British Mammal Society 1987 Conference - A.G.M. at Hereford

This year the lovely town of Hereford was the venue for 200 members of the British Mammal Society for the conference and A.G.M. Five members of Y.M.G. attended. The conference was opened on Friday evening When Dr Malcolm Coe gave the third Cranbrook Memorial Lecture on 'Large herbivores and acacia seed dispersal in Africa.'

Saturday brought a wider variety of subjects from toxicology of small mammals in heavy metal contaminated woodlands to the prey catching behaviour in the European mole (*Talpa europaea*). We saw marvellous photographs of Daubenton's bats (*Myotis daubentoni*) in flight snatching insects from water surfaces. Y.M.G. member Dr Michael Thompson spoke on his work on the longevity of female pipistrelle bats (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) in the Vale of York, this caused much interest however the projector was the only rebel in the conference hall! Dr Carolyn Sharpe also sent a pictorial display of work done by the group over a six year period at Hopewell House Farm, Knaresborough.

Saturday afternoon was a complete dormouse foray - a whole series of papers devoted to this little studied forest slumberer (*Muscardinus avellanarius*). Y.M.G. is starting its own mini dormouse project in North Yorkshire this summer.

Much celebration was indulged in under the auspices of the Conference Dinner, to wit - a few grey faces on Sunday morning - Iain Linn's lively paper on carnivores of the Wahiba Sands, Oman. Other old friends spoke including Paul Thompson, 'Grey Seals'; Paddy Sheenan 'The Irish Stoat'; Michael Delany 'Mammals of Oman' and Stephen Harris on the Mammal Society Badger Survey.

Sunday morning brought a diversion of a different angle as B. Burtran, mammal curator of London Zoo, spoke about the problems of breeding captive animals and the International Directory of Endangered Species that the Zoo is helping to collate.

Excursions were held on Sunday afternoon, I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to a breeding herd of red deer.

On a less happy note regrettably absent was Nick Southern, co-editor of the British Mammal Society Handbook, who died last year - he will be greatly missed by a lot of people.

Next year the conference will be held again at the College of St John in Ripon and Y.M.G. will be organising the field trips. So that's all until next year except a last question, that conjures up a picture of a giraffe complete with flying helmet and goggles, how do you get a 20foot giraffe under a 17foot motorway bridge?

Helen Ellerker

Early fox cubs

Ken Burden, 'Oak Cottage', 3, Primrose Vale, Knottingley.

The following account was told to me by a colleague at work, which taking into account the time of year I find most unusual. The local milkman was the first to mention seeing a family of foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), a vixen with at least three cubs, in the fields between the villages of Little Smeaton (SE 525 167) and Norton (SE 545 153), telling the brother of my informant of their presence. On the morning of the 25th February 1987, this worthy sallied forth to see the foxes for himself, for he considered it far too early in the year for fox cubs to be seen above ground. As he drove past an area known locally as Spittlerush, between the two aforementioned villages at about 0830hrs, he saw an adult fox standing in a field beside the River Went at SE 535 157. Parking his car the man got out to allow himself a better look around, and saw almost immediately three fox cubs in a field about 100 yards south west of the adult fox. Within this distance separating the animals was a minor road. As the man watched the adult fox threw back its head and gave what was described as a scream, at which the cubs ran towards it. They took a circular route, crossing the road at the other side of the bend from the watcher, preventing him seeing them as they did so. Re-united, the vixen, for that's what the adult fox surely was, led the cubs over a slight rise in the ground and was lost from view. Walking over to where he had last seen them, the watcher could find no trace of the family of foxes.

After a lifetimes interest in and roaming the countryside, I have never seen or heard of, fox cubs above ground as early as February, but see no reason to doubt the authenticity of this record.

Pipped to the Post

A fossil mammal from Germany *Leptictidium nasutum* mastered the art of bipedal running 45 million years before the only other bipedal running mammal, *Homo sapiens*.

Storch and Lister described this animal in 1985 (Senckenbergiana Lethaea 66 p. 1-37) and transferred the genus from the order Insectivora to an extinct placental order Proteutheria. From recent discoveries of complete skeletons, they have been able to analyse its functional morphology in relation to its locomotion (Natur und Museum 1986 116 p. 1-19). From these studies they have been able to dismiss any theories of bipedal jumping.

Looking like something of a cross between a shrew and a kangaroo, measuring only 75cms, this strange creature took to its hind legs and pipped us to the post way back in the Middle Eocene!
Ed.