there are so few in the area and why they are not breeding, as a feasability analysis for a sanctuary. Identification is difficult, since the common seal is easily confused with the grey seal and the two species haul out together on the Tees Estuary. The most useful diagnostic features are head shape and the position of the nostrils.

The Tees population of the common seal is quite isolated. Historical records reveal that in the 1800s there was a large population here, making the Tees Estuary one of the most important sites in Britain for this species. Today only 5% of the original intertidal habitat remains. After the industrialisation of the 1860s, virtually no seals were left in the Tees Estuary.

Counts of common seals at Teesmouth in 1989 revealed that the population is not likely to exceed 30 individuals. A maximum of 18 grey seals are believed to inhabit the area. The grey seal breeds on rocky islands and only the common seal breeds in estuaries.

Haul out site use of the common seal changes seasonally relative to moulting, which takes place from August to September. Only one common seal pup was observed on the Tees in 1989 and this died at four days old after being abandoned. Postmortem analysis revealed that it had died of starvation but it was not suffering from any viral disease. Indeed, there is no evidence for seals' deaths due to virus on the Tees. The failure to breed may be due to disturbance from shipping, but since boating is prevented in side channels, this seems unlikely. Pollution is another possible influencing factor. Dead animals have been analysed and the results show that heavy metal levels are not unduly high. PCB's have been shown to interfere with seal breeding, but resuls are not yet available for tissue levels in common seals on the Tees.

P. Bright: Ecology of the dormouse and its relationship with woodland conservation.

The dormouse is the only small mammal with a hairy tail. Its toes and fingers are adapted to an arboreal lifestyle. Radio tracking is possible, but the transmitter must be very small. The animal spends all its time in the trees, sometimes climbing high into the canopy using its tail as a balance. It needs a network of near horizontal branches for routeways through the wood, so habitat structure is important. The dormouse forages on the tips of branches, eating flowers in spring, berries and nuts in autumn. Food availability surveys show a gap in midsummer, which could be a time of food shortage. The dormouse needs a diversty of plant species to ensure a year-round food supply. Its fur is poorly water repellent so the animal is not very active in the rain. In summer, it may lower its body temperature, inducing torpor in order to conserve energy.

Litter size is small (approximately four) and one to two litters a year are produced in May to September. The dormouse can breed very late in the year, but often these young do not survive the winter. It has a low population density of 10-12 animals per hectare, making it very vulnerable. Lack of woodland management adversely affects the dormouse and the decline in coppicing may have contributed to population decline. The British climate is not reliable, with unpredictable winter temperatures. Temperatures in general have been more extreme this century.

Records show that dormouse numbers in Britain have declined since the 1930s, regardless of observer effort.

Ed.

SIXTH NATIONAL BAT CONFERENCE

LIVERPOOL 8-10th SEPTEMBER 1989

250 delegates from Britain and Europe assembled for a two day conference at Liverpool University. This annual event is becoming increasingly popular, with this latest receiving the highest attendance yet. The lectures and workshops were held in the Herculaneum Room at Carnatic House, and in some of the adjacent colleges. The contributions were variable and of a high standard, mostly relating to bat conservation programmes in Britain, as this was the main subject of the conference.

The four main sessions were chaired by well known chiropterists Bob Stebbings, Paul Racey, Phil Richardson and Tony Hutson. Only two of the papers had an entirely scientific content. The first was on the development of flight and echolocation in pipistrelles by Pat Hughes and Gareth Jones of Bristol University, and the second was by Peter Lina of the Netherlands on how bats use the landscape. This latter lecture helped me to understand more fuly some of the movements of pipistrelle bats within the York study area.

Not all the lectures were related to British bats. Paul Racey gave a thought provoking talk entitled '*Pteropus* problems in the Pacific', in which he described some of the problems facing conservationists in this part of the world, especially as bats are still part of the human diet. The outlook for these large bats, which include the flying foxes, is not good, especially in parts of Australia, where there have been conflicts between bat conservation and quarrying interests. Hans-Peter Stutz contributed with a lecture about bat conservation in Switzerland. Another contribution about bats in foreign