

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As you will know, 1986 is the Year of the Bat and with this in mind the bat section have been active from the start formulating new "bat teams" which are available for loft inspections and identification of species, continuing their work for the N.C.C. Indeed several members attended a bat workers seminar at Nottingham University in February and Dr. Bob Stebbings will be speaking to the group on bats in the middle of May. More "batty" news later on in the newsletter.

December 1985 saw an almost complete change of committee. As no Field Studies Advisor was elected, an extra committee member was chosen to work with the three other non-executive committee members to undertake this role on a rotational basis.

The beginning of March brought the Annual Dinner - a welcome respite from winter field meetings - among the unusual and luxurious setting of a Pullman Carriage at a restaurant just outside York.

Later in March the first trap of the year at Hopewell House Farm, Knaresborough was held in conjunction with the Harrogate Naturalists. Once again we were delighted to trap several harvest mice (*Micromys minutus*) at this site.

April saw the Mammal Society Conference being held locally this year at Ripon. Indeed one of our members, Dr. Carolyn Sharp, presented the results of 10 years trapping at Black Woods, Wheldrake. There was a good attendance by Y.M.G. members and Ron Deaton organised a nature walk at a local farm, with a total of 9 species being either trapped or seen during the course of the afternoon. A personal highlight was seeing a hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) in hibernaculum.

Later in the month 8 bat boxes were sited at Askham Bog near York and in an inspection, a week later, one was found to contain a family of blue tits - it's early days yet but it's rewarding to know that at least one of our native species has put it to good use.

We were also invited to carry out trapping for the Forestry Commission at Wharncliffe Wood near Sheffield in April, but unfortunately only two individuals were caught, both being common shrew (*Sorex araneus*). As yet we have found no satisfactory explanation for this.

Once again Y.M.G. will be holding a Field Studies Council course on mammals at Malham Tarn Field Centre during the summer recess.

Whether you're actively searching out new species or sunning yourself on a beach - have a good summer.

HELEN ELLERKER.

National Year of the Bat 1986

History of the Conservation of Bats in Britain

Dr R.E. Stebbings, Monks Wood Experimental Station, Abbot Ripton, Huntingdon.

Designation of 1986 as National Bat Year in Britain was the culmination of many years of trying to develop an awareness amongst people at large of the plight of bats. Over the past thirty years I have seen how public opinion has changed, as perceived by reactions and comments of reporters and householders on hearing the word 'bats'. In the 1950's and early 1960's the almost invariable reaction was of inherent dislike or fear of bats, but now few people express similar views. How has this change come about?

Until the late 1950's there was only a scattered handful of naturalists interested in bat studies in Britain. At this time little was known of the natural history of these animals and nothing of possible changes in their distribution or abundance. Following the formation of the Mammal Society in 1954, an informal group of members initiated the Society's bat group. The main purpose was to design and produce bat rings: firstly, ones which were less damaging than the various types already being used by five or six people, and secondly to have an inscription on them (LOND ZOO) which might be recognisable by the public. Michael Blackmore, Britain's leading bat man, oversaw these formative years. Thus the first conservation efforts were to try to limit the damage we biologists were causing by poor quality rings.

In 1957 the Dutch biologists Sluiter and Heerdt published results showing the damaging effects of disturbing and ringing bats in hibernacula and in 1958 Gilbert and Stebbings showed bats disappeared from roosts following disturbance. These discoveries were important because they coloured my line of interest thereafter. Much of my subsequent bat work (still as an amateur) was designed to measure what level of disturbance was tolerated by bats, before their behaviour patterns were changed (Stebbins 1966, 1969).

A ring design developed by John Hooper was adopted by the Mammal Society, and while this was better than most others it still caused injury to some bats. Joe Pickvance took over from Blackmore and decided that zero injury was the only valid goal. This aim was more or less achieved by 1970.

However, the next significant step towards the conservation of bats in Britain came in December 1960, three months after I moved to Dorset. On visiting some greater horseshoe (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) hibernacula, I saw large piles of droppings but only a few bats. Enquiries revealed people who remembered seeing and photographing clusters containing hundreds of bats in the 1940's and 1950's. Were the bats roosting elsewhere or had they died out? In 1961 I found the (previously unknown) major