to be 10 lb. in weight and another about 6 lb. (Scarborough Field Naturalists Society Minutes per C I Massey). On 8 October 1934 a common seal seized a hooked codling, became hooked itself and was landed and killed. (Naturalist, 1935 : 42-4). During January and February 1935 one of about half a dozen seals present in the South Bay, Scarborough, spent much of its time in the harbour mouth where its feeding techniques were closely studied. Again, cod of about 10 lb. weight, together with Viviparous or Yarell's Blenny (Zoarces viviparus) and coal fish (Gadus virens) were brought to the surface to be dealt with. Klepto-parasitism proved to be a hazard as herring gulls were ready to grab the catch from the jaws and front flippers of the seal as it surfaced. (Naturalist, 1935: 79-8 and 1936: 36-8. On the 30 March 1936 one of the seals waiting at the harbour mouth for fish scraps thrown by the coble fishermen, misguidedly took revenge by seizing and killing (but not eating) a swimming kittiwake. (Naturalist, 1936 : 41-43).

One of the earliest and most celebrated records of grey seal on the Yorkshire coast - a species which nowadays easily outnumbers the common seal - was of one seen off Kilnsca Warren on 31 August 1943 dealing with a "very large ray" (Raja sp.)" ..... the fish lashed furiously with its tail and 'wings' as the seal held it in the air". (Naturalist, 1948 : 24-5).

With sea-bird watching on the Yorkshire coast developing into a growth industry and with seals being more abundant than for many years, there is considerable scope for making useful and interesting observations of seal/fish and or seal/gull interactions. Any such records would be gratefully received.

Colin Howes
Assistant Keeper of Natural Sciences
The Museum and Art Gallery
Chequer Road
Doncaster DN1 2AE

TO PREBAIT OR NOT TO PREBAIT? THAT IS THE QUESTION!

J Counter, B Damper and R H Deaton.

According to "Live Trapping Small Mammals" (J Gurnell and J R Flowerdew : 1982) prebaiting Longworth traps "is a personal choice" and, as a guide to prebaiting the publication suggests "no prebait or one day prebait for most habitats but one or two days in grassland where field voles (Microtus agrestis) are being studied".

Recent work carried out in the Harrogate area rather spectacularly confirmed that, unless you're after Microtus, you can obtain excellent results very quickly without prebaiting. The only thing to watch is that traps are set in choice areas.

As an example; six Longworths were set on a scrub-covered roadside verge near Harrogate (OS Ref. SE 286 598) on 3 September 1983. Four hours later each trap had an occupant with the catch made up of four bank voles (Clethrionomys glareolus), one common shrew (Sorex araneus) and a wood mouse (Apodemus sylvaticus).

Similar results have been achieved elsewhere with perhaps the quickest and nicest record being that of a water shrew (Neomys fodiens) which was trapped on the banks of the River Nidd at Scotton Banks, near Knaresborough. Traps were placed in position en route to an evening badger watch and just one and a half hours later we had our water shrew.

More good luck than management you might think but it must question the value of prebaiting - particularly at vulnerable or inaccessible sites.

That the Gurnell and Flowerdew "suggestion" is not only sound but tried and tested is underlined by the fact that the quickest a field vole has been trapped without prebaiting is fifteen hours with acceptable results only coming after traps have been in situ for forty-eight hours.

J Counter, 87 St John's Grove, Harrogate, North Yorkshire.

RARE CARNIVORE INFORMATION SOUGHT

Dr N Easterbee of the Nature Conservancy Council is seeking information on wildcat sightings. He is also interested in information on rarer British carnivores including otter, polecat and pine marten.

Contact Dr Easterbee at NCC, 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE NEOMYS KIND

Numerous sightings of water shrew (Neomys fodiens) have been reported from a farm at Bishop Thornton, near Harrogate, this year.

They've been plentiful to the extent that they've actually been caught in a "Nipper" trap in the farmhouse and an animal found lurking under a sheet of corrugated iron was caught by the farmer - with his bare hands - "just in case anyone from t'Nats wanted to take a few snaps". (Unfortunately the farmer hadn't quite got to grips with the legislation concerning the trapping, handling and photography of shrews!)

A Sunday afternoon call at the farm in May to buy a dozen free-range eggs afforded an unexpected first-hand sighting of Neomys.

With egg transaction complete and whilst engaged in polite conversation with the farmer's wife the farm collie began to bark and scratch frantically in an attempt to undermine a paving stone in the farmyard. There was obviously something beneath the stone and investigation revealed that it was a water shrew which ran over one of the surprised observers' feet in making its escape.

The collie was, of course, severely reprimanded for infringing the Wildlife and Countryside Act but he didn't seem to understand the legislation either.

I suppose it really isn't easy teaching old dogs new tricks!

J Counter, 87 St John's Grove, Harrogate, North Yorkshire.

VOLE TRAP SHYNESS

In experiments in Canada the vole (Microtus pennsylvanicus) has been shown to exhibit a significantly higher likelihood of entering traps previously occupied by Microtus. They showed significant avoidance of traps previously occupied by other rodents or the predacious shrew Blarina brevicauda. There was an even lower probability of entering traps which were previously empty. The same study shows Blarina to be an important predator of Microtus in Canada. (Boonstra R, Rodd F H and Carleton D J, Canadian Journal of Zoology 60 : 438-442 1982).

OTTERS RELEASED

Three otter cubs released by the Otter Trust (Suffolk) may be the fore-runners of an extended programme. One was fitted with a harness with a radio-transmitter, so that its activities could be monitored. The project has World Wildlife Fund and NCC involvement.
(Habitat 19 (7) 1983)

BAT NEWS

The number of papers in this part of the Newsletter is testimony to the activity of the newly formed Bat Section over the past few months. Dr Michael Thompson is, of course, known and respected in this field but the Bat Section is rather less well known having only been founded in May by Dr Bob Stebbings. The work of the Section has been documented in the accounts of Beryl Cronin and Neal Stride. It should be pointed out that the Section consists of only six inexperienced members, their work in investigating a large number of requests from the public and from NCC should not be under-estimated. It is in particular a tribute to the leader of the Section, Neal Stride, who has worked tirelessly, often under very difficult circumstances, in dealing with these queries. This includes dealing with the press, radio and television personnel. On behalf of the Section, thanks Neal for doing such a good job.

Ed.

Bat Section Members:

Beryl Cronin
Neal Stride (Leader)
Barrie Smith
Edna Shann
Sylvia Thompson
Shiela Walsh

BATTING 1983

It hardly seems six months ago that an informal meeting with Bob Stebbings initiated a Bat Section within the YMG. As related elsewhere in this issue, we have experienced a frantic season of living on adrenalin, balancing priorities of telephoned and written messages, finding people who are prepared to make the journeys, and picking up the pieces when the equation went awry.

Rather than give a blow by blow account of roost visits, the following paragraphs highlight some of the exotica and unusual experiences of a batting season which effectively lasted three months during the hottest British summer since 1976.

The middle of June opened our season with the investigation of potential roosts at Kirkham Priory. Despite failure in capturing specimens for identification, we feel certain that a single nursery colony of c. 50 Daubenton's bats (Myotis daubentoni) was present. However, the tentative identification was based on pelage coloration, flight characteristics and dropping evaluation by untrained eyes - notoriously variable factors - and a serious attempt at specimen collection from a rather awkwardly located situation will have to be attempted in 1984. This 12th Century priory which succumbed to Henry VIII's Suppression of 1539 is now a DoE listed ancient monument and lies just 300 yards from the River Derwent, a rich foraging area for diurnal and nocturnal insectivores. Noctule bats (Nyctalus noctula) were almost certainly observed in flight; but at a distance, and once again identification was based on flight characteristics.

A month of quietly chasing up reports of sightings and potential roosts gleaned from chance conversation gave way to a deluge of reports and contacts in August following media publicity. This was generated by the award of a grant by the British Ecological Society to purchase an ultrasound detector. For the statistically minded, we received some 42 enquiries that were dealt with by 'phone, written reply or, in the majority of cases, a visit by one or more of the Section. Our furthest enquiry was a desperate plea for help from Prestatyn in North Wales ..... needless to say this had to be deflected to the Nature Conservancy Council offices in Bangor.

Indeed, the most satisfying aspect of 1983 has been the degree of liaison with the Nature Conservancy Council here in York. This has provided us with roost data that has subsequently been loaded on the computerized file at ITE Monks Wood, and by preventing or delaying exclusion of nursery colonies we have helped implement a facet of the 'Wildlife and Countryside Act' 1981 - one of the prime reasons for the Section's formation. An example of this was the effective delay in demolition of a suspected pipistrelle (Pipistrellus pipistrellus) roose site at Settle. As a sequel, the landowners generously offered to build roost boxes on their subsequent property.

The majority of our visits were in fact urban pipistrelle roosts, but more rural locations near Harrogate and Thirsk yielded common long-eared (Plecotus auritus) colonies. To gild the lily, a positive identification by Dr R E Stebbings of a Natterer's bat (Myotis nattereri) at Kexby, due east of York, represents a new area record and an additional record for the county, the last specimen being recorded in 1974.

The largest investigated roost of the season was at Castle Howard. Warm hospitality and a dusk sojourn realised 320 common pipistrelles

over an exit time of one hour - more than twice as long as any of our previously recorded roost clearance times. Castle Howard also produced our single record of a female whiskered bat (Myotis mystacinus) bearing 4 individual acarine parasites of the genus Spinturnix (Acari; Laelaptidae; Spinturnicinae). The Spinturnicinae are exclusively parasitic on Chiroptera, and the specimens collected appear to key out as Spinturnix myoti (Kolenati).

Thus ends our first season's activities. Hopefully with the renewing energy of Spring, 1984 will see a repetition of our successes.

Neal Stride
Bat Section Leader, 1983.

Ref. Evans, Sheals & Macfarlane
'Terrestrial Acari of the British Isles' Vol I 1961.

As we go to press, it appears that droppings collected at Sheriff Hutton have been identified as belonging to both Plecotus and Myotis, whilst a poor sample from Garrowby Hall also indicate the presence of Myotis sp. indet.

NS

BAT QUEST

As the nights draw in and the days grow colder, we stow away our ladders, hang up our torches and roll up our plastic bags after the first Bat Season, it is perhaps time to reflect on the Summer of 1983.

It is fair I think to say that we were caught somewhat unprepared by the onslaught of enquiries which had swamped us by mid-July. We are after all only six in number, and the frequency of the calls and the urgency of the callers was totally overwhelming. Our enquiries took us far and wide, to Humberside, North Yorkshire, the Moors and the Dales. We sought roosts in tunnels, lofts, outhouses, farm buildings, stately homes and ancient monuments. We looked in airing cupboards, under beds, up chimneys, behind wardrobes and shone our torches probingly into the darkest recesses of our enquirants' cosy homes. Plaintive cries of 'I'm afraid I haven't cleaned up here for ages' and 'Do you really want to look in the loft?' were bravely brushed aside in the relentless search for bat droppings or moth wings. It soon became evident that if you were to be a successful member of the Bat Section you had to be inquisitive, or have a long nose, and noses certainly helped when it came to savouring accumulated droppings. Was this the 'Earl Grey'? or perhaps more of a ripe Camembert?

Our hosts too were as varied as the situations in which we found ourselves. Sometimes chiroptophiles, sometimes fascinated, horrified scared stiff or merely surprised by the creature that had flown out from their weather-boarding as they began to paint. They were usually welcoming and always I think relieved to see us relatively normal looking individuals 'You mean you actually like bats?' Inevitably, as a result of their varying degrees of hospitality, they earned themselves a star rating:

* No refreshments
** Tea or coffee
*** Wine or sherry
**** Bed and Breakfast

It was this element of unpredictability which was for me the true joy of Batting, you never knew what you were going to find, or who with, or where.

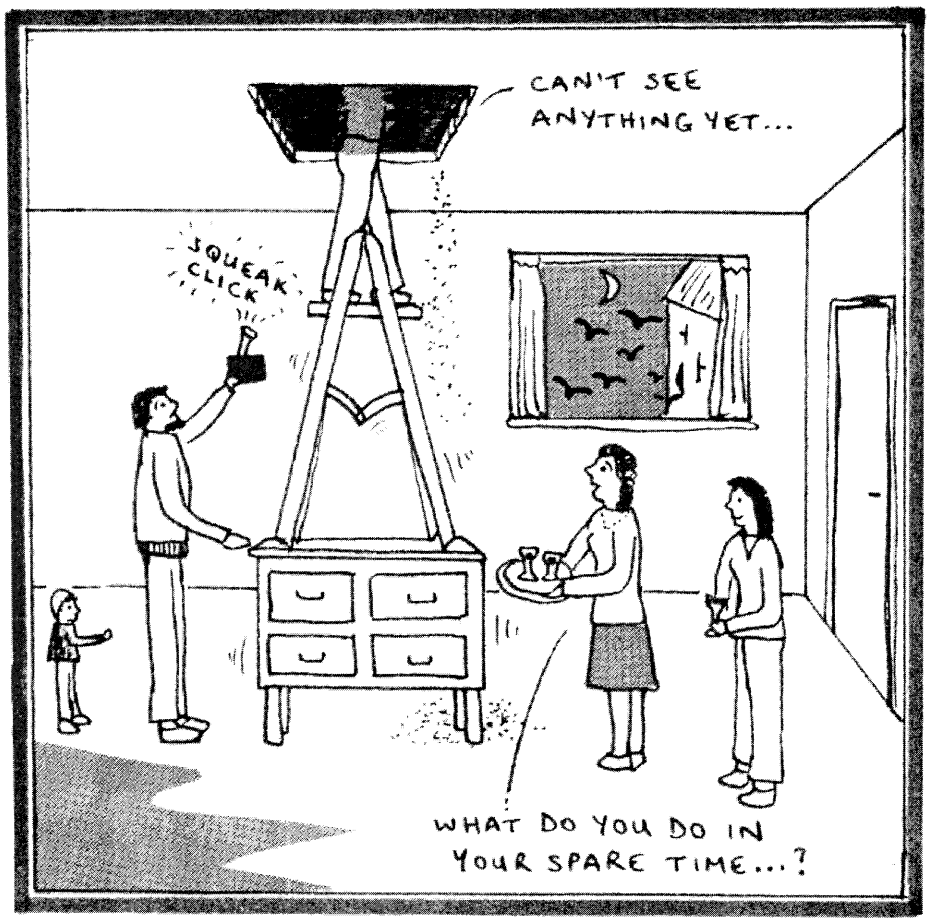
This summer certainly exploded the myth long held by myself that July and August are dead months in a natural history sense. If you want to see naturalist activity in high summer, then Bats are for you. What pleasanter way to spend a warm summer evening than in a deserted Fountains Abbey, eyes peeled for a flicker, a flutter of batwing in the gathering dusk.

Of course the season was not without its problems. Having spent half an hour convincing an enquirant that he should leave his bats undisturbed, the colony then emerged from the house next door and you had to break the news to his unsuspecting neighbour that he was the lucky one after all! Then there were the forms - was this roost behind the soffits or should it be the barge boards and were the entrance holes under the eaves or in the apex?

But it is the humour which will stay with us until the

persistent call of the telephone tells us that the nursery roosts are busy again ..... 'We've had other kinds of birds in the loft before' ..... 'She was bitten on the stomach by a bat while lying on the beach in Spain' ..... 'We wondered what had nibbled the Christmas puddings we stored in the loft'!

Beryl Cronin, 23 Adelaide Street, York.



Lindsey Wright.

Lindsey Wright

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS ON THE BAT FAUNA OF THE RYEDALE WINDYPITS

The history of the occurrence of the Lesser Horseshoe Bat (Rhinolophus hipposideros) at the very northern limit of its range in the Helmsley area of North Yorkshire has previously been documented (M J A Thompson, Imprint No 1 1983 : 2). The current occurrence of the species in the area is strongly suspected but the 1982 expedition documented by Dr Thompson did not confirm this in terms of specimens. As a result of this a further investigation was mounted by Dr Robert Stebbings of Monks Wood Experimental Station in association with the Nature Conservancy Council, Forestry Commission and Mr Roy Brown.

There are 30 known Windypits in the Ryedale area and between October 30 and November 1 12 were visited. Seven of these were closely examined, namely Ashberry 1 and 2, Bucklands, Motts Hole, Murton Cave and Peak Scar 1 and 2. Antofts and Slip Gill had entrances and upper levels examined but Gowerdale 1 and 2 and Noddle End could not be examined without appropriate caving gear. The results were disappointing in that no specimens of Lesser Horseshoe were recovered but one Whiskered Bat (Myotis mystacinus) in Bucklands, two Natterer's Bats (Myotis nattereri) in Ashberry 1 and one Daubenton's Bat (Myotis daubentoni) at Motts Hole were found. The Natterer's record is a new one for the area. Dr Stebbings also confirmed the occurrence of Lesser Horseshoe and Brown Long-eared Bat (Plecotus auritus) and possibly the occurrence of Brandts Bat (Myotis brandti) all from the shape, size and location of droppings. He also speculated on the presence of Barbastelle (Barbastellus barbastellus) which like the Lesser Horseshoe is at the northern limit of its range and is recorded from the Helmsley area though not the pits. Seven of the 15 species of British bats may therefore use these caves during the year, particularly as hibernacula. The complex and fractured nature of the rock, with numerous crevices makes bat sighting difficult but scratchings around the crevices show that large numbers of bats use these sites and Dr Stebbings estimates a population of several hundred. The importance of the caves as a whole may be considerable and surrounding wooded, riperian and permanent pasture habitats are ideal for bats. Dr Stebbings believes that the caves may be used as winter roosts for an area covering several hundred square miles.

Following the current investigation Dr Stebbings has put certain management proposals to North Yorks Moors National Park and although some windypits are already SSSIs he believes further recommendations may be required. Further investigations are planned and the YMG Bat Section may also be involved in surveys. The story continues!

Barrie D S Smith

SECOND EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM ON BAT RESEARCH, BONN 1983.

Over 120 participants were present at the second European Symposium on Bat Research held in the Zoological Department of Bonn University from September 21 to 25 1983. They came from almost every country in Europe, including eastern Europe. Some, unfortunately, were unable to attend, including a party from Russia. The Zoological Department is now housed in the summer residency of Electors of Bonn and Cologne, which was built in 1792. This splendid and spacious Hanoverian building is surrounded by the Botanical Gardens.

There were eleven of us in the British group, and most of us contributed papers at the various sessions. The majority of contributions from participants were in English and German, but a few were in French. The highlights, for me, were papers given by Dr Robert Stebbings on bat conservation in Europe and worldwide at the beginning of the conference, Professor Neuweiller of West Germany on echolocation sound patterns, audiograms and foraging in echolocating bats and G Rother and Professor U Schmidt, a paper on ontogeny of vocalisation in the fruit eating bat (Phyllostomus discolor).

Other interesting British contributions were John Carrol's paper on the conservation and wild status of the Rodrigues Fruit Bat (Pteropus rodricensis), Susan Swift on the residual effect of timber treatments on bats, Mark Avery on winter activity of pipistrelle bats, Hugh Aldridge on high-speed photographic analysis of bat flight and Paul Racey's contribution on resource partitioning in two species of bats occupying the same roost. Two Swedish papers were of particular interest for me, namely R Gerell on the social structure in pipistrelle populations and Professor Ahlen's demonstration of an instrument for detecting bat and insect sounds.

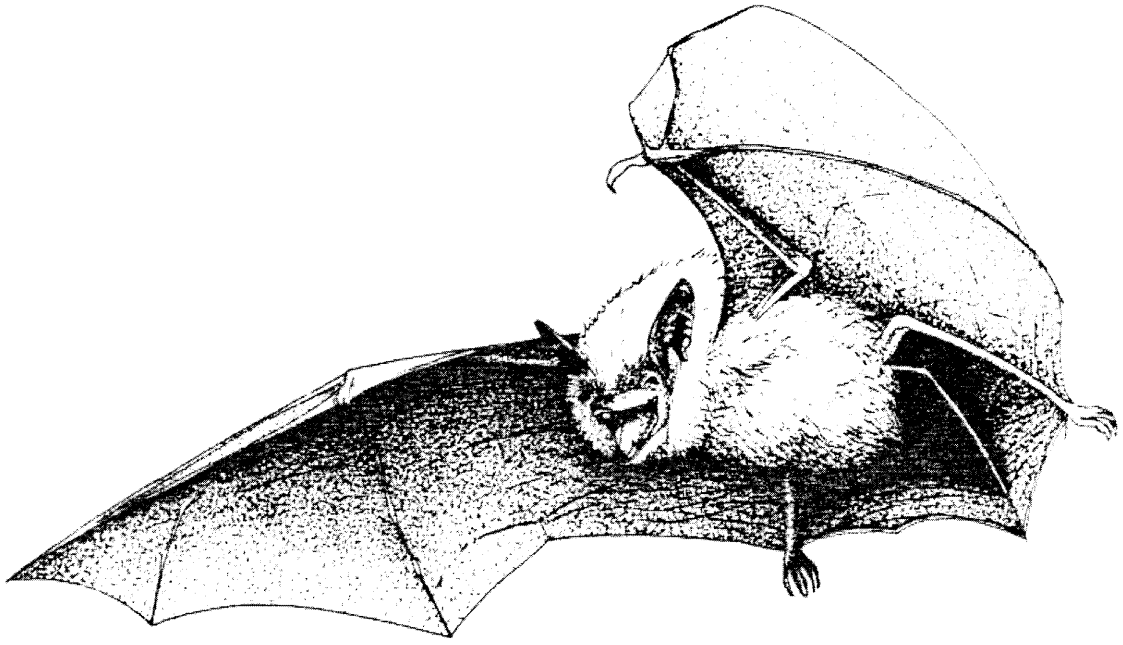
It was during the mid-session coffee breaks or at meal times, either in local restaurants or at the students' union buildings, that one got to know others at the conference. As the weather was excellent, there were many opportunities to wander around the Botanical Gardens or into the historic core of Bonn itself. The last day was the excursion day to Frankfurt Zoo, for a special guided tour around the nocturnal mammal house, one of the first of its sort in world zoos. In it we were shown a large colony of neo-tropical fruit bats. The return journey to Bonn was via the Rhine valley, with a stop for another guided tour around one of the many castles in the area. After going around Marksburg castle, we all sat on the terrace overlooking the Rhine on a perfect late September evening sipping the local hock.

For me, it was a most memorable and exciting few days in Germany. My thanks, and those of others present, must go to Professor Schmidt and the staff of the Zoological Department for their kind hospitality and excellent organization.

Michael J A Thompson

BAT NEWSLETTER

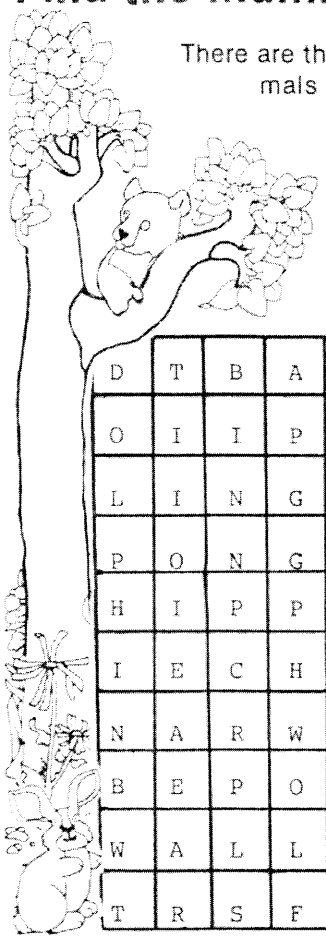
A new Newsletter for all those interested in the study and conservation of bats has been produced by Tony Mitchell-Jones and Bob Stebbings. It contains a lot of useful information including the law, dealing with bats and procedures. It is available from NCC, Godwin House, George Street, Huntingdon PE1 6BU.



Bat logo by Terry Coult, Durham Bat Group.

Puzzle Page

Find the Mammal Word-Game



There are the names of at least 30 mammals hidden in this grid of letters. Read letters up, down, across, diagonally or at an angle. Good luck!

B. Smith

D	T	B	A	D	G	E	R	O	E
O	I	I	P	E	D	O	E	E	M
L	I	N	G	E	R	H	D	L	O
P	O	N	G	R	E	Y	S	E	A
H	I	P	P	O	N	A	Q	P	L
I	E	C	H	I	D	E	U	H	I
N	A	R	W	H	A	L	I	A	O
B	E	P	O	T	T	O	R	N	N
W	A	L	L	A	B	Y	R	T	E
T	R	S	F	O	X	F	E	L	K

MAMMAL CROSSWORD 1 - ANSWERS

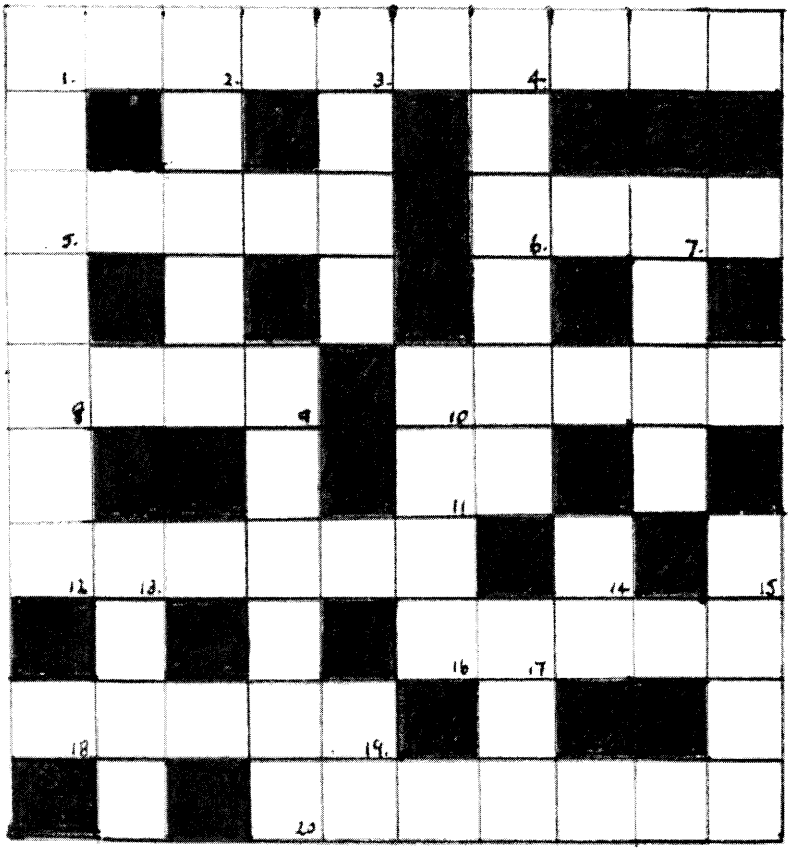
Across

1. Capybara
5. Marmot
6. End
7. Lynx
8. Item
9. Sus
10. Iris

Down

1. Camels
2. Pyrenees
3. Anteater
4. Apodemus

MAMMAL CROSSWORD 2



Across

1. Grieve to market and almost end for this mammal (4, 6)
5. Am all mixed up (5)
6. Round the bend to stab turned back (4)
8. What a cheetah can't retract (4)
10. Still burning bright in Siberia and some other Asian parts (5)
11. Neither he nor she (2)
12. Spiny insectivore of Madagascar (6)
16. Qantas flying mammal (5)
18. She was small and crafty to Janacek (5)
20. Britain's largest bat (7)

Down

1. Tom in Warsaw (7)
2. You might find this antelope in sunny Alabama? (5)
3. In me alas, when I'm full (4)
4. Jewish priest gets tea in the end (6)
7. With these 10 you know where you stand! (4)
9. Where coneys burrow (6)
10. Hear this parasite in alarm (4)
13. Come out backwards in time (4)
14. Rat loses tail for sun deity (2)
15. March box for one of this form (4)
17. Choose to lose to a potto (3)
19. Are whales fish? (2)

AN ATLAS OF YORKSHIRE MAMMALS - C A Howes

The Naturalist No 965 1983

Ten years of recording everything from squashed hedgehogs to urban foxes, examining the contents of owl pellets and fox droppings and monitoring the prey brought in by domestic cats, has culminated in the compilation of 'An Atlas of Yorkshire Mammals'.

Tens of thousands of records contributed by droves of enthusiasts (not least YMG members), local natural history societies, museum based 'data banks', nature reserves, country parks, bird ringing stations, etc., are made available as sets of 10 km square and tetrad distribution maps covering the five Yorkshire vice counties. Also included is a definitive check list of 83 Yorkshire mammals - the first since 1881. The 'Atlas' heralds a new era of county-wide mammal studies, so be in at the start of a new wave of recording. It's a must for your library, in fact, get a second copy to annotate in the field.

Copies are available from Dr M R D Seaward, (Editor of The Naturalist), University of Bradford, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD7 1DP The pricx is £2.00 (including postage and packing). Dr Seaward is kindly offering this publication at a special rate for Imprint readers since normal price does not include postage.

FASTING MANATEES

Amazonian manatees (Trichechus inunguis) feed on water plants but in the dry season supplies run low. It has been suggested that they are capable of going up to 200 days (7 months) without feeding, relying on supplies of blubber built up in times of plenty. They rely on an extremely low metabolic rate (36% of standard).

(Best R C., Biotropica 15 (1) 1983 : 61-64)

THE SWEET SMELL OF HOME

Sophisticated gas chromatographical analysis of faecal pellet odours of rabbits (Oryctolagus cuniculus) show that individuals recognize their own smell (or the smell of the anal gland secretion). Familiarity of their own smell in their own territory increases levels of confidence as manifested by aggressive and reproductive encounters and initiative. Also by characteristic postures and patterns of movement.

(Goodrick B S, Hesterman E R and Mykytowycz R, Journal Chemical Ecology 7 (6) : 947-959)

REVIEWS

HEDGEHOGS - Pat Morris, Whittet Books, Weybridge 1983 £3.95

There is a commonly held belief that there are 2 types of natural history publication - the academic and the popular and never the twain shall meet!

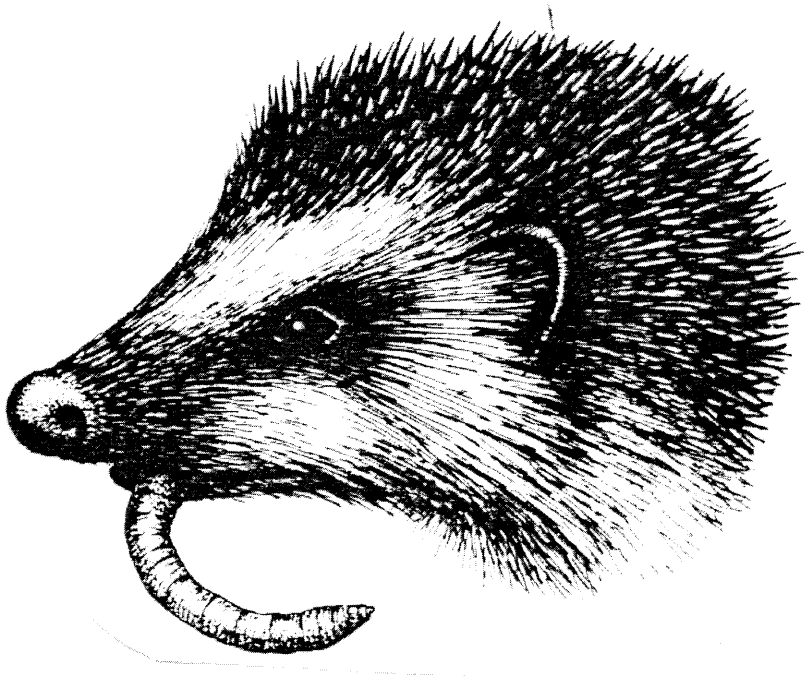


Illustration from 'Hedgehogs' by Guy Troughton

Pat Morris has done what few would dare try: he has combined the two and to my mind, done it brilliantly. This is a delightful book, peppered with whimsical illustrations by Guy Troughton. It is literally chock-a-block with information on hedgehogs but in such a palatable way that the facts are a doddle to assimilate. Dr Morris is a lecturer at Royal Holloway College and two of his ex-students tell me that his lectures were a joy. I can believe it!

All the questions you ever wanted to ask are answered here. Chapters include headings like 'Slug pellets - are they a hazard to hedgehogs?', 'Hedgehogs out and about, how far do they travel?' and 'Telling t'other from which'(sexing techniques!)

By the way, in case you didn't know, Dr Morris reckons that your average large hedgehog has 7,500 spines but for all the other burning questions nip out and buy the book!

Barrie D S Smith

YORKSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP

1984 Programme Spring/Summer

JANUARY Thursday 5	The World Wildlife Fund - Films on a mammal theme presented by Mrs Lynne Alderton, the Regional Organiser.
FEBRUARY Thursday 2	'The Art of Taxidermy' - David Astley, a York taxidermist.
MARCH Thursday 1	'Rodents and Tree Seeds' - Clare Knee of Westfield College, London University.
APRIL Thursday 5	'Radiotracking Red Squirrels' - Mel Tonkin of Merlewood Research Station, Grange-over-Sands.
MAY Thursday 3	'Farming and Wildlife' - Philip Moodie of MAFF, Beverley.
JUNE Thursday 7	'The Blackwoods Trap' - Ken Wilson reports on ten years of small mammal research at Blackwoods.

FURTHER DATES FOR 1984

December 14	M Clegg - 'A Naturalist's Year'.
February 14 7.30 p.m.	R Dennis on 'Highland Birds and their conservation'. RSPB at University Physics Lecture Theatre, University of York.
March 10 2.00 p.m. (Afternoon session) 6.00 p.m. (Evening session)	YNU joint meeting on Birds and Mammals. H Arnold on 'Biological Records and bat conservation'. W Gott and M D Lloyd on 'Birdwatching around Bradford' and D Herringshaw on 'Goshawks' at University of Bradford. (Tea and light refreshments available).
March 3	YNU Symposium on Natural History - Heworth Croft Science Laboratories, College of Ripon and York St John, York.
March 23 7.30 p.m.	Chislett Memorial Lecture. T Birkhead on 'Birds in the Arctic Environment' at University of Leeds.
April 6-9	Mammal Society AGM at the University of Aberdeen. Contact Dr P A Racey, Dept of Zoology, Tillydrone Ave., Aberdeen AB9 2TN for details.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Contributions for Imprint will normally be under 500 words but those up to 1,000 words would be acceptable for a major item. Full articles, notes, news and field reports principally of Yorkshire interest and within the broad field of Mammalogy are in scope. Notice of coming meetings are very welcome and contributors should bear in mind Imprint's publication dates in June and December. Lighter, humorous articles are also welcome but the Editor's discretion must be accepted!

Whilst not essential, it helps if articles are typed with titles in capitals. Please add an address for inclusion at the end. In notes and major articles, all vernacular names should include the latinized form when used for the first time, underlining genus and species. Contributors should remember to acknowledge reference to other publications mentioned in the text by listing them separately at the end of the item.