The yellow necked mouse - A history of its discovery in Yorkshire.

C.A. Howes, Museum and Art Gallery, Doncaster.

The recording of the yellow-necked mouse (Apodemus flavicollis) in Yorkshire has suffered from a history of false starts and doubtful identifications, a major problem being that some individuals of the smaller wood mouse *(Apodemus sylvaticus)* also sport a yellow chest spot or stripe. Was this jumbo-sized mouse, with its splendid yellow chest-band, really a Yorkshire resident or were we wasting our time searching for it?

In 1977 small mammal enthusiasts were greatly encouraged by Dr. David Cork's tantalising study (Mammal Review 1977, 7 (3-4): 123-130) which speculated that the species was under recorded nationally. Based on a bit of imaginative matching up of distribution maps, charts of climatic zones and topographical features, he suggested that *A.flavicollis* could be expected to occcur in low-lying woodland, within areas of low annual rainfall, which have a February mean temperature above 1.4°C. This made possible a potential distribution range which extended up the east of England, through the lowland and drier parts of Yorkshire and north into Northumberland.

Dr. W.I. Montgomery (Mammal Review 1978, 8 (4): 177-184), employing yet more imagination and yet more statistics, honed the data to an even finer grade of meaningfulness, demonstrating a strong association with zones of dry soil types - populations being restricted to the driest areas within these zones. Further, he demonstrated a marked preference for mixed deciduous woodland, the largest populations occurring in the more mature forest sectors.

Armed with this model of habitat preference and potential range, it was tempting to speculate that uncharted populations may indeed exist in the remnants of mature woodland in the 'tropics' of South Yorkshire, the wooded valleys of the magnesian limestone woodland, on the Wolds and into the mature sheltered south facing woodland of the Helmsley/Pickering region.

Almost precisely as predicted by the Cork and Montgomery blueprint, Dr. Roy Brown (in Delaney, M.J. (Ed) 1984, Yorkshire Mammals, University of Bradford) reported that he had identified a partly decomposed specimen from a wood near Bawtry on the South Yorkshire/Nottinghamshire border, the skulls of two specimens from tawny owl pellets collected from near Driffield and a badly decomposed specimen (possibly of *A. Flavicollis)* at Wass near Helmsley.

Not specifically mentioned in Roy's account were two earlier Yorkshire records. During the early 1950's Robert Callick photographed a tawny owl carrying a large *Apodemus* sp. in a wood at Cawthorne - the prey item was identified as *A. flavicollis* by Dr. H.N.Southern. In August 1956 an occupied nest was found near Conisbrough Castle (Hazelwood, A. Naturalist 1957, 82: 9-10).

Further support for the Cork/Montgomery distribution theory comes from Lincolnshire, where yellow-necked mice have been reported from near Boston and at Gibraltar Point in the south and Caistor and Winterton in the north (Johnson, M. 1982, Atlas of Mammals, Reptiles and Amphibians of Linconshire and South Humberside, L.N.U. and Arnold, H.R. 1984, Distribution of Mammals of the British Isles, B.R.C. Abbots Ripton).

Badger Symposium

The Mammal Society are holding a one day symposium on badger *(Meles meles)* biology at the University of Southampton on Saturday the 28th of June, 1986. Details are available from the Conference Secretary - Dr Stephen Harris, University of Bristol, Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1UG. The fee is £5. Topics include feeding, ecology, territorial behaviour and the epizootiology of bovine tuberculosis.