AN ALTITUDE RECORD?

The Handbook of British Mammals (3rd. edition) describes the prefered habitat of the bank vole *Clethrionomys glareolus* as mixed deciduous woodland with a thick shrub or field layer. It also states that in Britain this species is also found in grassland habitats, young deciduous plantations, conifer stands and hedgerows. No mention is made of altitude levels for Britain, but populations are found at exceptionally high altitudes in south Norway (1400m) and the French Alps (2400m). Pearsall (1950) describes cyclical vole plaques in upland grasslands, due to the field vole *Microtus agrestis*. They are most common amongst the rough and tussocky grasses.

On the afternoon of the 27th June 1991, my wife, Patricia, and I, along with our two dogs, were approaching Lady's Pillar at 688m (2257 feet above sea level) on Hugh Seat, which overlooks the Mallerstang on the Yorkshire-Cumbria border. Suddenly, one of the dogs became very excited and started sniffing around in some thick mat-grass *Nardus stricta* near the monument, which was erected in 1664 by Lady Ann Clifford to her friend Sir Hugh Morville. After much barking and scratching, the dog caught and killed a bank vole.

We were most surprised to see a bank vole at such an altitude and in such a habitat. Could this be a Yorkshire altitude record for this species? One could count it as a Yorkshire record (98/811992), for we think we were just inside Yorkshire!

Michael J.A. Thompson

References

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Pearsall, W.H. (1950) Mountain and Moorlands. New Naturalist. Collins, London.

WEASEL SCATS FOUND IN BUNGALOW LOFT AT LOWTHORPE

During a bat roost survey (August, 1990) of a roof-loft at a detached bungalow in the small village of Lowthorpe, Driffield (TA 0760), a small pile of unfamiliar droppings were colected (TL) and sent to Doncaster Museum (CH) for identification and analysis.

The droppings were not from the obvious candidates of bats (Chiroptera), rats or mice (Muridae) or grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*), all of which are known to enter house roofs. The droppings were clearly from a carnivore, but were too small for stoat (*Mustela erminea*), cat (*Felis catus*) or ferret (*Mustela vison*). This left the weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) as the most likely source of the droppings, which matched reference scats.

It is well known that the weasel is an acrobatic animal quite capable of climbing up trees and walls in search of prey items. However, analysis of the scats did not give any clues as to the weasel's purpose. Two of the four scats analysed contained the remains (including bones and teeth) of the bank vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*), whereas the remaining two scats contained rodent fur and bones identifiable to vole sp. only. It would appear, therefore, that the weasel had been foraging previously in the adjacent hedgerows, shrubberies or woodland of the arable farmland surrounding the bungalow.

It is possible that the weasel was attracted to the loft by the smell of mice since it was noticed that the fibre-glass insulation had been extensively tunnelled by mice, although there was no evidence for any current infestation. Alternatively, it is possible that the weasel was searching for house sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) nesting under the eaves. (A romanitic explanation for the whole incident could be easily envisaged if bank voles, rather than mice, had invaded the roof lagging and that the weasel(s) had carried out an efficient rodent extermination exercise.)

In a survey of the food habitats of stoats and weasels in Yorkshire, the bank vole appeared in the diet of the weasel but not the stoat. An identical observation was made in the study of the diet, distribution and habitat preferences of stoats and weasels in Sheffield. Chiroptera did not feature as prey in the dietary species noted in either of these studies.