Bats for an afternoon

Mary Youngman, 4, Breary Close, York.

On Saturday, 11th October, the Fauna & Flora Preservation Society presented 'Bats for an Afternoon.' at London's South Bank Centre, with an aim to "raise pubic awareness of these sensitive and threatened animals."

Exhibitions in the foyer included a display on Monkton Bat Cave project in Kent (the construction of artificial caves using manhole concrete sections), and many spectacular photographs, of particular note were the contributions of R. Stebbings and F. Greenaway.

The main programme consisted of three lectures:- 'Bat Conservation in Britain' by Tony Hutson, 'The Bionic Bat' by David Pye and 'Can we survive without Bats' by Bob Stebbings. David Pye's lecture demonstrated the latest bat detection equipment and was especially interesting. The talks were interspersed with BBC film clips and made a thoroughly entertaining afternoon.

Batty Bits

In the controversy surrounding bats and disease, especially rabies, an interesting and relevant article by D.G. Constantine was published (in Australia Mammals 1985 8 p.325-329) on disease exchange between bats and bat researchers. A survey of the pathogenic micro-organisms of bats, which are of foremost interest to humans, is produced with the associated problems and suggested precautions.

On the whole, it seems that humans pose a larger threat to bats, as far as disease transmission is concerned - by inadvertent cross infection of bat colonies and exposure to human microbial pathogens. Practical preventative steps are given and the article is unsensationally informative throughout.

Humans are not the only problem which bats have, according to a note from Alberta, Canada. Hochachka and Scharf report their observations of black-billed magpies (*Pica pica*) predating on little brown bats (*Myotis lucifugus*) and big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*). In Canadian Field Naturalist 1986 100 (1) p.121-122, they described how they watched as a magpie actively pursued a flying bat for about half a minute and actually found the bird eating the bat amongst some scrub afterwards. They record two other sightings of bat predation by the birds. This represents the first conclusive report of bats as prey species for magpies. The only other corvids known to prey on bats are blue jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) and an African crow species. I wonder if British magpies have such prey predilections?

ED.

Disappearing Forest Wildlife

Kate Fuller, 138, Clifton, York.

The 'Disappearing Forest Wildlife' exhibition, which opened at the Yorkshire Museum in June, highlights the worldwide destruction of forests and the dire ecological consequences of this process. Forests constitute an important resource for mankind and the need for conservation and careful management is emphasised.

The exhibition provides a good opportunity to see threatened forest species in reconstructions of their natural habitats, which include European forests, British forests and rain forests. Mammals are well represented and there is a rare chance to see a display featuring the giant panda (*Ailuropoda melanleuca*).

Other endangered mammals on display include the aye aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*), probably on the verge of extinction, the tree porcupine (*Coendou*), the tiger (*Leo tigris*), the mountain gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla*) and several rare monkeys.

More familiar British and European species are also featured, including spectacular mounted specimens of the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), the pine marten (*Martes martes*) and the beaver (*Castor fiber*).

Giant Panda

Answers to the mammal crossword in no.7

Across	Down
1. Pole cat	2. Otter
3. *Mus*	4. Shrew
5. Stag	6. *Sus*
7. Dormouse	7. Deer
12. *Apodemus*	8. Bats
13. Vole	9. Water
14. Rat	10. Fox
15. Grey seal	11. *Talpa*