

## Chairman's report

1986 has once again seen a varied and interesting programme of events for members of Y.M.G. - both by virtue of the excellent speakers at indoor meetings and field work done throughout the year. As no Field Studies Advisor (F.S.A.) was elected for 1986 an additional non-executive Committee member was appointed and members of Committee carried out the field work between them and I would like to thank them for their support in this. Unfortunately no F.S.A. has, as yet, been appointed for 1987.

1986 saw the culmination of trapping on two long term sites - Blackwoods, a Forestry Commission reserve near York and Hopewell House Farm near Knaresborough in conjunction with the Demonstration Farm Project. Both have proved very successful but this now leaves the way clear for the group to trap on new sites and expand the types of field work covered. As 1986 was the 'Year of the Bat' there was a great deal of activity by the Bat Section who have continued their work in conjunction with the N.C.C.. They also ran a stall at a local Fayre selling Bat Memorabilia to raise money. And two very active "batters" in the group (Dr M. Thompson and Leslie Helliwell) showed some of the work they were doing towards bat conservation in an episode of the popular television wildlife programme 'Clegg's People'.

We have again had a slight increase in membership but group funds remain low and it is becoming increasingly more difficult to fund the groups activities, there have been several suggestions as to how to boost funds but no decisions have been reached as yet.

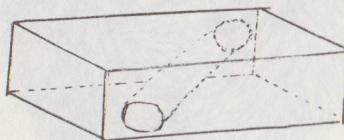
On behalf of the Y.M.G. Committee I would like to wish all members and friends of the group a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Helen C. Ellerker

## Bat Bricks

AVH INTERBRICK LTD. have agreed to manufacture 'Bat Bricks' for the British market. Bat bricks allow bats access into buildings through an oblique hole, which also gives weather protection from rain and snow. These bricks will be available in two sizes; 65mm. (for new buildings) and 73mm. (for old buildings). The price will be approximately £4.50 per brick.

Mr. Ungley (NCC York) will answer any enquiries and will shortly be receiving a sample brick. Telephone York 415722.



## "Are you sure?"

R.H. Deaton, 20, Hill Top Road, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 3AN.

From time to time friends, acquaintances, people I've never met before and fellow naturalists tell me about their various mammal sightings. Some are mundane. Others are extremely interesting. I listen to them all. But, unless I know that the person concerned is a 'reliable' observer, I invariably find myself asking the question, "Are you sure?" Why the caution?

Well, bats are notoriously difficult to identify; some small mammals can - and do - pose the occasional problem; many have difficulty with deer and there's even confusion with carnivores. In my view the whole business of mammal identification is a veritable minefield and I make no apology for admitting that, with very few exceptions, I only 'accept' mammal records if I happen to know that the person concerned is familiar with the species.

If this principal hadn't been rigidly applied, then recent records might suggest that Harrogate has, amongst other things, a thriving population of red squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*), that the River Nidd is still a stronghold for the otter (*Lutra lutra*) and the Nidd Gorge is home of the white tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)!

Sadly, it is now over twenty years since the last authenticated record of a red squirrel at Harrogate but reports persist. What people are almost certainly seeing are grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*), some of which have reddish-brown fur on their back and flank. The growing number of 'otter' sightings in Nidderdale are probably attributable to American mink (*Mustela vison*). Although the presence of red squirrels at Harrogate and otters on the Nidd isn't impossible the report of 'exotic' deer in the Nidd Gorge almost certainly is. The latter report coincided with the closure of Knaresborough Zoo and the observer believed that, rather than risk animals being destroyed, the owner of the zoo might liberate them in the adjacent Nidd Gorge. Such ideas were ill-founded and the RSPCA carefully controlled the disposal of the entire collection of birds and animals. A deer certainly was seen in the Gorge - roe (*Capreolus capreolus*) are quite common - and its identity retrospectively checked in the mammal handbook. The 'exotic' was selected and its highly unlikely occurrence supported the 'Zoo theory'. What the observer didn't think to check was whether the Zoo had ever had any white-tailed deer. Unfortunately - or perhaps fortunately - it hadn't!

A spate of 'big cat' sightings in and around Harrogate also coincided with the closure of the Zoo. Even though extensive searches failed to find tracks, or any other evidence to substantiate the presence of a 'big cat', several people insisted that an unidentified - and perhaps dangerous - animal was at large in the North Yorkshire countryside. How can these and similar sightings be satisfactorily explained? Was it a dog? Or perhaps a cat? There are certainly feral cats (*Felis catus*) resident in and around the Gorge. Who knows?

I never cease to be amazed by people who can