MAMMAL NEWS

OTTER COUNT

In a recent study in Shetland, Kruuk et al investigated the numbers and habitat use of otters. They found that holts tended to be associated with peaty coasts and fresh water.

They estimate the adult population on Shetland to be 700-900. This small number together with its isolation, means that otters on Shetland are relatively vulnerable.

Ref: Kruuk, H. ; Moorhouse, A. ; Conroy, J.W.H. ; Durban, L. and Frears, S.
Biological Conservation 49 (1989)

HAWK HARASSMENT

A note appeared in a recent issue of British Birds describing the unsuccessful attempts of a sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* to prey on foraging noctule bats *Nyctalus noctula*. Although the bird was very persistent in attack, the bats easily evaded its attentions.

Ref: Roworth, P. & Wright, E.
British Birds 82 No 11 (1989)

SUB ZERO SQUIRRELS

The first mammal known to tolerate body temperatures below freezing is the arctic ground squirrel, *Spermophilus parryii*. Brian Barnes has discovered that during hibernation the animal's abdominal temperature can fall to as low as - 2.9 C. Despite this, the squirrel does not actually freeze but remains in a supercooled state. It is thought that the squirrel allows its body temperature to drop so low in order to conserve energy.

Ref: Barnes, B. Science 244 (1989)
New Scientist 29/7/1989

DORMOUSE CAPTIVE PROPAGATION

At the request of Dr Pat Morris, a captive group of dormouse, *Muscadinus avellanarius*, has been established at London Zoo with the eventual aim of reintroducing captive bred animals into suitable habitat. Under the provisions of a special license, ten animals were captured in Devon in 1988 and the group has been divided into five unrelated pairs, housed in the zoo's Charles Clore Pavillion. The first young were expected around June 1989. It is hoped that the animals may eventually be put on show to the public in addition to providing an opportunity for study.

Ref: Rodway, P.
Zoo News Summer 1989

THE THIN RED LINE

The red squirrel, *Sciurus vulgaris*, is in danger of becoming extinct in Britain, ecologists Robert Kenwood and Jessica Holm have warned. This is due to the competitive advantage of the grey squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*, which, unlike the red squirrel, can readily digest acorns. Consequently, the red squirrel is only likely to hold out in areas of conifer forest - a habitat currently plentiful in northern Britain. However, even this situation may change as the Scottish climate warms, making the region potentially more attractive to oaks and therefore to grey squirrels. Perhaps the best hope fopr the red squirrel is for colonies to be established on islands inaccessible to grey squirrels. This has already been accomplished on Furzey Island in Poole Harbour.

Ref: Timson, J.
New Scientist 4/11 1989

ROAD DEATHS ANALYSIS

It is interesting to compare P.N. Johnson's account of avian and mammalian traffic mortality along a Yorkshire road with Nicola Wise's analyis of the same subject. The two authors studied differing roads - Johnson looked at a 1 km section of the A19 near Askern, while Wise's survey took place on a quiet country lane near Malton. The relative busyness of the roads is reflected in the casualty figures, with roughly twice as many deaths recorded per year on the A19 as on the country lane.