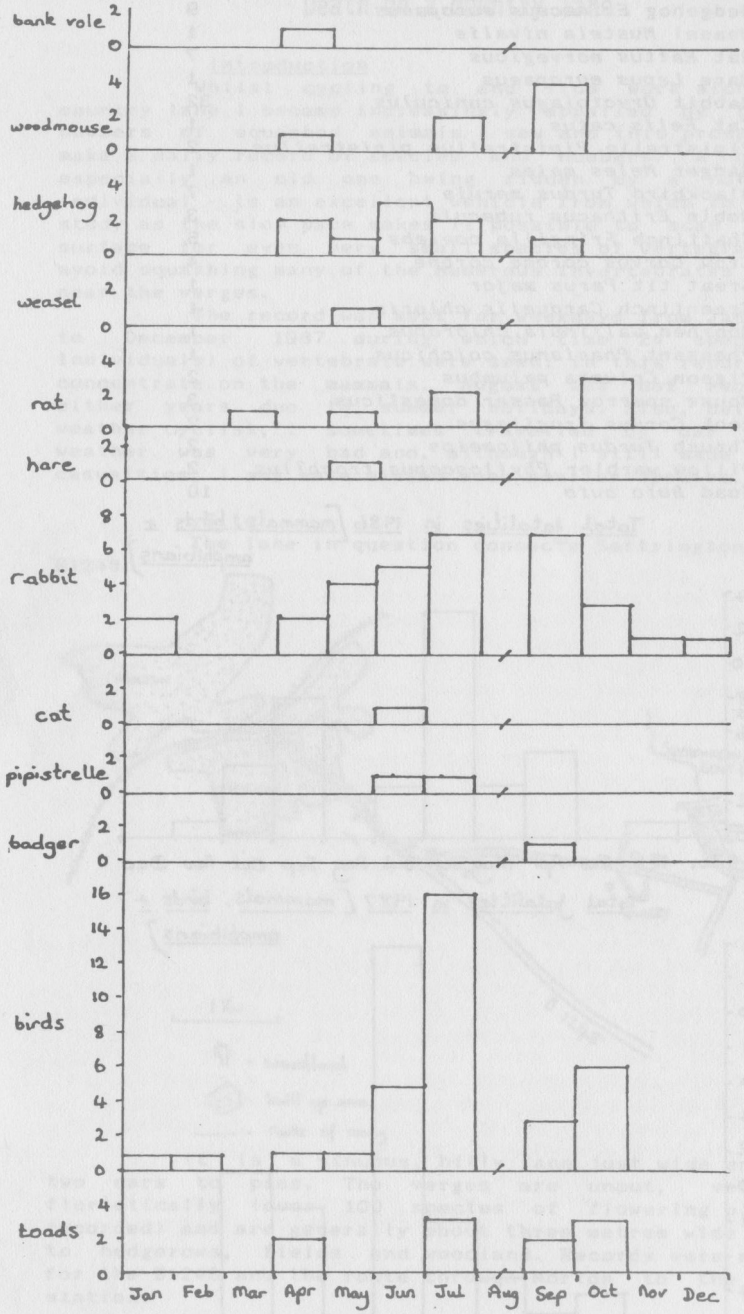
Total fatalities [1986 and 1987 combined]



Discussion

The most striking observation made, was that of the 106 casualties, 103 occurred on the country lane, only two on the relatively busy B1248 (hare and rat) and one in the town (hedgehog). This is presumably related to the traffic frequency. Vehicles travel often enough on the main road, during the day at least, to provide a constant threat which can be avoided, whereas the lane is quiet for most of the time thus lulling the animals into a false sense of security. Another reason for this discrepancy could be the height of the verges, those on the lane are left to grow whereas those on the main road are cut frequently. This can affect the fatality figures in two ways, firstly those animals om the verges of the main road would have a clear view of the traffic whereas those on the verges of the lane would not be able to see the traffic until they were actually on the tarmac, also the tall vegetation may muffle the sound of oncoming vehicles somewhat. Linked to this is the sinuous nature of the lane compared to the straight main road. I am not suggesting that animals pause on the edge of the verge to stop, look and listen but the distribution of casualties on the road tends to suggest that it may be a factor, fatalities tended to appear along bends in the lane and near the brows of hills. (One hedgehog I became acquainted with certainly did not stop to look and listen, it was observed several times purposefully setting out from the same place in the verge to cross the lane, on two occasions I helped it on its way by carrying it across to the other side.) Secondly, and perhaps more likely, this phenomenon may be due to the drivers having insufficient time to take avoiding action in these conditions of reduced visibility.

Another striking but not surprising feature of the records is the seasonality of the fatalities. This is probably related to the activity patterns of the animals, especially as the winter of 1986-7 was quite bad with snow covering the lane for about three weeks. Seasonality may also be related to breeding cycles, many of the rabbits killed in the summer months were juveniles.

Apart from seasonality, records revealed that there were some particularly bad days, for example, on the 7th July 1987, 9 animals were killed, the reasons for these peaks are obscure. They may be related to weather conditions, lunar cycles, a drunken party in the village or some other strange phenomenon. To make the study more worthwhile it would be useful to make note of some possible influencing factors and also whether the animals were first noticed in the morning or the evening, this latter factor was not recorded but my general impression was that most observations were made in the morning, the fatalities thus ocurring during the night and twilight hours, probably relating back to activity patterns.

It is certainly worth making a daily record when conducting such a study as casual observations may be influenced by the time taken for the animal's remains to disappear from the road surface. Frequent observation over a short distance makes it possible to take this into account. It was noticed that a squashed hedgehog could still be recognisable as much as three weeks later but rabbits and pheasants could disappear very quickly indeed! (In fact deer