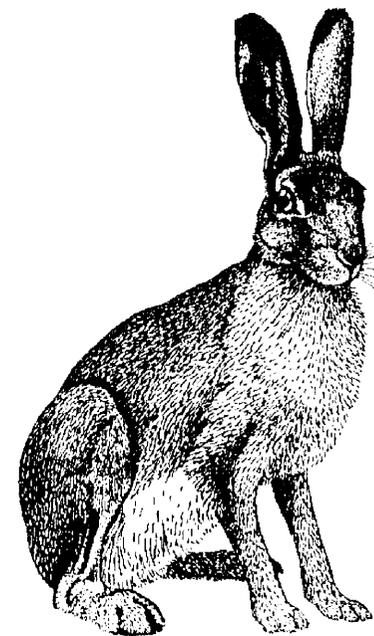


# IMPRINT



**The Yorkshire Mammal Group Newsletter**

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*Geoff Oxford*

As 2001 draws to a close, the Yorkshire Mammal Group completes its thirtieth year of existence. The founding members could hardly have dreamt that their embryo organisation would have survived so long and, at the start of 2002, would boast a total of about one hundred members. One founding father, Michael Thompson, remains a member of the YMG and his enormous contribution towards ensuring the Group's longevity (there were lean times as well) and continuing success was acknowledged in April with the presentation of a sculptured brown hare (see page 1). This year seemed an opportune time to record properly the origins and subsequent evolution of our Group and I was delighted when Michael agreed to write an account of the YMG's history for *Imprint* (see page 6).

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) had a major impact on fieldwork during 2001. For example, monitoring the introduced dormouse population in North Yorkshire did not take place at all, although I'm sure the mice fared just fine without their nest-box roofs being removed on a monthly basis! A full programme of box checks next year will allow us to gauge the success of this year's breeding – the population is of real importance on a national scale because it represents the most northerly introduction so far. Dormice are not totally absent from this issue, however; Roma Oxford (page 33) describes the trials and tribulations of a dormouse training day in Cheddar.

Water voles, once again, feature in a number of articles. A one-day conference for all involved, and interested, in riparian habitat management was held at the University of York in May. A commentary on the day's offerings is provided on page 36, and flows from the quill of our correspondent, 'Ratty'. John Traill, newly appointed as The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Water Vole Project Officer, describes one field meeting that did happen, despite FMD, at Howden Marsh (page 15)

*Imprint* 2001 contains a fine mix of articles, field reports and observations. I'd like to convey my sincere thanks to all who contributed text, drawings and photographs, and anticipatory thanks to all those others who are at this moment planning contributions for *Imprint* 2002.

*Geoff Oxford*

At the YMG's indoor meeting held on 5 April, 2001, those present celebrated Michael Thompson's thirty years of association with the Group. Gordon Woodroffe gave a short and amusing address, summarising the roles Michael has played in the Group's history, from founding member onwards. These have included, in chronological order and correct to the best of our knowledge, spells as secretary, chairman, treasurer, secretary and, currently, mammal recorder. Gordon likened Michael to an otter, a mammal with a large home range. The YMG committee had planned the surprise presentation for January, but Michael was unable to be there. The same thing happened in February and March as Michael journeyed off to the Lake District, and to the Middle East. Eventually, in April our paths met, although the card signed by many members of the YMG, anticipating a January opening, was by this time well out of date!



Gordon Woodroffe (right) presents Michael Thompson with a hare sculpture, in recognition of his services to the Yorkshire Mammal Group.

*Photograph: Roma Oxford*

As a token of the appreciation of his hard and dedicated work on behalf of the Group, Michael was presented with a sculpture of a running hare, carved in lime by Jack Hansley especially for the occasion. The choice of a hare was appropriate because Michael has taken a very active part in the national brown hare surveys for a number of years and especially since setting up house in the Vale of Pickering. Michael's account of the origins and subsequent fortunes of the YMG can be found on page 6 of this issue. On behalf of the YMG, let me thank Michael once again for the enduring vision and enthusiasm that has kept the Group on the road for the past three decades – if it wasn't for him, you surely would not be reading this now!

Compiled by Geoff Oxford

### Hedgehog removal aids Scottish waders

Introduced predators often pose major threats to island bird populations. Digger Jackson (2001) has recently reported the results of experiments which assessed the impact of an egg predator, the hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*), on nesting success of wading birds on islands off the west coast of Scotland. Hedgehogs were introduced to some islands relatively recently and their presence has coincided with a decline in some wader species. Jackson set up two fenced enclosures from which all, or nearly all, hedgehogs were removed and then estimated nest success of birds inside and outside these areas. Nest success inside the enclosures was found to be 2.4 times higher than outside, where hedgehog densities were high. The experiments indicated that removal of hedgehogs from entire islands would result in large increases in nest success. They also demonstrated the utility of cheap fencing as a conservation tool although in the present case, rabbits rather undermined (literally) its usefulness. Fencing is clearly not a long term solution and the paper concludes by suggesting that the human-mediated redistribution of species native to the UK to parts of the UK outside its natural range, an act that is currently legal, should perhaps be prohibited by law.\*

### Reference

Jackson, D. B. (2001) Experimental removal of introduced hedgehogs improves wader nesting success in the Western Isles, Scotland. *J. Appl. Ecol.*, **38**: 802-812.

#### \* Editor's note:

This matter is raised in a recent JNCC consultative document, *Biological translocations: a conservation policy for Britain* available at [www.jncc.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.gov.uk). The problems raised by introduced hedgehogs on Scottish islands are used as an example (page 26 of the document)

### Yorkshire Dales caves shown to be important for bats

New research has uncovered the importance to bats of remote caves and mine-shafts in the Yorkshire Dales. Earlier studies using visual surveys suggested that the extensive network of caves and mines were little used. However, recent night-time surveys, using humane traps, bat detectors and night-vision equipment, by John Altringham's team from the University of Leeds have shown that hundreds or even thousands of bats use these roost sites. Five species of cave-roosting bats known to be resident in the area were found (Natterer's, *Myotis nattereri*; Daubenton's, *Myotis daubentoni*; whiskered, *Myotis mystacinus*; Brandt's, *Myotis brandti* and brown long-eared, *Plecotus auritus*) as well the occasional noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), a species not normally associated with caves. Natterer's bat is by far the most abundant (c.75%) of records, followed by brown long-eared. These bats were recorded from August to November, prior to hibernation. As a result of this work, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority is drawing up a caves habitat action plan, which will ensure that caves with a high biological importance are properly managed. Experts will also start working with the pot holing clubs to develop voluntary codes of practice for the recreational use of these caves.

Yorkshire caves with even larger visiting populations are found in the North York Moors, perhaps because caves are scarce there and the bats concentrate at them. A preliminary analysis of recapture data suggests visiting populations in the thousands.

Information drawn from a report in the *Northern Echo* newspaper, and personal communication with John Altringham.

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### Javan rhinos a little less rare

The Javan rhinoceros, one of the world's most endangered large mammals seems to be recovering. One of just five rhino species, the number of Javan rhinos in the world is currently about 60. While Indonesia remains the species stronghold (c. 50 animals in Ujung Kulon National Park), there is another, smaller population in Vietnam (c. 8 animals). The latter are sometimes called the Vietnamese rhino but belong to the same species. A recent survey by WWF suggests that four calves were born in Ujung Kulon since April 1999. Camera traps have caught on film one mother rhino and two cubs, and footprints of two more cubs have been found. The rhino population in Ujung Kulon fell to between 25 and 30 individuals in the 1930s so the increase to 50 and

contemporary evidence of successful breeding augers well. The aim of the Park Authority and the WWF is to increase the population to c. 80, the carrying capacity of the National Park.

Information drawn from BBC News Online – 11 October, 2001.

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### **Water voles in the rule book**

Bridlington Golf Club has a good population of water voles living in ponds and ditches on the course. Because of the vole's burrowing habits, there is a club rule stating that if a golfer's ball should go down a water vole hole, they will be entitled to a free drop.

Thanks to John Traill for this nugget.

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### **Bats on the wire**

Next time you find yourself in the tropical fruit section of your local supermarket contemplating kiwi fruits, or you're tempted to finish off a Chinese meal with lychees, ask yourself (after reading this) whether you're making a bat-friendly purchase.

In Queensland, Australia, fruit bats are classed as vermin to fruit growers in the area, who claim that once a colony of bats has located an orchard, an entire crop can be devoured in just a few nights. To counteract the problem, farmers apply to the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) for a culling permit on a restricted number of animals. The permit allows fruit-growers to erect an electric wire grid over trees to electrocute the bats on impact. Farmers are also allowed to shoot bats. Earlier this year in a court case involving just one lychee grower who flouted QPWS stipulations, it was estimated that around 18,000 spectacled flying foxes (*Pteropus conspicillatus*) were electrocuted in the November/December 2000 lychee season and that about 10,000 of these were females. The impact of this single grower continuing to operate his deadly grid, would be to halve the population of *P.conspicillatus* in under five years. In the 1980s there was an estimated population of 1.5 million spectacled flying foxes, but the most recent survey put this nearer to 75,000.

The alternatives to frying fruit bats alive are being investigated as I write, but will inevitably require significant funding before trials can even begin. Techniques such as non-lethal grids, chemical bat repellents and radar-based detection systems are all being considered. Meanwhile, eat your five portions of fruit a day, but think before you do.

Source: BBC Wildlife April & December 2001, abstracted by Roma Oxford.

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### **Decline in some heavy metal levels in German bats**

Over the past 20 years, bat carcasses have been collected by the environmental conservation agency in Lower Saxony (Federal Republic of Germany), now called Niedersächsisches Landesamt für Ökologie (NLO), and preserved by deep-freezing. The collection comprises 458 bat carcasses from 13 different species. Rainer Hartmann, studying for his doctorate at the University of Göttingen, undertook a residue analysis on common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and greater mouse-eared bat specimens (*Myotis myotis*) to investigate temporal changes in heavy metal contamination for the period 1987 to 1999.

The lead content of the forearms of 111 common pipistrelle and 30 greater mouse-eared bats was determined. In addition, heavy metal levels were assayed from the lung, liver and kidney tissue of 22, and from the hair of 95, *P. pipistrellus*. Forty-eight excrement samples, taken from various locations, were also tested.

A 50% decline in the lead content of the bone tissue during the test period (1987-1999) was found. The lead content of hair specimens, in the same time frame, declined by 55%. The major reason for this decline in lead pollution levels was thought to be the introduction of lead-free petrol in 1988. Based on neurobehavioral investigations on primates, a possible connection between the dramatic bat population reduction up until 1988 and lead contamination was considered. Even minimal, subtoxic, lead levels can lead to a significantly less-efficient nervous system which might delay the interpretation of acoustic stimuli during coordinated movements. For the bat, which greatly depends on its hearing for finding food, the higher lead intake resulting from the increased use of leaded petrol in the first half of the 20th century could have had a significant effect.

Animals from regions with higher lead pollution levels show significantly higher lead content in bone, as well as liver and kidney tissues. No differences were found between the sexes. The lead level found in *P. pipistrellus* was 70% higher than in *M. myotis*. Lung tissue taken from animals from the lead-polluted regions did not show increased levels suggesting that inhalation is not a major route for heavy metal acquisition..

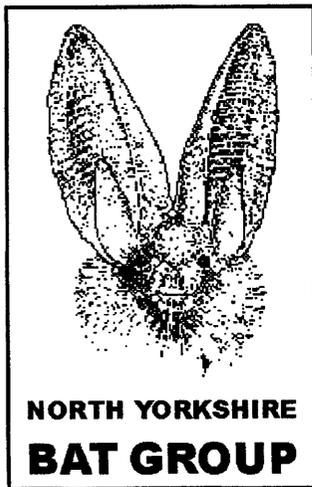
A decline in the cadmium (by 40 – 50%) and the nickel (appr. 10%) were also determined for the period 1987-1999. No recognisable trends were found for the remaining elements tested, viz. chrome, copper and zinc.

Random sampling for platinum, increasingly released into the environment since the introduction of the automobile catalytic converter, detected 2.6 ng/g in hair and 6.8 ng/g in excrement. Platinum content in bone tissue was below the sensitivity of the detector (< 0.5 ng/g).

Thanks to Rainer Hartmann for permission to reproduce this abstract.

## North Yorkshire Bat Group – Annual Report

*John Drewett*



2001 has proved to be an odd year for the bat group, thanks largely to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Our usual programme of summer walks and surveys was greatly reduced as access to much of the countryside was impossible. Bat walks went ahead at Kexby Bridge with Roma Oxford and at Fairburn Ings with Ruth Warren and the two bat nights at Thorp Perrow Arboretum continued to be as popular as ever.

In January and February we held our traditional hibernation roost counts at Fountains Abbey, in conjunction with the National Trust. The first of these revealed higher numbers of bats than in recent years. This was especially true for Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*), a trend which seems to have

been widespread across the country. The second count was less successful, largely because access to large parts of the estate was restricted as a result of flood damage. The summer roost counts at Fountains Abbey suggested a large increase in the number of Natterer's bat in the cellarium roost site. We wondered if these may have been Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentoni*) from elsewhere in the cellarium rather than Natterer's, but recordings made with a time-expansion bat detector suggested they really were Natterer's.

The number of bat calls coming through the English Nature offices in Yorkshire has been up on previous years and rather inconsistent. There was a considerable increase in the number of calls early in the year, but fewer in the main breeding season. Outside these periods, the number has been very erratic. However, the recent trend of very few calls from York has continued. Until two years ago the Group has dealt with large numbers of bat calls from this region, so perhaps this just indicates that we have already advised most of the people in the city who have bats.

Another aspect of this year's work has been assisting in drafting the bat section of the new Biodiversity Action Plan for Hambleton. Under the leadership of Graham Megson a wide range of conservation groups have come together to develop this action plan with the intention of making it a document with realistic targets that will be used, rather than just another report to gather dust on the shelf. Graham is now in the process of establishing a similar forum in Selby District, into which the Group will also have an input.

After several years of slow progress, this year saw the welcome establishment of a proper procedure for dealing with bats in bridges which need strengthening or repair. The County Council has contracted me to check each bridge on the work programme in advance of repairs and where bats are found appropriate measures are taken to ensure their conservation. In this first year, and with the problems posed by foot and mouth disease, it has proved a challenge to keep up with the number of surveys required, but as more advanced planning comes on stream the system looks like it will work well. However, the bats still manage to throw a spanner in the works from time to time and this year moved into a crevice only 1.5 metres above the low summer water level at Masham, bringing planned repairs to a halt for a few weeks while a licence was obtained.

The need for a licence from DEFRA for any works where there is a bat roost came into force just over a year ago and applies to any building, tree or structure other than a currently occupied domestic house. The application form is quite detailed and must be filled in by someone with bat expertise. To obtain a licence a survey has first to be carried out to establish the identity and

numbers of bats concerned, then the 'developer' has to show what measures they will take to ensure that the populations of those bats will be maintained at a favourable status in the area. If a licence is granted checks need to be made to ensure that the agreed mitigation measures are implemented and their effects monitored. Normally this licence work will be carried out by a professional consultant as the licence applicant is liable for ensuring that all the conditions are complied with, but it is nevertheless an important step forward for bat conservation.

Another important recent change was the inclusion of the word 'reckless' in the legislation protecting bats. This should make it far easier to prosecute those breaking the bat protection laws as they can no longer claim that their actions were not intentional. The changes also make breaking species protection legislation an arrestable offence.

So, although an odd year, it has by no means been quiet. Let's hope for a little more normality in 2002.

## The Yorkshire Mammal Group – Its Origins and Subsequent History

*Michael Thompson*

The Yorkshire Mammal Group is now over thirty years old and, as such, is the oldest regional mammal group within Britain. How did it originate and what has happened since 1970? I hope, as a founder member, to answer some of those questions.

In 1956 the Bootham School Natural History Society, founded in 1834 and the oldest schoolboy society of its kind in Britain, published a cyclo-styled booklet on the story, archaeology and natural history of the parishes of Overton and Skelton, north of York. In 1969 I, along with my family, were living in Skelton and I was shown a copy of the booklet by the then incumbent, the Rev. Henry Stapleton. We decided we would like to bring the Bootham School publication up-to-date and that he would deal with the historical side of the parishes and I the natural history. We approached William Sessions, the printing and publishing firm in York, who agreed to help us with the project. The book, now

out of print, was eventually published in 1971 with the title *Skelton Village - The Continuing Community*.

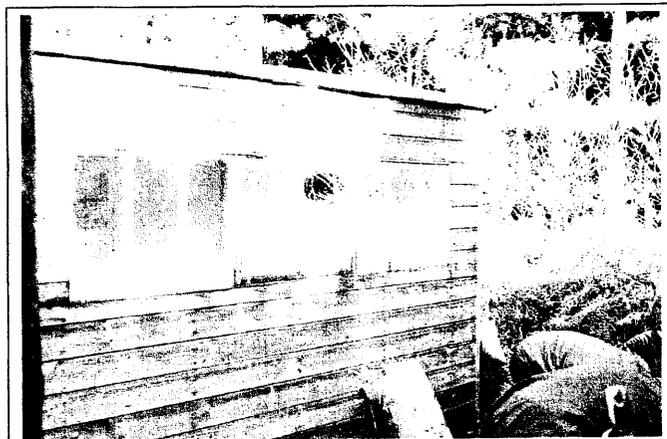
Bootham schoolboys had surveyed the geology, flowering plants, ferns, mosses, liverworts, fungi, ornithology and some of the small woodlands of the parishes, but I wanted to add mammals, amphibians and reptiles. I got others to deal with the botanical aspects of the survey, whilst I dealt with the faunal lists. In dealing with the mammals, I soon realised that I had little information about the small mammals, such as the shrews, and I asked Colin Simms, then the curator of natural history at the Yorkshire Museum in York, what I could do to find out about them. He suggested I should approach Neil Cowx, a lecturer in biology at St. John's College, York. Neil was very keen to help. He suggested that we, the Chairwoman, Christine Thompson (now Cooney) and the members of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Moorlands Nature Reserve Management Committee and myself, should carry out a number of autumn and winter mammal traps during 1969 at Moorlands, which is situated in Skelton parish. Five species of mammal were recorded, wood mouse, bank and field voles, and common and pygmy shrews. In all, at the end of the survey, I had located 22 species of mammal within the parishes. These trap sessions, under Neil's guidance, proved to be very successful, so much so that when the exercise had been completed we wondered if further field work could be carried out elsewhere. An idea was germinating.

Four of us met at Colin Simms' home within the grounds of the Museum Gardens in February, 1970. As well as Colin, there was Neil, Elizabeth Rogers, a biology teacher at one of York's secondary schools, and me. We decided to set up a mammal group of both amateur and professional mammalogists based in York, to carry out scientific field work in Yorkshire. We advertised the fact that such a group was being created in the Yorkshire Evening Press and encouraged anyone interested to come along to the Biology Department, St. John's College at Heworth Green for an inaugural meeting. The response was good. A committee was set up, with Christine Thompson as its first secretary. It was hoped that there would be little structure necessary; thus it was called a group, rather than the more formal title of society. Although York-based, it was decided to call the group, the Yorkshire Mammal Group, for the initial membership came from quite a wide geographical area. A logo of an otter's footprint was adopted almost immediately. A programme of activities was arranged. To augment the fieldwork, monthly meetings were held in St John's College biology laboratories at which talks, owl pellet analyses and small mammal dissection took place. The late Dunstan Adams, Head of Biology at St. John's College and past president of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation (RSNC), gave the Group a great deal of encouragement. Of the

original four founder members, only I remain a member of the YMG, the others having moved away from York.

Three small mammal trap sessions, running concurrently, were organised in different habitats around York to make comparisons and to see if, as an exercise, members would become involved. These were at Moorlands, Overton Wood and Oxleas Farm, Leavening, the home of Peter Richardson, a farmer who had joined the Group. A lot of useful information was collected and because of the commitment of members, it was decided to carry out a more long-term project.

By this time, a number of stalwarts of the early days had joined the Group including, among others, Sheila Walsh (now Stebbings), Dennis Aspinall, Noel Snowden, Rod Anness and Janetta Lambert. At the suggestion of Neil Cowx, who regularly took his students on field outings to Howsham Wood, North Yorkshire, the YMG embarked on a long-term study of the small mammals of this wood. The Forestry Commission, who then owned the wood, granted the Group permission to carry out this work and the Yorkshire Philosophical Society gave a £100 grant to purchase a field-studies hut. A new garden shed, with a window, was finally installed in the wood on one of the forest rides. A 48-position grid was established and monthly traps carried out between May 1971 and May 1972. The results were published in the *Naturalist* (Aspinall & Thompson, 1973) and, according to Colin Howes, was the first such study on small mammals carried out in Yorkshire



The YMG field-studies hut after its relocation to Blackwoods, Wheldrake (circa 1971).

(Note on the right mammalogists preparing Longworth traps)

Photograph: Michael Thompson

(Howes, 1998). The Howsham survey completed, the field studies hut was moved to the Forestry Commission's Blackwoods plantation near Wheldrake for a long-term study of the small mammals in a newly planted coniferous wood (photograph above). This ran from 1971 to 1985 (Sharp & Wilson, 1987).

By now the YMG had acquired its own set of Longworth traps and so other long-term studies followed. The first of these was at Hopewell House Farm, Knaresborough, between 1980 and 1988 and formed part of the Demonstration Farm Project instigated by the Countryside Commission. Eight species of small mammals were recorded during this survey including the relatively rare harvest mouse. The results were published in the Group's magazine *Imprint* (Frazer, 1988). In the second major study Ann Hanson, the Group's field studies officer at the time, arranged for the YMG to take part in a bi-annual survey of small mammals on the experimental agroforestry plots at Leeds University Farm, Tadcaster. This continued from 1991 to 1996 and the results were again published in *Imprint* (Fuller, 1991-1992; Hanson, 1992-1996).

In 1975 Dennis Aspinall died, aged 41, and in his memory the YMG established an annual small mammal trap on one of the many Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT) reserves. The information from these traps is often used to inform the management plan of the particular reserve. The Dennis Aspinall Memorial Trap in 2000 took place at the YWT's Filey Dams nature reserve where, in previous years and under the guidance of Gordon Woodroffe, a long-term trapping programme had been conducted to investigate the status of the water shrew. Over the years a large number of weekend traps and other general mammal surveys were also carried out by the Group, many in co-operation with the Harrogate, Scarborough and Sorby Natural History Societies. Of the total of 78 papers describing small mammal survey work in Yorkshire, 60% have been published in *Imprint* (Howes, 1998).

As well as small mammal field work, the YMG has been involved in various national surveys, for example the 'Great Nut Hunt' (for dormice), organised by The Mammal Society of Great Britain, to which the YMG is affiliated. The Group, over the years, has also taken part in national water vole, harvest mouse, dormouse, badger and otter surveys and, for the Bat Conservation Trust, bats. Together with those of other naturalists in Yorkshire, YMG members submitted mammal records to the Biological Records Centre for the national 10 kilometre square mapping scheme for the British Isles, the results of which were published in 1978 and updated in 1993. In 1985 a book, *Yorkshire Mammals*, edited by Professor Michael Delany, was published to commemorate the 100th anniversary publication of W. E. Clarke and W. D. Roebuck's classic *The Handbook of Yorkshire Vertebrates*. Six of the fifteen contributors to *Yorkshire*

*Mammals* were YMG members. The YMG is also affiliated to the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union (YNU), founded in 1861. Unfortunately, since the Group's foundation in 1970, little field work has been carried out by the Mammal and Lower Vertebrate Section of the YNU. However, Colin Howes (Doncaster Museum) has remained the overall recorder of mammals for Yorkshire, on behalf of the YNU.

In the past, various attempts were made by the YMG to record mammals in Yorkshire on a more organised and regular basis, such as on a card system or using colour pins on Ordnance Survey maps but, after some initial enthusiasm, the schemes were abandoned. Now, however, using the *Look Out for Mammals* database issued by The Mammal Society, the Group has had since 1999 an effective recording scheme. To date, over a thousand records have been sent on to the newly established North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre, currently based on St. William's College in York.



Sheila Walsh and Rod Anness removing ectoparasites from a pipistrelle bat (1977)

Photograph: Michael Thompson

Over a quarter of all British mammals species are bats. Within a few years of its foundation, the YMG became involved in a long-term pipistrelle bat ringing programme based on York. A few initial capture-mark-release bat sessions were organised around York, with the encouragement of Dr. Robert Stebbings, and during these I was trained to ring. Starting in 1977 and with the help of YMG members, such as Sheila Stebbings, Edna Shann and Lesley Helliwell, the ringing of pipistrelle nursery colonies continued for the next 14 years. During the 'York Ringing Programme', over 26 colonies were found within a 12.8 kilometre radius drawn from the centre of the city. In total, nearly 3000 bats were ringed. Papers were published in the *Journal of Zoology* on longevity and survival rates among female pipistrelles and roost philopatry in pipistrelle nursery colonies (Thompson, 1987, 1992). Other species were also trapped, counted and studied, including brown long-eared, whiskered and Daubenton's bats. A bat section was set up in 1985 as a separate entity, but still attached to the YMG, and was initially led by Edna Shann and Lesley Helliwell, both of whom have done a great deal for bats and their conservation in Yorkshire. As well as nocturnal fieldwork, the bat section was also concerned with conservation issues - it has done, and is still doing, valuable roost survey work

for English Nature (formerly the Nature Conservancy). Unfortunately, after a few years interest in bats started to decline but in 1995 the section was re-launched and re-named the North Yorkshire Bat Group (NYBG) and is currently under the successful leadership of John Drewett. The NYBG now publishes its own newsletter, *Plecotus*. In a collaboration between the NYBG and the East Yorkshire Bat Group, a Daubenton's nursery colony at Kexby Bridge was monitored throughout the summer of 1995 and the results subsequently published in the *Naturalist* (Oxford *et al.*, 1996). Edna Shann died after a short but distressing illness in 1998. She had been a faithful and active member of the YMG for many years.

The annual conference of the Mammal Society was held at Hereford in 1987 and a number of YMG members attended, including Helen Ellerker (then Chair of the YMG) Gordon Woodroffe and myself. At that conference several members of The Mammal Society presented papers on the dormouse and its conservation, and the use of nesting boxes as a survey tool. Following the conference, we decided we would like to launch a dormouse nestbox scheme in North Yorkshire. We approached Graham Tooze, then the warden of the National Trust property at Rievaulx Terraces near Helmsley, and obtained permission to erect boxes in the woods there. Starting with seven boxes in November, a further 52 were added in April 1988, erected in two grids by Lesley Helliwell and Bev Greenwood. The site was inspected by some members of The Mammal Society during one of the field trips at the end of the Annual Conference held in Ripon in 1988. Unfortunately, although this was a traditional site for the dormouse in Yorkshire, subsequent inspection of the boxes in 1989 and subsequent years, showed that dormice were not using the boxes. This scheme was eventually abandoned.

However during 1999, at another highly favourable site in North Yorkshire, a small team (at the insistence of the owner) of YMG members helped at the start of the most northerly captive-release programme for the dormouse in Britain, a scheme co-ordinated by The Mammal Society and English Nature. A total of 27 dormice originating from four different sources were put into cages and fed by Jenny Armstrong, a student, for three weeks before they were allowed access to the wood. With the help of Carl Whitehead, she also erected 150 dormouse nest boxes with which to monitor the success of the reintroduction (see Oxford, 1999, 2000).

In 1983, under the Chairmanship of Linda Collier, the first issue of the Group's magazine, *Imprint*, was published. Its first editor was Barrie Smith of Harrogate, a keen mammalogist, who remained as editor until his tragic death in a climbing accident in June 1985. He was much missed but a new editor, Angie

Hibbert, took over almost immediately. Other editors followed, namely, Dean and Nicola Wise, Kate Fuller, Beryl Cronin and currently Geoff Oxford. Initially a bi-annual publication, *Imprint* is now produced annually and has not only increased its circulation, but also improved in length and quality. Most, if not all, YMG activities are reported in the magazine.

From its inception, the Yorkshire Mammal Group has had a simple written constitution; this was necessary for grant applications. With the recent expansion in the Group's membership and finances, the constitution has been modified and expanded to comply with Charity Law, so that the YMG could be formally registered as a charity. There was a time in the mid 1970s when active membership dwindled to half a dozen individuals. I remember a meeting when it was considered that the YMG should be dissolved and its limited funds handed on to the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. With the start of the bat ringing programme, however, new members appeared and the Group took off again. Meetings at St. John's College came to an end. Several members worked at Biosis (the publishers of *Zoological Record*) in York and meetings were transferred to their offices in Micklegate for a number of years. That venue, too, had to be vacated and through the influence of Geoff Oxford, the monthly meetings are now held in the common room in the Department of Biology, University of York. Two highly successfully regional mammal conferences, organised under the auspices of The Mammal Society, have been held at the University. The first was masterminded by Gordon Woodroffe in 1989 while the second, in 1998, was orchestrated by several YMG members. The latter, with the title *More about Mammals*, attracted nearly 140 participants.

What of the next thirty years? Who is to say, but long may be the life of the Yorkshire Mammal Group and its contribution to the study of mammalian wildlife in Yorkshire.

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## Mammal Trapping at Askham Bog – A Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Wild Workshop

*Ann Hanson*

### Introduction

Over the summer of 2001 the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust ran a series of Wild Workshops for the benefit of its volunteers and members. The idea of these workshops was to allow people to broaden their knowledge and skills on a variety of topics from grass identification to woodland management, from lichens to wild flowers, and of course mammals!

Originally the mammal workshop was arranged to take place at Little Beck Wood, a charming YWT reserve near Whitby, but, because of an unfortunate outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in this area, the venue was changed at the eleventh hour to Askham Bog (bring on the mosquito repellent). However, most people were still brave enough to come along.

The idea behind this particular Longworth trapping session was to show people as wide a range of small mammals as possible and to demonstrate trapping methods and animal handling techniques. In order to do this 69 Longworth

traps, baited with wheat, peanuts and blowfly pupae, were placed in several different habitats around the reserve on the evening of Friday 10 August.

Askham Bog is undergoing some serious management at the moment in an attempt to lose some of the woodland and bring back the bog. This involves quite a lot of tree felling, grazing of the rank grassland by Exmoor ponies and the building of a new boardwalk for disabled access. This gave us plenty of different habitat areas, from natural to slightly disturbed to completely annihilated, in which to place our traps.

### Trap positions

1. Long reeds and grasses beside a wet ditch – five traps at three metre intervals.
2. Rank wet grassland grazed by Exmoor ponies – 10 traps placed at three metre intervals underneath bog myrtle bushes and five traps at three metre intervals out in the grassland.
3. Wet birch woodland – 10 traps placed at three metre intervals at the base of trees.
4. Long wet grass and reeds along a fence line – five traps placed at three metre intervals.
5. Damp deciduous woodland – 10 traps placed at three metre intervals at the base of trees.
6. Log pile – four traps placed in brambles at the base of the pile.
7. Boggy meadow with tall reeds, sedges and grasses adjacent to woodland – 10 traps placed at three metre intervals.
8. Recently thinned damp woodland beside a new boardwalk – 10 traps placed at three metre intervals at the base of trees.

### Results

The traps were checked on the morning of Saturday 11 August. The weather was cloudy and warm, with the previous night clear and dry with little moonlight.



Sexing a long-suffering field vole (*Microtus agrestis*) at Askham Bog.

Photograph: Tim Pickles

Location	Species*	A/SA/J	Sex	Weight (g)	Notes
Site 2, under bog myrtle	<i>M.a.</i>	A	F	30.0	
Site 2, in open grassland	<i>S.a.</i>	A	?	7.5	
Site 3	<i>C.g.</i>	A	F	22.5	
Site 4	<i>A.s.</i>	SA	M	20.0	
Site 4	<i>S.a.</i>	A	?	7.0	
Site 7	<i>A.s.</i>	J	?	17.0	escaped
Site 7	<i>M.m.</i>	A	F	3.5	
Site 8	<i>A.s.</i>	SA	M	22.0	

\**A.s.* = *Apodemus sylvaticus* (wood mouse); *C.g.* = *Clethrionomys glareolus* (bank vole); *M.a.* = *Microtus agrestis* (field vole); *M.m.* = *Micromys minutus* (harvest mouse); *S.a.* = *Sorex araneus* (common shrew); M/F = male/female; A/SA/J = adult/sub-adult/juvenile.

### Conclusions

Five species of small mammal, common shrew (*Sorex araneus*), wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), field vole (*Microtus agrestis*), bank vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*) and harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*) were captured and shown to the YWT members and volunteers. The harvest mouse was a good record for the reserve, as it's many years since one has been seen at Askham Bog, although I'm sure the elusive little creatures were there all the time.

The afternoon session of the Wildlife Workshop was spent analysing barn owl pellets and learning how to recognise mammal tracks and signs. Finally, for those who stayed the distance, Lesley Helliwell kindly came along in the evening, with a couple of live bats, to give an excellent talk on bats and batting. The evening was rounded off by another trip out to Askham Bog, where we picked up several pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and a possible whiskered bat (*Myotis mystacinus*) on the bat detectors.

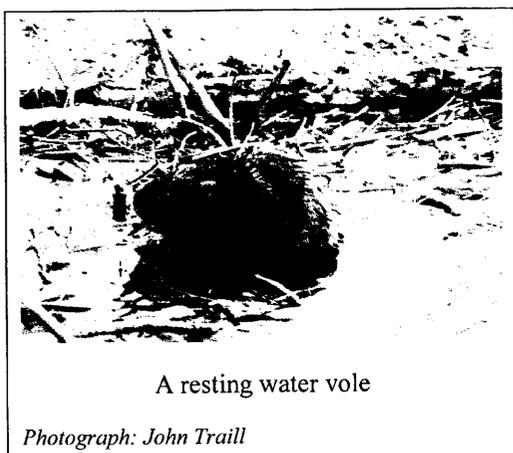
Thanks are due to Lesley for her bat expertise, Kerry Felber of YWT for organising the event and keeping everything running smoothly and to everyone who joined in with so much enthusiasm. Also, many thanks to Rob and the Exmoor ponies for their amazing skill at trap setting by moonlight.

## YMG Visit to Howden Marsh

*John Traill*

The Yorkshire Mammal Group (YMG) held an outdoor evening event at Howden, East Yorkshire, at the end of June to look for signs and sights of one of Britain's fastest disappearing mammals. The water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*) was once a common sight on our waterways, but today sadly this is not the case, with a huge crash in the population occurring over the last 15 – 20 years.

The evening event was led by Jon Traill, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's (YWT) newly appointed Water Vole Project Officer, and YMG member. The YWT project aims to highlight the problems surrounding the demise of the water vole, provide accurate up-to-date information about the status of the water vole in East Yorkshire, and work closely with landowners and farmers and other organisations such as the Internal Drainage Boards and Environment Agency to try to halt the decline. A three-year funding package for the project has come from Enventure Northern with matched funding from the BP Teesside to Saltend Ethylene Pipeline Project.

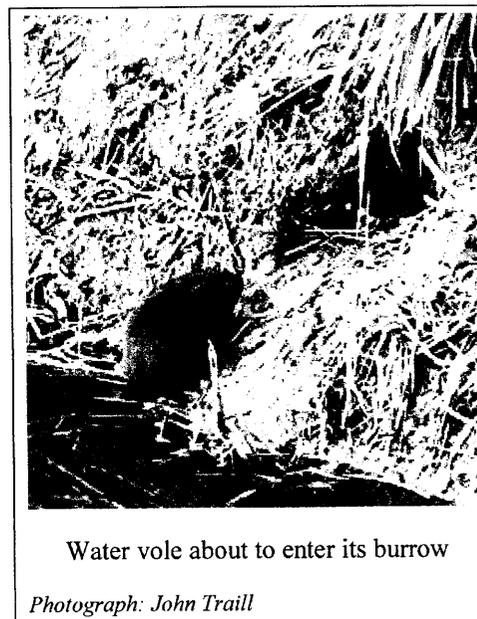


A resting water vole

*Photograph: John Traill*

A small but enthusiastic group met in the centre of Howden, by the ruins of the old minster. The weather was favourable, being dry and relatively warm, as we walked off towards Howden Marsh. However, a slight detour was taken through the Ashes playing field past the old moated site to an innocuous looking drain, running alongside a road in the town. The drain in question was steep-sided with grassy banks, bare in patches with bushes and overhanging trees growing on one side. Very quickly it was apparent why this drain was worth a visit. As well as some easy-to-spot field signs such as droppings and numerous burrows, the resident water voles were active, scuttling and

swimming close to the ditch sides. A couple of times, we inadvertently surprised an unsuspecting vole and, quick as a flash, the vole 'plopped' into the water and dived away, with a tell-tale stream of bubbles the only give-away as to where it was going.



Water vole about to enter its burrow

*Photograph: John Traill*

The group spent a good three-quarters of an hour watching the voles on this ditch before setting off around the corner to the marsh. The Howden Marsh site is approximately 30 acres in size and is a remnant of a much larger area of ancient grazing marsh. Today it is owned by the East Riding of Yorkshire Council and leased to Howden Town Council who manage the site for amenity recreation and wildlife. The habitat available for water voles is extensive and varied, consisting of reedbeds, ponds and drainage ditches. Because of the time of year, the vegetation was thick and lush, which meant it was difficult to locate the voles. We walked slowly around the site looking for field signs while also watching out for any slight movement or noise in the reed fringed margins of the pond. Towards the end of the tour round the marsh an obliging vole swam across the pond, while a less obliging vole hid in a clump of reed. We could clearly hear the vole chewing away but none of us could locate it.

A unanimous decision to re-visit the ditch by the playing field was taken and once again, plenty of voles were active. As the light faded the group stood in hushed tones watching these endearing little rodents busily going about their evening routine, with a large male vole swimming off down the ditch as he patrolled his territory before night-fall.

## Small Mammals on Sessions and New Earswick Nature Reserves

Geoff Oxford

### Introduction

At the request of Mr Bill Sessions, the YMG live-trapped two small nature reserves situated on the southern outskirts of New Earswick, to the north of York, during the weekend of 5-7 October, 2001. These reserves lie opposite one another on either side of the Haxby Road, approximately at OS grid reference SE609548.

### Habitat and trap distribution

Sessions Reserve (to the east of Haxby Road) consists of a peninsula and an island, the former is low and prone to flooding and the latter higher and drier. The peninsula is bounded by the River Foss and Old Foss Beck (or 'Little Foss') and is connected to the mainland at its northern end where a road linking Huntington Road and Haxby Road crosses the waterways. There are also two narrow footbridges, one leading to the mainland behind Sessions' factory on Huntington Road, and the other to the island. At the southern end of the peninsula lies an open glade area and at the north a pond. Between these two features is dense mixed woodland with little ground cover at the time of trapping (October). The island (Lock Island), bounded by the River Foss and a disused lock, is entirely clothed with dense deciduous woodland with no significant ground cover in October. Lock Island is linked to the mainland by a narrow causeway. Traps were laid in pairs at five sites on the island and at 10 on the peninsula. On the peninsula, three trap sites were under deep shade just within the woodland, the other seven were distributed around the uncut edge of the recently mown glade in tall vegetation containing, *inter alia*, meadow cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*), meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), nettles (*Urtica dioica*) and tall grasses.

At the centre of the New Earswick Reserve lies a substantial lake (an old brick pond) and to the east an area of dense mixed woodland with limited ground cover. Eleven pairs of traps were located under brush-piles within the

woodland area (the reserve suffers from trespassing and so leaving traps in open situations was not possible) and seven pairs along the southern edge of the lake under scattered trees with an understorey of bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), nettles and grass.

Traps were laid on the evening of 5 October and checked on the morning of 6 October. Doors were then closed to be reopened in the early evening. The final check and lift took place on the morning of 7 October.

### Results

Animals caught on the mornings of 6 and 7 October are shown in the accompanying tables.

### Discussion

In 1983 Carolyn Sharp and six boys from Bootham School trapped the Sessions Reserve over a two-day period using 48 traps (*Bootham School Natural History Journal*, January 1984, p.26). On the peninsula they caught just *Apodemus*



Field vole just prior to release

Photograph: Bill Durrant

*sylvaticus* (probably 14 animals), while on Lock Island *Apodemus* (probably 12 animals) and also two *Clethrionomys glareolus* (bank vole) were found. The apparent lack of animals on Lock Island in the current survey is interesting. The previous trap was similar to the present one both in the numbers of traps employed and the trapping period, and so the difference may indicate a change of habitat over the nearly two decades that have

elapsed between the surveys. Certainly dense ground cover, normally associated with *Clethrionomys*, was absent at the time of the trap in 2001.

The peninsula of Sessions Nature Reserve floods after periods of heavy rain and during such times is presumably cleared of small mammals. The most recent flooding took place during the winter of 2000/2001 when it was inundated for an extended period and to a great depth. The two species recorded on the

peninsula must therefore have recolonised either directly from the mainland (*via* the footbridge or across the link road) or from Lock Island (again *via* a metal-mesh footbridge). Both bridges have a wooden plank fixed along one edge to facilitate the movement of fauna. The fact that shrews were not caught on the peninsula, despite the presence of very suitable habitat, may possibly reflect a reduced ability on their part to recolonise after floods. *Microtus agrestis* is a new record for the reserve. In a smaller, 24 hour trapping session performed by Michael and Christine Thompson and Peter Walls on the peninsula in 1971 (unpublished report), a male *Clethrionomys glareolus* was caught. The composition of the small mammal community on the peninsula may depend on the chance colonisation of sufficient animals of a particular species to establish viable populations. *Apodemus sylvaticus*, known to be more prone than other small mammal species to venture over open ground, probably always recolonises after a flood event, whereas for other mammals a successful colonisation (for example, *via* a pregnant female or a male/female pair) may be more sporadic. It would certainly be interesting to determine the genetic relatedness of individuals within a species on the peninsula.

The only species found on the New Earswick Reserve was *Apodemus sylvaticus*. This was expected in the dense woodland, which had very little ground cover at the time of the trap, but other species might have been anticipated in the more open, bramble-vegetated strip to the south of the lake. Adjacent to this vegetation is a narrow path, a hedge and then arable fields so there may not be sufficient suitable habitat to sustain populations of, for example, *Clethrionomys glareolus*. The species diversity of small mammals on the reserve could be enhanced by substantially increasing the area of open glade within the woodland in order to encourage dense ground vegetation. It would also be beneficial to link these open glades to the edge of the reserve to provide a suitable corridor to and from the surrounding hedges and farmland.

Many thanks to Derek Capes, Bill Durrant, Ann Hanson, Roma Oxford, Peter Richman, Bill Sessions and Don, Robert and Paul Thorpe for help with opening the traps. Special thanks to Bill Durrant who also helped to lay traps, reset them on the Saturday evening and took photographs, and to Bill Sessions for making available the results of the previous surveys.

### 6 October

Site	Species*	A/J	Sex	Weight (g)	Notes
<b>Sessions peninsula</b>					
Glade	<i>A.s.</i>	J	F	14.5	
	<i>M.a.</i>	J	F	13.0	
	<i>A.s.</i>	J?	?	?	escaped
<b>New Earswick</b>					
Woodland	<i>A.s.</i>	J	M	15.5	
	<i>A.s.</i>	J	F	14.5	
Southern edge	<i>A.s.</i>	J?	M	17.0	

### 7 October

Site	Species*	A/J	Sex	Weight (g)	Notes
<b>Sessions peninsula</b>					
Glade	<i>M.a.</i>	A	M	21.5	
	<i>A.s.</i>	J	F	13.5	
	<i>A.s.</i>	J?	F	18.5	
	<i>A.s.</i>	J?	M	17.5	
	<i>M.a.</i>	A	F	24.5	
	<i>A.s.</i>	J	F	15.5	
	<i>A.s.</i>	J	F	14.5	
Woodland	<i>A.s.</i>	J	F	9.0	
<b>New Earswick</b>					
Woodland	<i>A.s.</i>	J	M	16.5	
Southern edge	<i>A.s.</i>	?	?	?	escaped
	<i>A.s.</i>	J?	M	16.5	
	<i>A.s.</i>	A	F	24.0	

*A.s.* = *Apodemus sylvaticus* (wood mouse); *M.a.* = *Microtus agrestis* (field vole); A/J = adult/juvenile; M/F = male/female.

## Ellerton Church Barn Owl Pellet Analysis

*Ann Hanson*

### Introduction

In September 2000, members of the Yorkshire Mammal Group were asked by Ellerton Church Preservation Trust if they would analyse some barn owl (*Tyto alba*) pellets at the Heritage Open Day, in order to help raise funds for the church restoration fund.

Ellerton Church is in the village of Ellerton in East Yorkshire and looks out over the flood meadows of the River Derwent. The church had fallen into a terrible state of disrepair over the years, but this didn't stop a pair of barn owls from making their home there. When the Ellerton Church Preservation Trust was established and work began on the church, one of the first major tasks was to replace the roof. Instead of evicting the owls, a splendid purpose-built apartment was included for them in the roof design and they readily moved in.

The owls hunt over the nearby wet meadows and their pellets are an excellent way of sampling the small mammals in the area. Pellets are coughed up at the roost and several bags were collected over the summer of 2000. Some of these were analysed at the Heritage Open Day and the rest at a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Wild Workshop in August 2001 (see page 13).

### Results

Sixteen pellets were analysed and the following small mammal skulls were extracted. Most pellets contained two or more animals.

Species	No.
Short-tailed field vole ( <i>Microtus agrestis</i> )	21
Common shrew ( <i>Sorex araneus</i> )	3
Brown rat ( <i>Rattus norvegicus</i> )	2
Wood mouse ( <i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i> )	1
Pygmy shrew ( <i>Sorex minutus</i> )	1
Water shrew ( <i>Neomys fodiens</i> )	1
Harvest mouse ( <i>Micromys minutus</i> )	1

These results indicate that the owls were mainly hunting over the wet meadows near the river, which should have a good population of short-tailed field voles; the owls preferred prey. The odd brown rat also shows they were helping out the local farms with a bit of pest control!

Thanks are due to Stephen Warburton and Ellerton Church Preservation Trust for providing the owl pellets and being so hospitable at their Open Day, and to everyone who helped with analysing the pellets.

Harvest mouse

*Drawing from The Cheshire Wildlife Trust's web site*



## Homer's Odyssey

*Barry Wright*

It all began one dark night in November, November 6 to be precise. I layed in bed, half dozing, and became aware of a scratching noise in the attic above my head. Unable to sleep I decided that I had to go and investigate, at 2.00am! In the past we had had wood mice in the attic. Assuming the scratching was from a wood mouse I baited and set four Longworth traps in the hope of catching the offending animal. These were later identified as traps A to D.

Sure enough on the morning of 7 November one of the traps 'A' contained a young male wood mouse. As I had nothing against the animal personally, I decided to let him go some distance from the house. I released him

approximately 210 metres away along a disused runway and in some rough grassland on the edge of the runway of an old airfield.

In case there was more than one animal involved I left the traps baited upstairs in the attic. The following morning, 8 November, I was slightly surprised to find that a young wood mouse again occupied the same trap. This was released at the same point on the disused airfield.

The following morning, 9 November, I was surprised that a wood mouse again occupied the same trap. Surely, if there were three wood mice in the attic I would have caught more than one on the previous occasions. I began to wonder the impossible, that the wood mouse I caught on the first occasion had actually returned twice to the same trap in my attic having crossed seven private gardens. I again release the animal at the same point and reset the trap.

Surprise surprise, on the morning of the 10 November the same trap, 'A' was again occupied by a wood mouse. At this point I thought, enough is enough, and decided to apply a permanent fur clip mark to this individual. This would surely tell me whether it was the same individual I was recapturing, or whether there was more than one animal up there.

On 11 November it was at the same time a shock and a relief to find that the animal occupying my trap was the same one I had marked the day before. Instantly he gained the nickname of Homer, partly because he had clearly demonstrated a homing instinct and partly because he seemed so stupid as to be recaptured several times over the past few days. Homer On this basis, I jumped to the conclusion that I had been recapturing Homer ever since the morning of 7 November. All was to change on the following day, 12 November when, wood mice occupied two out of my four traps. Homer occupied one trap 'D' and another, 'A', had caught one of his buddies, nicknamed Barney after the Simpson's cartoon character. Barney was marked as we were now clearly going into a different phase of this trapping exercise.



Homer with 'name badge' (arrow)

*Photograph: Barry Wright*

The next day, 13 November, I recaptured Barney in trap 'A', but Homer was nowhere to be seen. As can be seen from Table 1 below, there have been

sporadic recaptures of both Homer and Barney up until the time of writing (25 November) when they were still being recaptured. Also shown in the table is that I increased the distance of release for both Homer and Barney over this period. So far, both Barney and Homer have managed to find their way back to my attic from a distance of 260 metres away. To date, Homer has returned from a distance of 260 metres and was last released at a distance of 310 metres. It remains to be seen whether he can find his way back from such a long way away.

My only experience, in all of the years I have been mammal trapping, suggested that the maximum distance to expect a wood mouse to move between capture points would be around 100 metres. I recorded this movement when trapping on the North York Moors and assumed that the individual had used a sheep track through the heather to achieve such a long trek overnight.

Speaking with others, who are experienced in mammal trapping, suggests that the distances involved, and the fact that the animals are finding their way back, not only to my house, but also into my attic, from distances in excess of 250 metres is unusual to say the least. Exactly how these two individuals are managing to achieve this defies belief. Perhaps this is a major evolutionary step and these two individuals were born with on-board GPS navigation systems of the type found on some modern cars.

How they are achieving this is of little consequence as I have gained a lot of pleasure from catching and releasing these two individuals over the last few weeks. The traps will remain set as I am sure Homer and/or Barney may reappear at some point, and if not, I feel sure that some other individuals will eventually find their way into the comfort and safety of my attic. Only time will tell.

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#### **Editor's note (with thanks to Ann Hanson):**

Mather & Baker (1981) examined direction finding in wood mice and showed that they are able to record the magnetic course of a passive outward journey which they use to navigate their way back. However a magnetic sense was not substantiated by Sauve (1988) using similar techniques. Other work has suggested that they may use environmental gradients for orientation (Jamon & Bovet, 1987). With respect to homing distances, Jamon & Benhamou (1989) concluded that they could home from up to 73m within their home range, but when taken 1km away they failed to return. Homer and Barney certainly seem to have beaten the 73m record!

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**Table 1. Capture records of two wood mice caught in the attic at 130 Prince Rupert Drive, Tockwith and release at varying distances away on a disused airfield (November, 2001).**

Date	Homer *	Released (m)	Barney *	Released (m)
6	Traps set		Traps set	
7	? (A)	210	?	
8	? (A)	210	?	
9	? (A)	210	?	
10	Caught, marked (A)	210		
11	Recaught (A)	210		
12	Recaught (D)	210	Caught, marked (A)	210
13			Recaught (A)	260
14	Recaught (A)	210		
15	Recaught (D)	260		
16				
17			Recaught (D)	260
18/19/20				
21	Recaught (D)	260		
22/23				
24	Recaught (D)	310		

\* Trap identification shown in parentheses. Traps were set daily.

## The Mammals of Cromwell Bottom – National Mammal Week Event 2001

Ann Hanson

### Introduction

Cromwell Bottom, also known as Elland Gravel Pits, is a fascinating urban wildlife site situated between Brighouse and Elland in West Yorkshire. The site has a long history of use and abuse by humans, including farming, the construction of canals to serve local industry and osier beds for basket weaving in the 17th and 18th centuries. This was followed more recently by mineral extraction, fly ash tipping from Elland power station and finally the site was re-excavated and used for landfill. Despite all this, the wildlife managed to survive and is now protected by a group of local people known as the Friends of Cromwell Bottom (FoCB), who aim to have the area designated as a Local Nature Reserve and ultimately as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to ensure its protection for future generations.

The site is extremely diverse, bordered on one side by the Calder and Hebble Canal and with the River Calder winding through it. There are three main areas, known as Brookfoot Loop, Tag Cut Loop and North Loop. Brookfoot Loop consists of willow carr, birch scrub, open and overgrown lagoons, reed beds and a small but very rare lowland sphagnum bog. Tag Cut Loop has more open grassy meadows and a row of ponds and reed beds along the line of the old canal known as Tag Cut. North Loop is still classed as an active landfill site, but will hopefully also be restored for wildlife once it has been capped and made safe.

### Methods and Results

Because of the nature of the site (unlimited public access and the possibility of vandalism) it was not possible to use the YMG Longworth traps, but FoCB were not to be deterred and purchased 100 plastic trip-traps in order to carry out a small mammal survey with our help. As the area seems suitable for water shrews, a few traps were placed out on the evening of Wednesday 4 July next to likely ponds along Tag Cut. Unfortunately, trip-traps cannot be locked open in

the same way as Longworths can, so prebaiting is rather difficult. However, the traps were left closed with a bit of bait around the entrance to entice any water shrews into the vicinity and to allow them to get used to the strange traps.

On the evening of Friday 6 June, 54 traps baited with wheat and blowfly pupae were set to catch along Tag Cut (the line of the old canal on Tag Cut Loop) between Iron Pool and Deep Tag. About half the traps were placed in tall damp vegetation alongside ponds and reed beds and the other half in the adjacent damp grassland. Another 18 traps were placed in rushes and less damp grassland around New Pond, upslope from Tag Cut (see Fig. 1).

These traps were checked on the morning of Saturday 7 June, but unfortunately yielded only one dead common shrew at Iron Pool. There could be several explanations for such a low catch, but I suspect the abundance of natural food and shelter on the site made small mammals less likely to enter the traps. Also, the plastic traps themselves had a very strong "new" smell and, after getting wet in the long grass, the trap doors had a tendency to stick to the roof of the tunnel, making the traps less likely to catch anything.

The traps on Tag Cut Loop were set to catch again on the Saturday evening, although it was discovered that five traps had mysteriously disappeared during the afternoon. Fortunately they had been left closed during the day, so could not have been taken with any animals inside. At the same time the remaining 28 traps were set to catch in the Willow Carr area of Brookfoot Loop. Of these traps eight were set in the edge of some birch scrub, 10 in an area of rank, fairly dry grass and 10 in a dense, damp patch of reed canary grass on the riverbank.

The traps were checked and lifted on the morning of Sunday 8 June and this time yielded a slightly better catch of eight animals (all alive and well). The weather conditions were hot, humid and dry on Saturday 7 June and warm and breezy, with rain the previous night, on Sunday 8 June. The results are shown in Table 1.

### Conclusions

Although a rather disappointing number of small mammals were captured, at least this preliminary trap provided some initial records for the site. Four species were recorded; common shrew (*Sorex araneus*), wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), bank vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*) and field vole (*Microtus agrestis*). Also, a few members of FoCB gained some experience in small mammal trapping and handling techniques, which will hopefully help them to carry out future surveys.

Cromwell Bottom is a prime example of a valuable urban wildlife site and well worth a visit for any naturalist. On the first day of our trap, huge clouds of damselflies and Burnet moths flew up as we walked through the grass on Tag Cut Loop. The ponds and lagoons are excellent for dragonflies, with a broad-bodied chaser and a rather more elusive emperor dragonfly in residence that particular weekend. The wet areas also abound with amphibians and we encountered a positive carpet of miniature frogs and newts, making walking a rather time-consuming business in places! The diversity of grasses and flowers is also impressive, with a small patch of grass vetchling being a first for my personal plant list.

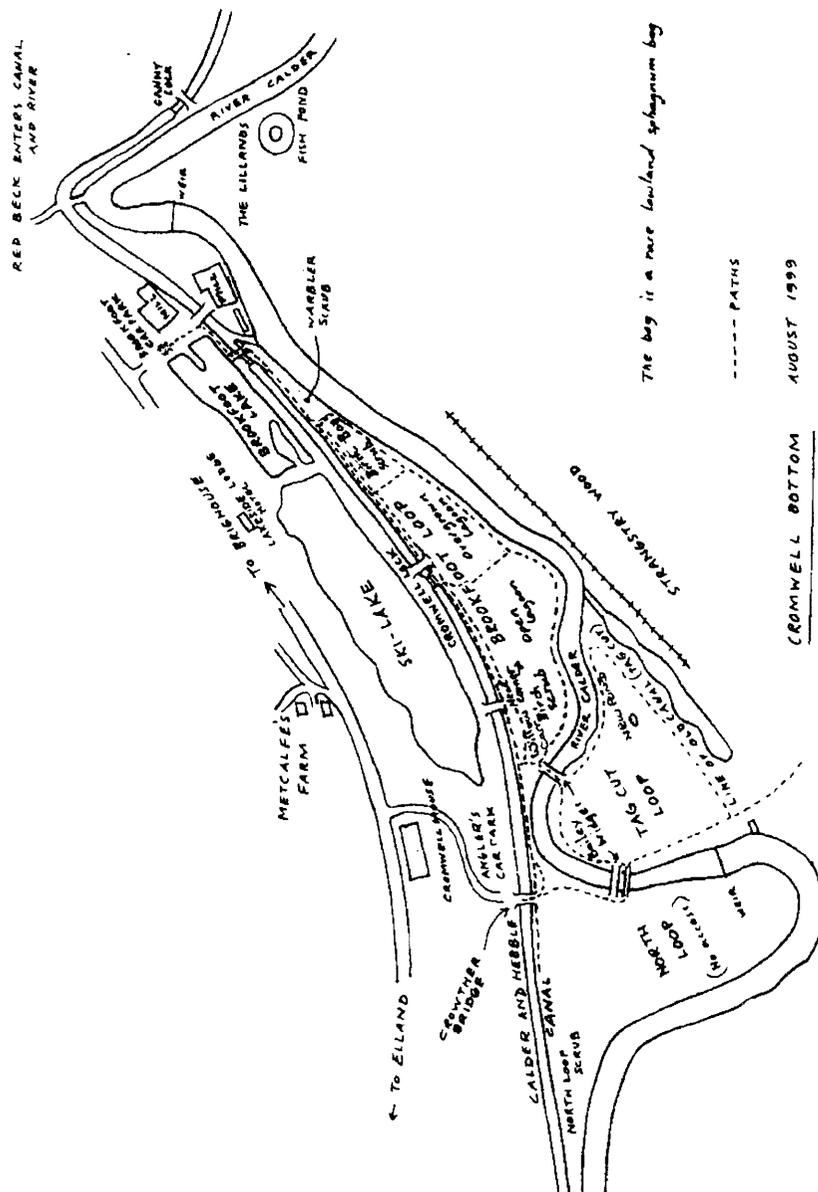
Thanks are due to everyone from FoCB and the Yorkshire Mammal Group who came along and helped with this trap, but especially to Sean Lynch who coordinated the event for FoCB and Martin Tordoff for his admirable attempts at vole juggling.

**Table 1. Small mammals caught at Cromwell Bottom, 8 June, 2001**

Location	Species*	A/SA/J	Sex	Weight (g)
<b>Tag Cut Loop</b>				
Tag Pond, damp grass	<i>A.s.</i>	A	M	26.0
Deep Tag, damp grass	<i>C.g.</i>	SA	F	16.0
New Pond, dry grass	<i>M.a.</i>	J	F	11.0
<b>Brookfoot Loop</b>				
Willow Carr, dry grass	<i>S.a.</i>	A	?	8.0
Willow Carr, dry grass	<i>C.g.</i>	A	M	17.0
Willow Carr, reed canary grass	<i>A.s.</i>	A	M	29.0
Willow Carr, reed canary grass	<i>C.g.</i>	SA	F	13.0
Willow Carr, reed canary grass	<i>C.g.</i>	A	M	21.0

\* *A.s.* = *Apodemus sylvaticus* (wood mouse); *C.g.* = *Clethrionomys glareolus* (bank vole); *M.a.* = *Microtus agrestis* (field vole); *S.a.* = *Sorex araneus* (common shrew); A/SA/J = adult/sub-adult/juvenile; M/F = male/female.

Figure 1. Map of Cromwell Bottom.



## The Chestnut Centre

Mary Youngman

On Sunday 29 July a small group of YMG members visited the Chestnut Centre. Located in the Peak District National Park, at Chapel-en-le-Frith, the Chestnut Centre houses Europe's largest multi-specied collection of otters and owls. The centre has a breeding programme for both these groups and aims to release captive-bred stock back into the wild.

Our first port of call was the tea-room which, apart from the essential refreshments, had a display of harvest mice. We spent some time admiring these delightful animals as they raced up and down the dried teasel stalks placed in their enclosure. Next we moved on to the circular nature trail that meanders through a wooded valley - a pleasant habitat to be in on such a warm sunny day. The first otter enclosure claimed to hold giant otters but to our disappointment there was no sign

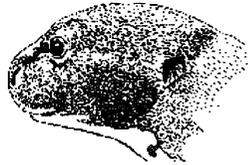


Giant otter, *Pteronura brasiliensis*

of them, presumably they were well hidden in the vegetation. Eventually we moved to the American and European otter enclosures. Here there was no difficulty seeing the animals. Two individuals in particular were very lively chasing each other in and out of the water, so we were able to appreciate their agility in their aquatic environment. We continued our wander around the trail admiring more otters (including the vociferous Asian short-claw otter), numerous owls and a wildcat (where comparisons were made with my own rotund tabby cat). Just as we reached the end of the trail we encountered a member of staff equipped with a metal bucket containing fish - feeding time had commenced. The opportunity was not to be missed and so we walked briskly back to the first enclosure and there at last were the giant otters in all their glory. Watching the giant otters feed provided a splendid finale to a most enjoyable day.

### Fact-file - The giant otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*)

The giant otter is native to South America's rainforests and wetlands. The fur is dense and velvety, a deep chocolate brown colour, with white creamy patches or spots on the neck which are individually unique. The otter can reach two metres (six feet) in length (with the tail averaging two feet long), and a weight of 32 kg (70 lbs). The life span is 12 years in the wild and 21 years in captivity.



## YMG Mammal Recording 2001

### *Michael Thompson*

The recording scheme has now been going since 1996. Throughout the past year, since the last report on mammal records (Thompson, 2000), I have continued to receive information from members. The total number of records on the database now stands at 1335, compared with 931 at the end of last year. All records for each species are printed out in the Records Book, together with their associated distribution maps for North Yorkshire and part of East Yorkshire. Last year I listed the records for 27 species of mammals, including six species of bat - I have now included data on five additional species: American mink, otter, pine marten, polecat and harvest mouse. Of these, there is just one record each for the pine marten and polecat, and a few for the otter and mink. Sylvia Jay and Gordon Woodroffe hold most of North Yorkshire's otter and mink records; John Drewett has this information for the bats. As before, the bat records on the *Look Out for Mammals* database are my own, which will be passed on to John in due course. There are more water vole records to add - Jon Traill, the recently appointed Water Vole Project Officer at the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, and member of YMG, will pass his findings on to us. The dormouse is listed for both years, but is not yet available for viewing. This year I have included the distribution maps for the stoat and weasel (see

Fig. 1), which, according to the records, still show the 2:1 ratio in favour of the stoat. The stoat seems to have a wider distribution than the weasel in North Yorkshire; could there be a biological reason for this? Details of records and tetrad numbers are presented in Table 1.

By far the most commonly reported mammal is the hedgehog with 188 records to date, 89% of which were road casualties. The earliest date during the year for a death on the road (d.o.r.) hedgehog record was 9 March (1996) and the last, before hibernation, was 30 November (2000). Most d.o.r. records occur in urban or suburban areas, with far fewer in rural locations; these findings support Colin Howes' observations on hedgehogs in suburban areas (Howes, 1976). According to Nigel Reeves, 40.9% of all hedgehog deaths are caused by humans, which include road traffic accidents, the activities of gardeners and land managers, drowning in steep-sided garden ponds, attacks by pets and poisoning (Reeve, 2000). The Highways Agency does not report annual hedgehog deaths on roads in the UK, but does give figures for badgers (37,500-50,000), deer (20,000-42,000), foxes (100,000) and otters (60-86% of deaths). The actual numbers are likely to be higher. YMG records contain many d.o.r. reports for badger and fox, and several otters are known to have been killed in this way following the release programme on the River Derwent catchment in North Yorkshire.

In August 2001, with the help of Mike Gray of the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC), I passed on 1102 YMG records. Eventually, these will be put onto their main database, with a GIS backing. The NEYEDC, based at St. Williams College, York, is one of several regional centres in Britain to be set up following the Environmental Conference in Rio in 1992, to which Britain is a signatory. The Director of the NEYEDC is Lisa Kerslake, also a member of YMG and who serves on its committee. Currently, Lisa is assembling the Centre's staff and equipment, and securing funding for its future. From time to time, YMG records held at the Centre will be updated and will be accessible, if need be, by YMG members.

I would like to thank the following contributors: David Baines, Derek Capes, Charles Critchley, Tony East, Ann Hanson, Colin Howes, Lisa Kerslake, Robert Masheder, Geoff and Roma Oxford, Denise and John Ray, Gill Smith (Ryedale Natural History Society) and Mary Youngman..

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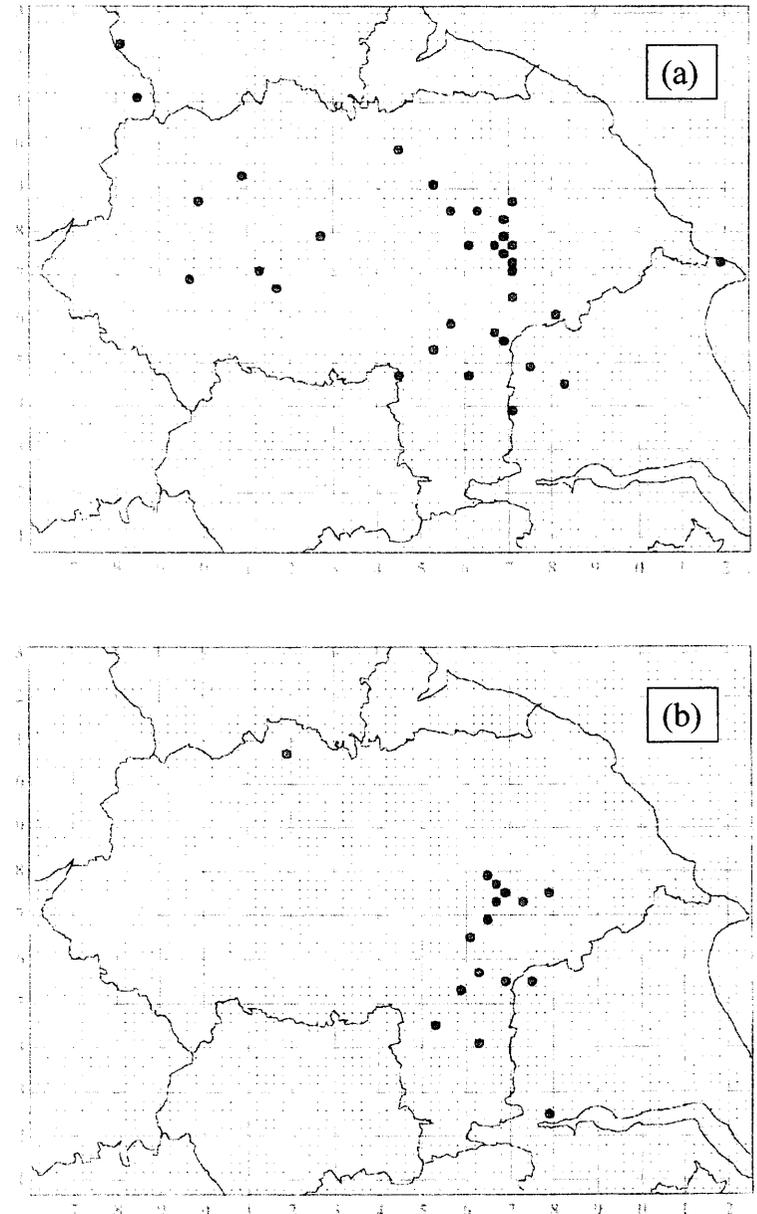
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**Table 1. Records of North and East Yorkshire mammals currently entered in the YMG database**

Species	No. records	Tetrads on maps
Hedgehog	188 (121)	145
Mole	157 (124)	128
Common shrew	28 (14)	22
Pigmy shrew	11 (6)	10
Water shrew	4 (1)	4
Brown hare	137 (92)	93
Rabbit	141 (114)	122
Grey squirrel	74 (56)	63
Bank vole	2 (18)	19
Field vole	20 (11)	19
Water vole	16 (9)	13
Dormouse	5 (-)	2
Harvest mouse	6 (-)	5
Wood mouse	19 (13)	15
Brown rat	28 (15)	23
Fox	101 (62)	89
Otter	6 (-)	5
American mink	6 (-)	5
Badger	109 (82)	78
Pine marten	1 (-)	1
Polecat	1 (-)	1
Stoat	33 (31)	33
Weasel	17 (16)	16
Red deer	2 (2)	2
Fallow deer	5 (2)	5
Roe deer	44 (28)	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>1195</b>	

The figures in parentheses represent those published in the last edition of *Imprint*. There are 140 bat records in the database, making a total of 1335 records in all.

**Figure 1. Distribution records for (a) the stoat (*Mustela erminea*) and (b) the weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) in N. Yorkshire**



## Percy the Polecat – Obituary

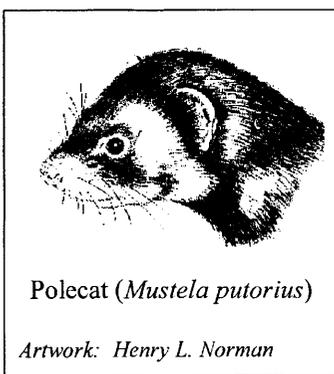
*Ann Hanson*

The travels of Percy the polecat (*Mustela putorius*) came to a rather abrupt end on the B1224 between Long Marsden and Bilton in Ainsty, North Yorkshire (SE493507) on 29 March 2001. His mortal remains were spotted by a keen mammalogist and collected, at arms length, for further investigation.

At first it was suspected that Percy was in fact an escaped polecat ferret, popular with both ferret keepers and pet owners. However no-one came forward to collect the body and the decision was made to consult the experts. Johnny Birks of the Vincent Wildlife Trust expressed an interest in Percy, so he was deposited in the freezer, to be examined at a later date. Whilst in the deep freeze, convictions waned and he became affectionately known as Freddy the Freezer Ferret. Finally the time came to defrost Percy and take him on a trip to The Mammal Society Easter Conference in Ripon. Here, for reasons which will be obvious to anyone who has been in close proximity to a deceased mustelid, he was examined in the car park by Johnny Birks and a group of interested on-lookers.

On close examination it became apparent from the state of his paws and claws, and a variety of scars, that Percy had probably been living wild. His general condition was that of a male polecat ready to breed and probably looking for a mate. His pelt showed all the characteristics of a true polecat; very dark guard hairs with a more creamy under-fur, no white on the paws or chest, the characteristic face mask and brown fur coming down the centre of the face to touch the nose (in polecat ferrets there is more often a line of white fur just above the nose).

So the burning question was, "How did Percy get to North Yorkshire"? Was it under his own steam or was he brought in by a ferret breeder and subsequently



escaped? We will probably never know the real answer, but if more true polecats start to appear in Yorkshire in the not-too-distant future, we might at least have some clues.

Polecats were widespread in Britain up to the nineteenth century, but were then gradually exterminated (Walton 1977), managing to hang on only in their Welsh stronghold. In Yorkshire, the polecat era officially came to a close in 1928, although during and after the Second World War, with an absence of gamekeepers, residual populations rallied and produced a small batch of slightly suspect records (Howes 1985). More recently, as a result of a more enlightened attitude towards our small native carnivores, polecats have been spreading out from Wales and have also been reintroduced in a couple of locations, although distinguishing them from escaped polecat ferrets has never been easy! A distribution map in Birks *et al.* (1997) shows polecat records well into the English Midlands and also heading towards Yorkshire from Cumbria, a successful reintroduction in the north. Thus, it seems inevitable that polecats will once again reach Yorkshire – the question is when?

As for Percy, his body was finally handed over to Stuart Ogilvy of the Yorkshire Museum, who delivered him to Andrew Kitchener at the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, where his remains will be used to further scientific research on polecats and polecat ferrets.

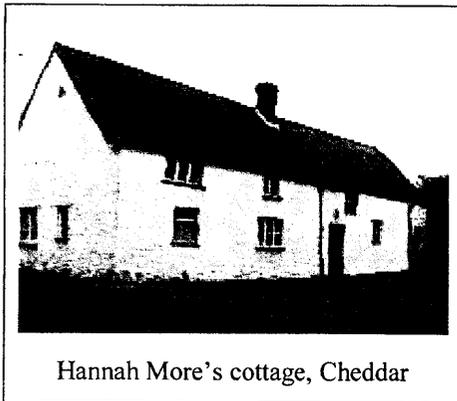
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## The Day of the Dormouse

*Roma Oxford*

Anyone who has seen a live common dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) cannot help but be captivated, and so it was for me when Doug Woods came to talk about them to the Yorkshire Mammal Group some years ago. When the chance arose to become involved with the dormouse release and monitoring scheme in North Yorkshire, I joined the team's monthly visits to the wood; the promise of another few glimpses of dormice too strong to resist. After a year of opening dormouse boxes, Geoff and I concluded that more than one member of the team ought to be a licensed 'dormouser', so we signed up for a course with Doug Woods as a step towards obtaining our own English Nature handling licences.



Hannah More's cottage, Cheddar

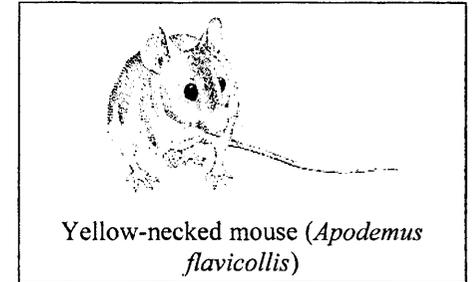
On Saturday 14 July, bright and early, we set off for Cheddar and the famous Hannah More's cottage, the atmospheric venue for the course. About 14 of us were present, representing a number of organisations. There were interested amateurs, Country Park rangers, English Nature personnel and Sue and Roy Eden from Dorset who had been asked to organise a course themselves, so were keen to see how it was done. Sue and Roy have been

studying dormice for some years in the scrubby coastal hedges of Dorset (Eden & Eden, 1999), and they were keen to point out that dormice don't necessarily read all the right books on preferred habitats.

Once introductions had been made, Doug Woods led us through dormouse biology, habits, habitat requirements etc. etc. We investigated animal-gnawed nuts (in depth, because we had to pass a 'nibbled nuts' test later in the day), looked at preserved specimens, consulted literature during a coffee break and then the final graduation (for those seeking licenses) before the afternoon field

session was to remove a dormouse from a box in such a way that its ventral side could be examined. Most people found this short activity nerve-wracking, and if it wasn't for the extreme docility of the dormouse Doug had chosen for us to practice on, some would have gone home! You see – you had to hold the mouse with its head closest to your body and that's not easy when instinct dictates otherwise. There was many a contorted wrist that lunchtime (by the way, never buy lunch from Budgens in Cheddar!).

In the afternoon we split into two groups and went our separate ways to different sites. We went with Doug to the woods above Cheddar Gorge, indeed to the very site where Paul Bright did his pioneering work using dormouse boxes for the first time. In all we probably saw about six or seven dormice and at least two for several minutes as they scrambled up the tree to observe us from a safer distance. Three boxes held rather more of a surprise to us Northerners – yellow-necked mice (*Apodemus flavicollis*)!



Yellow-necked mouse (*Apodemus flavicollis*)

The residents of the first box shot out like jack-in-the-boxes and disappeared in a flash. When we came across a second box, for our benefit Doug decided to attempt a closer inspection. The mice were duly coaxed into the bag and not only did they seem enormous compared to wood mice, but their activity was positively manic. To cut a story short, in attempting to show us the yellowness of a mouse's neck, Doug got quite severely bitten. Box three, when we found it, was left alone!

Once all the box inspections were complete, we reunited at the cottage and Doug gave an illustrated talk on dormice in captivity with particular reference to breeding. After that, we filled in our appraisal forms, thanked Doug for his expertise and headed off home. The day had been both fascinating and exhausting, but everyone agreed it had been a truly wonderful experience. We completed our forms for English Nature and licenses arrived in the post a couple of weeks later. So that's it – we're now qualified dormousers.

### Reference

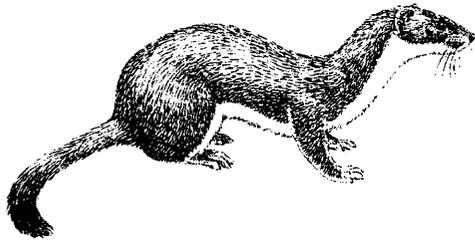
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## The Stoat

*Lawrie King*

Shirley and I visited Tophill Low Reserve on Sunday 22nd April 2001, a cold but dry day. Plenty of birds about but no sign of the black-necked grebes which had probably moved on to their breeding grounds (Wheldrake?). The ring-necked duck drake eventually turned up at the North Marsh together with the female pochard, who had been his companion for some time.

As we were leaving the reserve at about 2.00pm we saw four birders looking at the roof of the three-storey building between the car park and the Visitor Centre. I stopped, hoping that they were looking at an unusual bird but when I asked what they had seen I was told there was a stoat on the roof catching moles! And indeed there was, although it wasn't catching moles, it was just taking them to a nest it had under the eaves of one of the dormer windows.



As we watched, the stoat, appeared from its nest, ran across the roof, over another dormer window, paused at the top of a drainpipe, had a quick look round and then dived down the inside of the pipe. A couple of seconds later it reappeared at the bottom of

the pipe, ran through the hedge, across the grass sward and into the field behind the Visitor Centre. It soon reappeared but this time with a mole in its jaws. It ran across the grass, through the hedge, up the drainpipe, across the roof and back into its nest.

While we watched, the stoat, repeated the journey four times, each time taking back a mole. Obviously it had found the nesting hole of a mole family. Other watchers had seen the stoat take no less than six moles.

Doubtless there are many records of stoats taking moles, but then up a drainpipe to a nest on the top of a building just has to be a first.

## Water Vole Symposium: A Not So Brief Sketch

*'Ratty'*

Ruth Warren and Tim Kohler (English Nature), Colin Howes (Yorkshire Naturalists' Union) and Geoff Oxford (YMG) are to be congratulated in putting together this symposium on water voles. Where better than the idyllic setting at the University of York? The lake languishing placidly in the centre of the campus, mallards, coots and geese going about their daily business, the weeping willows on the banks, a fisherman surrounded by his tackle and bait. Then almost on cue, a rowing boat emerged from the far bank. A mole sat in the back



trailing his paws in the water and a perspiring vole rowed him towards the Biology buildings (I made that last bit up but I think you get the picture). In the words of Bertie Wooster\*: God was in his heaven and all looked well with the world. Then, as in a Wooster novel, dark clouds suddenly appeared. I had been looking forward to hearing about

Yorkshire and other water voles; no worries, a quiet, relaxed, stimulating day with no responsibilities. Then the editor of *Imprint* called me over. "Did I think", he said, "that the events of the day should be reported in the above mentioned journal." Like a fool, I said "yes" and got the job. "Nothing elaborate you understand, no long reports, stick to a theme, get the flavour of the conference and no clever stuff. And none of that Brummy humour. You needn't worry about the grammar, I'll put that right." Or at any rate that was the gist of what he said!

The trouble with the biology lecture theatres is that most people, quite understandably, enter through the main entrance. This is situated adjacent to the speaker and designed to cause maximum disruption by latecomers. So if you're late as many of those who had to come a long distance were (York and its environs always present a problem) then you need an experienced, confident, opening speaker. Rob Strachan proved more than equal to the task. He gave a brief natural

history of the water vole, illustrated with some excellent slides. He emphasised the importance of latrines, revealed the best time for field surveys and showed how dramatic the crash in water vole populations had been. Particularly enlightening was the fact that female water voles mark up to six latrines along about 150 metres of river. Males overlap between one and three females. As for continental water voles, because they are largely terrestrial, they are regarded as quite a pest in the bulb fields. In Austria we were shown a field full of vole hills.

Rob has, almost single handed, carried out the three national water vole surveys, all funded by the Vincent Wildlife Trust. It will be interesting to see how, when and who funds the next one. Certainly there is some very accurate baseline data which will be useful to monitor the fortunes of this endangered species. And if anyone was left to wonder how mink had become so prolific throughout the UK you can do your own sums: 700 mink farms in 1962 with an average of 10,000 animals per farm.

Colin Howes (Doncaster Museum) followed. He is Yorkshire's mammal recorder and his talk on the current status of the water vole in Yorkshire was based on excursion reports of the Yorkshire Naturalist Union going back to 1875. Unfortunately, much of the water vole data he had intended to present had been lost in the deluge which engulfed parts of the museum earlier in the week. It was, nonetheless, interesting to learn that because the Humber was linked with the Rhine system following the last Ice Age he suspected that Rhineland voles were now inhabiting the Yorkshire region. He intimated that it was time we got some DNA studies going. Come on Colin, if our voles have such impeccable ancestries they should be a good bet for European funding.

And so on to current survey work in west, north and south Yorkshire. First, Peter Bowler brought us up-to-date for the western region and Tim Kohler for the north and south. They described a whole network of habitats and water courses with some of the most unlikely names. It was good to hear that voles had not gone from the river Went. Habitats containing a miscellaneous collection of motor cycle parts, fridge doors, prams and rubber tyres were quite well occupied. (Yes, and an otter spent much of his lying up time in a discarded car on the river Dee near Aboyne but I don't recommend improving habitats with a load of junk). It's always good to add to one's vocabulary, and we heard two new words to describe water vole numbers: a "stonkin site" for water voles (Bowler) and that some becks were "well stuffed" with voles (Kohler). Quantifying them is less easy. During the ensuing discussion there was a very good question on how many fisheries had been surveyed as these do make good water vole sites because they are protected and relatively mink free. Indeed, a recent study in Staffordshire has shown these to be prime habitats.

IDBs also came in for a good deal of criticism over their respect for wildlife. For the uninitiated these are not some form of intercontinental ballistic missiles (although they have much the same effect) but our old friends the internal drainage boards. Michael Thompson (YMG) sits on one and feels uncomfortable. There's no answer to that one. Others were very unhappy with IDB arrogance as well. Maybe, but unless you try to get them involved more habitats will be lost to their insensitivity. After all, they too are under pressure to stop localised flooding. It is time the EA got off the fence and became a bit more involved.

Tony Mitchell-Jones (EN) and Heather Kennedy (EA), were brave enough to give *Powerpoint* presentations. And very good they were too. Tony described the salient points of the *Species Action Plan*. These aim to arrest the decline and maintain the current status of the water vole in Britain and to restore voles to their former glory by 2010. He stressed how the three national surveys had been fundamental in studying water vole populations and that there was now the possibility of full legal protection. His paper after lunch concerned the legal status of the water vole. Not the best after lunch topic but the play on words such as '*recklessly* damage' should keep a good few lawyers in business. Perhaps they might sponsor the next conference; now there's a thought! Heather Kennedy took us through *mitigation*. In any development it was essential that this should be taken at the earliest possible time.

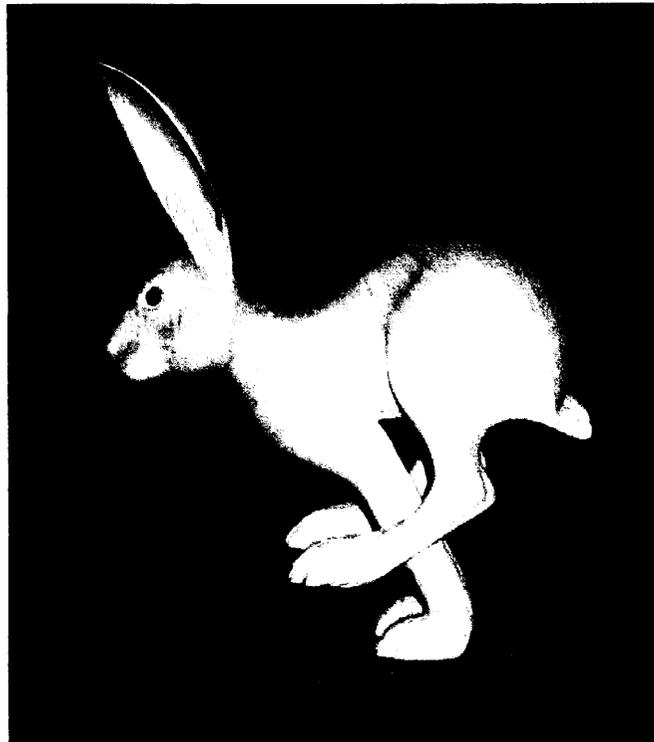
The closing discussion was thought-provoking although I have to say that when delegates were asked how many of them were using the standardised, recording forms issued by English Nature the result was rather disappointing. Organisations, which I would have thought should have known that consistency and standardisation are mandatory if we want meaningful data, appeared to be doing their own thing. As one person pointed out, many volunteers want to go to survey sites with water voles. The same was true of otter surveys but unless we look at the big picture the results will be biased and quite frankly, not much use. However, if the conference results in people taking the lead from English Nature it will have achieved a great deal.

Where do we go from here? Another conference definitely, but let's involve the NFU, the IDBs, RSPB and MAFF. Without their co-operation it's going to be a long haul. And who better than Elliot Morley to chair it?

All in all a good day with over a 100 delegates attending. Special thanks to the magnificent seven (speakers), English Nature, YNU, the University of York and all those who underpinned it by their attention to detail and organisational

skills. The sandwiches weren't bad either. Pity about the bookstall. What should have been a very economical day for me turned out to be rather expensive because *Second Nature* had two books I couldn't resist. At least the IDBs cannot be held responsible for that one!

Ask Jeeves! web site: [www.ask.co.uk](http://www.ask.co.uk)

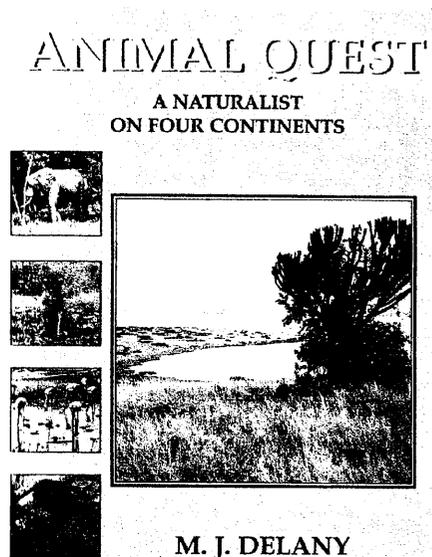


Hare by Jack Hansley (see page 1)

## Book Review

*Peter Richman*

**Animal Quest – A Naturalist on Four Continents.** Michael Delany. Capponnellan Press, Bingley. 2000. Pp. 192. Price £9.95. ISBN 0 9538886 0 6. \*



Michael Delany's interest in mammals started at the tender age of eight, when Bertram Mills Circus fired his enthusiasm for elephants and large cats. In this book he tells of his life from his Manchester roots, and a fascinating story it is too.

His early career in the 1950s was dedicated to studies of wingless insects inhabiting the heaths of south Devon, before he moved on to explore micro-organisms in the Gulf of Mexico. Africa in general, and Uganda in particular, take up about one third of the book. Here he was interested in the pristine and unexamined fauna including sixteen species of squirrel and 78 species of blue butterflies. His research interests shifted again after a

chance encounter at a conference on the ecology and taxonomy of African small mammals held in America in 1977. In 1979 he made an extended visit to Abha in Southern Arabia where he trapped and studied the region's 83 species of small mammal. Also included in his book are the portions of Michael Delany's life spent studying mammals closer to home in Scotland, the Channel Islands and the Isles of Scilly. The volume is illustrated by over 30 high quality colour plates and numerous sketches, and represents a really good buy at £9.95.

\* available from the author at Fern Lodge, Fern Hill, Bingley, West Yorkshire BD16 4AQ – price includes P & P.

## Yorkshire Mammal Group Programme, 2002

- January 10<sup>th</sup> **Quiz Night** (with wine prizes)
- February 7<sup>th</sup> **Dolphins in schools.** Horace Dobbs (International Dolphin Watch)
- March 7<sup>th</sup> **The return of the polecat in Britain.** Johnny Birks (The Vincent Wildlife Trust)
- April 4<sup>th</sup> **Putting the bats of vice-county 61 (East Riding) on the map.** Tony Lane (East Yorkshire Bat Group)
- May 2<sup>nd</sup> **Control of TB in badgers and cattle: data and predictions.** Graham Smith (Central Science Laboratory)
- June **Evening field trip** (details to follow). During the summer months there will be other field study events, including those organised by the North Yorkshire Bat Group.
- October 3<sup>rd</sup> **Harvest mice in East Yorkshire.** John Traill (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust)
- November 7<sup>th</sup> **Last refuge of European large carnivores.** James Roberts, wildlife guide and author.
- December 5<sup>th</sup> **Members evening** - a number of short talks by YMG members.

Indoor meetings are held in the Common Room of the Department of Biology, University of York and start at 7.30pm. All are welcome.

For further details contact: Lisa Kerlake on 01904 557235

## Yorkshire Mammal Group Committee Members, 2002

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**Homer: an end-note** (courtesy of Barry Wright - see page 27)

