

Chairman's Report

Right from the start of 1987 Y.M.G. have dived enthusiastically into studying mammals on new sites and relatively new species to the group. As we again have no Field Studies Advisor this year the Committee and volunteers from the membership have endeavoured to carry on the full field programme with great success. A favourite area of woodland bordering the River Ure was surveyed in January and we were especially pleased to see signs of the return of otter (*Lutra lutra*) for the first time in several years.

March means Annual Dinner - we enjoyed a sumptuous feast at a local hotel preferring to stay close to home during the cold wintry weather. March also saw the return of the group to Hopewell House Farm, Knaresborough assisted by the Harrogate Nats.

In April we stretched our brains with our first open night and mammal quiz - an event much enjoyed by all, winners and losers alike, we hope to have another one next year. Later in April the group trapped at the Willow Garth Reserve, near Knottingley; Ken Burden and his Committee have done wonders with this reserve over the last couple of years and it promises a host of field work for the group and birdwatchers alike.

Several members travelled to Hereford to the British Mammal Society A.G.M., a very stimulating weekend which has been partly instrumental in sparking off the study of dormouse in North Yorkshire by Y.M.G.

A sunny if cool weekend in May saw several members trekking down to Suffolk to spend a day at the Otter Trust at Bungay - it was lovely to see these normally shy but playful mammals in their semi-natural Haven, we were especially happy to hear of the recent breeding success of youngsters re-introduced to the wild from the Trust. Our summer promises to be action packed with bats and badgers, dormice, water vole, water shrew and who knows what else we'll find.... it will all be in the next issue!

Helen Ellerker

Answers to the Mammal Crossword in No.8

Across

1. Dromedary
4. Noctule
7. Serval
8. Ratel
10. Saki
12. Marten

Down

1. *Dinoceras*
2. Aye aye
3. Pangolin
5. Civet
6. Wolverine
9. Boar
11. Ai

An undescribed hedgehog virus?

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Out during the day, hyperactive, ravenously hungry, green faeces - those of you who take in sick hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) might know these symptoms. Once inside, it is clear that the hyperactivity is a result of hypothermia, the hog is looking for anywhere that is warm. In this connection the excessive eating might be a way of trying to produce extra, metabolic, heat. No matter how well looked after, in a day or two appetite falls off and the hog goes into a slow decline ending in death. We have seen more than half a dozen hogs in this condition, mostly during late summer or autumn. Until a couple of years ago we assumed poison was to blame, possibly a result of eating slug pelleted molluscs.

In early August 1985, we were given a nine day old orphan hog whose nest had been disturbed. The mother had moved her litter to a new home but had left Spike behind. We reared him successfully and he had the run of our kitchen. At the beginning of September, two hogs with the syndrome described above were delivered to us from different parts of York. They lived in the kitchen and had intimate contact with Spike. Two days after the arrival of the first sick hog, and before either had died, it was obvious that Spike was showing the same symptoms. It was only with considerable effort that we kept him alive. At times we were down to force-feeding him on glucose-saline. For weeks his staple diet was bread, milk and Complan - nothing else would raise a flicker of interest. At last he began to pull through and eventually regained normal health. He was released to the wild the following May.

Where does this leave the poisoning hypothesis? It seems very unlikely that a poison could have spread from one hog to another in sufficient quantity to produce the symptoms. The coincidence of the arrival of the new hogs and Spike's illness suggests an infectious agent. Whatever it was, it didn't seem to be bacterial since a shot of antibiotic from our vet had no effect at all on Spike's condition. That leaves a parasite or a virus. The speed of Spike's decline seems to rule out the parasite, which would require a much longer incubation period. So, is there an undescribed viral disease of hedgehogs, or was it just coincidence that Spike's illness coincided with the appearance of the sick hogs? We have described these events to Pat Morris but he is as baffled as we are. If anyone else has had a similar experience with hedgehogs, we would be very interested to hear from them.