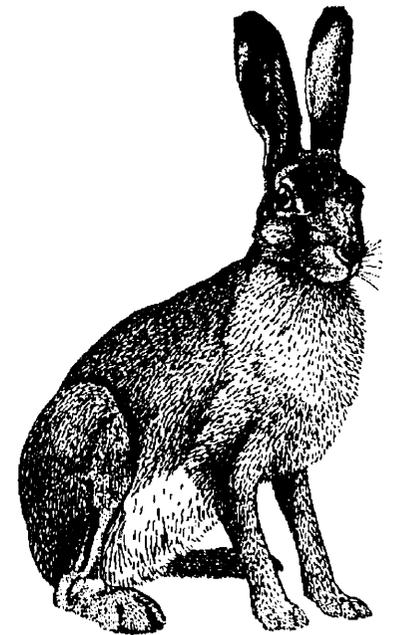


# IMPRINT



**The Yorkshire Mammal Group Newsletter**

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## Editor's Report

*Geoff Oxford*

Welcome to the 2003 edition of *Imprint*. I am happy to report that, in terms of membership, the YMG continues to flourish with better attended indoor meetings than ever before. However, despite this pool of talent, we are desperately seeking members who would be willing to fill positions on the YMG Committee. Unfortunately speakers, field meetings and *Imprint* (even) do not self-assemble! The work is satisfying and not onerous so if you want to volunteer, please see a Committee member at one of our meetings. Speaking of which, 2003 will see a change of venue for the Group as we relinquish our room in the Department of Biology, University of York, to take up residence at York CVS, in the Priory Street Centre. The YMG moved to the University in 1993 (can it really be a decade ago?) when continued use of the wonderfully architectural Garforth House, the home of BIOSIS in Micklegate, became impossible. The latest move is precipitated by looming plans for the re-development of the Biology common room, and also the spiralling costs imposed by the University.

It is interesting how by chance the European beaver, a species rarely featured in *Imprint*, is in this issue the subject of two articles and is also a key player in one of the reviewed books. Likewise, the rare pine marten appears in no less than four separate places. Dormice have been the subject of a reintroduction into North Yorkshire but we live in hope that remnant wild populations still lurk somewhere in forgotten corners of the county. A succession of National 'Nut Hunts' (the latest reported herein) have failed to bring to light the 'smoking gun' of characteristically opened hazelnuts. Michael Thompson, YMG Mammal Recorder, continues to painstakingly enter our data of sightings, road kills, dung pits and other evidence of a species' presence. The mapping has reached the stage where real patterns are beginning to emerge for at least some species. We also bring you reports of the work of the North Yorkshire Bat Group, results from several live-trapping studies, news of otter rescues and whale sightings, and much more. I am most grateful to all who have contributed articles, reports and book reviews to this edition of *Imprint*.

## Cutting Edge – Mammal Snippets

*Compiled by Geoff Oxford*

### Marking methods for small mammals

In a recent paper, Lindner & Fuelling (2002) studies the effects of ear tattoos for individually identifying small mammals in the field. This method was considered as an alternative to the more 'traditional' toe-clipping, a technique altogether more brutal, potentially damaging and with real animal welfare implications. Indeed, in some countries this method is prohibited by law or, at least, requires special licences. The species used for the trials was the grey-sided vole, *Clethrionomys rufocanus*, studies over three summer seasons in the tundra of northern Norway. The authors found that ear-tattooing took about two minutes to perform, and that the rate of first recapture after marking was 87%, much higher than the reported recapture rates for toe-clipped voles. Note, however, that the effects of toe-clipping and ear tattooing were not contrasted directly in the same population, and so comparisons are difficult. The authors reported no weight loss in recaptured animals, in contrast to the findings of other studies using different marking methods. However, the time-lag between marking and first recapture was higher than between the second and third recaptures, suggesting that ear tattooing did induce some trauma. They conclude that ear tattooing is a viable alternative to other methods of individually tagging small mammals.

### Reference

Lindner, E. & Fuelling, O. (2002) Marking methods in small mammals: ear tattooing as an alternative to toe-clipping. *J. Zool., Lond.* **256**: 159-163.

### American marten wild in Britain

Davison *et al* (2001), supported by The Vincent Wildlife Trust, have been investigating the use of mitochondrial DNA techniques to delve into the phylogeography and population history of our native pine marten (*Martes*

*martes*). During this work they discovered that two of six animals sampled from England were in fact not our species at all but the American marten (*M. americana*). The samples of American martens were collected in the 1990s and it is unknown whether a self-sustaining population exists in this country, or whether the animals were accidental escapes, perhaps from fur farms, or a result of a deliberate release. In 1969 a specimen was reportedly shot in Yorkshire and there are unsubstantiated reports of a deliberate release of *M. americana* sometime between 1960 and 1976. If one or more feral American marten populations does exist, this may be bad news for the genetic integrity of our native marten - the two species may be able to hybridise with one another. A similar case has arisen with the Scottish wildcat (*Felis sylvestris*) and feral domestic cats (*Felis catus*), which are also able to hybridise. This presents a challenge to those seeking greater legal protection for *F. sylvestris* because it is very difficult to define exactly what a wildcat is.

Back to the pine marten, DNA markers have recently been used to test the efficacy of faecal identification (Macdonald & Tattersall, 2002). Three experienced surveyors collected fresh marten scats using standard techniques on the same transects in Galloway, Scotland. Scats were then identified on the basis of extracted DNA which showed that nearly one in five 'marten' scats were in fact from foxes. The incidence of errors among the three surveyors ranged from 9-29%. The surveyor who performed most reliably in Scotland misclassified all 12 scats collected from sparser marten populations in England and Wales, highlighting the difficulties of surveying mammals at low densities. These results have important implications for the training of volunteers.

## References

- Davison, A., Birks, J. D. S., Brookes, R. C., Messenger, J. E. & Griffiths, H. I. (2001) Mitochondrial phylogeography and population history of pine martens *Martes martes* compared with polecats *Mustela putorius*. *Mol. Evol.*, **10**: 2479-2488.
- Macdonald, D. & Tattersall, F. (2002) *The State of Britain's Mammals 2002*. Mammal Trust UK, London.

## Mouse with a habit

Last year in one of the local villages in the Dales I spotted a poster advertising a helpline number for people to call who have a drugs problem. Given the beautiful surroundings and apparently idyllic way of life it seemed an unlikely issue in this particular location, but of course such problems are no longer confined to urban areas. Neither, it seems, are they confined to the human inhabitants.

Sitting in my living room one evening last winter I heard something scrabbling about in the kitchen drawer. Quickly getting up to investigate I found no animal, but the tell tale droppings of a mouse. The drawer is effectively my medicine cabinet, so it seemed an unlikely place to sustain a mouse for long. However, on cleaning the drawer I discovered chewed up bits of silver foil. The mouse had unwrapped and eaten two Paracetamol tablets. I have no idea what the fatal dose of Paracetamol is for a mouse, but I assumed that it had almost certainly exceeded it and that I would not be troubled again. Consequently, I returned everything to the now clean drawer.

Two mornings later I awoke with a migraine and went to the drawer for some pain killers. Imagine my surprise to find more chewed-up silver foil, mouse droppings and two more tablets missing. This was either a mouse with a habit or one that felt worse than me! Once again I cleaned out the drawer, but this time replaced the normal contents with a Longworth trap baited with museli. Early next morning I heard the trap door close and on investigation found a beautiful wood mouse inside. I emptied the mouse into a large plastic bag and took him or her about 500m away where I released it behind the chapel.

Back indoors I decided to read up on wood mice in my books where I soon discovered that they are claimed to have a good homing instinct. So, I was not surprised three days later, to hear a mouse in my drawer again. Once again I set a Longworth trap and caught the mouse the same day. Although I hadn't marked the original mouse, this too was a wood mouse and I suspect it was the same one. This time I took it for a drive and released it about 4km away. I was not troubled any longer.

This autumn I was again briefly troubled by a wood mouse in the kitchen

drawers, but at least this time it had the good sense to stick to the nuts and dried fruit!

*John Drewett*

Editorial comment – for more on mouse homing see page 30

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### **Pine marten den-site survey**

In connection with its work on pine marten conservation in England and Wales, The Vincent Wildlife trust is gathering basic information on den sites used by pine martens elsewhere in their European range. The current questionnaire survey is being conducted mainly among professional naturalists and foresters in Ireland and Scotland. Johnny Birks would therefore be most grateful to receive any details people might be able to supply of den sites they have encountered. For the purpose of the survey a den is defined as any site providing shelter and known to have been used for resting or breeding by one or more pine martens. Questionnaire forms will be available at YMG meetings or from Geoff Oxford (details at the back).

*Gordon Woodroffe*

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### **Return of the European beaver: a suitable case for treatment**

In an article in *Mammal News* (1998, 115: 6), The Mammal Society urged Scottish Natural Heritage to proceed with the re-introduction of the European Beaver *Castor fiber* into Scotland. As to practical aspects of re-introduction, it had been demonstrated that the species can thrive in a variety of habitats, often at close quarters to humans, habitats of which there many examples in more than sufficient abundance in Scotland. One of the most promising is on Speyside (the Inch Marshes) where the local people were strongly in favour of a reintroduction.

After a risk analysis and an ecological survey the decision was made to go

ahead. This promised to be a most exciting project. To reintroduce beavers back to the Highlands after 400 years is no mean achievement. By now 12 to 15 animals should have been shipped from Norway to quarantine pens for release in the Knapdale Forest. If the trial was a success, then animals would have been released elsewhere in Scotland. After all, as a recent article in *Mammal Review* (2002, 32: 153-178) points out, successful reintroductions and translocations of European beavers have taken place in about 14 countries. So why has the Scottish project been shelved? You may well ask? The answer is quite predictable. Some influential landowners are against it and obviously have friends in high places; so it is being reconsidered. Seems that a few people are in a position to probably overturn a well thought out project which had the blessings of some of our top scientists.

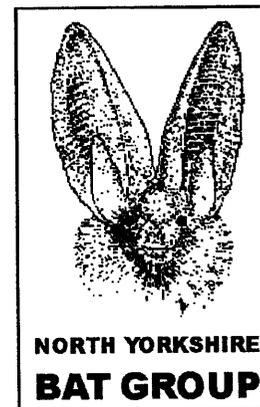
Question: Which country had the first World Wildlife Fund National Appeal?

Answer: The United Kingdom, of course. We're excellent at telling the rest of the world how to conserve their wildlife.

*Gordon Woodroffe* (with additional material from *The Guardian* (24.10.02))

## **North Yorkshire Bat Group - 2002**

*John Drewett*



Whilst we often move events around the county to give as many people as possible a chance to attend something that does not involve a long journey, the year usually starts off with a predictable two visits to Fountains Abbey to look for hibernating bats. This forms part of the National Bat Monitoring Programme, although it is not perhaps the best way of determining the use of hibernacula. Numbers of bats seen are always low and the results seem to vary considerably from season to season. Also, the precise sites which can be examined also vary from year to year as high water levels can prevent us accessing the tunnels that take the river under the abbey. However,

there is one thing that we do seem able to rely on; a brown long-eared bat in a particular crevice in the Serpentine Tunnel. There has been a bat in the same hole every year since we started regular monitoring. Because we don't handle hibernating bats (and we couldn't reach it even if we did), we have no idea if this is the same individual, but it seems remarkable that whereas other bats come and go, this one remains in place.

Another predictable part of our programme are the public bat walks at Thorp Perrow near Bedale every May and August. These usually attract a large human audience that vastly outnumbers the bats, which are particularly fickle at Thorp Perrow. Some nights we see little more than the odd Pipistrelle, whereas on others there is tremendous variety. May was excellent with Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule, Daubenton's, Whiskered/Brandt's and probably Natterer's seen. Along with a known Brown long-eared roost this represents most of the county's species. August was not so productive this year and there were far fewer humans too, perhaps due (at least in the case of the latter) to the tremendous floods which preceded the weekend. Just two days before the event I was wondering if I would make it when 21cm of rain in 48 hours left my village street resembling the River Swale!

A new venue this year was Kiplin Hall near Scorton, a magnificent country house recently restored and opened to the public by the Kiplin Hall Trust. We were invited to hold a talk and bat watch there in July. Wet early evening weather threatened to spoil the event, but as the talk was given in the shelter of the library, the rain stopped and everyone was treated to perhaps the best view of bats emerging from a roost to be seen on any of our events. The roof of the Apple Loft, one of the estate buildings used by the BTCV as a local office, is home to about 350 Pipistrelle bats which emerged in front of the assembled crowd. As many youngsters were also flying by this time, probably 500 bats were seen.

Two courses were arranged in the summer, one for those wishing to train for a bat licence, the other for those wishing to further their knowledge and use of bat detectors. The first, held over a weekend at Cliffe Castle Museum, Keighley progressed well, with all of the theory part of the training covered. We are particularly grateful to Derek Farr and Cliffe Castle Museum for providing the venue and allowing us the use of the museum's extensive

collection of bat skins. As well as the theoretical side of training, there is also the practical side and this involves trainees making several accompanied roost visits with licensed bat workers. Those who attended the course are now at various stages of progression towards obtaining their licences.

The bat detector course was held in Grassington on a Saturday night. The initial indoor session looked at the types of bat detector available, their advantages, disadvantages and use. Guidance was provided on methods to improve ability to identify bats from their calls, before we headed off for to the River Wharfe to put it into practice. Participants seemed to enjoy the evening despite the competition from the ceilidh and disco being held in the market place outside. It seems that the Queen had decided to hold her Jubilee that weekend, but had not thought to consult us first!

As we move into autumn we can reflect on rather an odd summer in terms of weather and some odd behaviour among the bats. The year started mild and April could well have been mid-summer. However, by the time summer had arrived so had the rain, along with winds and low temperatures. Things didn't really pick up until mid August with another mild, sunny spell which ended with frosts rather early in October. Most noticeable this year has been the large number of bats turning up inside houses, often several at a time, and the wide range in the age of juveniles, even within a single roost. Presumably there is some connection between the weather and bat behaviour.

Finally for this year, some fascinating news about the Windy Pits near Helmsley. The Windy Pits are a series of caves in the North York Moors. Records of their use by bats dates back many years, but the nature of the caves has always made monitoring bats there difficult. In recent years Leeds University has been carrying out various research projects at the Windy Pits aimed at discovering more about their use by bats. This year, with the help of the North and East Yorkshire Bat Groups, Nicky Green has ringed 220 Natterer's bats from eight different summer roosts in the two counties. At South Cave in East Yorkshire (near Beverley), a Natterer's bat first ringed at one of the windy pits in 1998, was caught, 63km from where it was first ringed. In addition, individual bats from roosts at Ellerburn, Wintringham and Wheldrake (all North Yorkshire) have later been captured at the caves.

## The Diurnal Bank Voles of Moorlands Nature Reserve

*Ann Hanson*

Earlier this year the Mammal Group was approached by Kerry Felber, who works as a Project Officer for Open Country in Harrogate, to see if we would carry out a small mammal trap for her organisation. Open Country is part of Harrogate and District Community Transport Limited and aims to get people with disabilities and learning difficulties out into the countryside. We readily agreed and decided that Moorlands Nature Reserve, a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve near Skelton, would be an appropriate venue as it has wheelchair access and well-maintained, firm paths.

Moorlands is a Victorian forest garden and is famous for its show of rhododendrons and azaleas in spring. It has a mixture of exotic and native tree species, but the ground flora is somewhat impoverished in places due to the rhododendrons. There are however quite extensive bramble patches within the wood, which became central to our trapping strategy.

On the evening of Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> August, 40 Longworth traps were set open and prebaited with wheat, peanuts and blowfly pupae. They were then set to catch on the morning of Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> August.



Bank vole

Traps were placed in groups of five at several locations, but bramble patches featured highly as they provide good cover for small mammals during day-light hours. Other trapping locations were an area of long grass and ferns adjacent to two ponds, underneath rhododendron

bushes and another more open area of long grass on the woodland edge.

The traps were checked and lifted on the Thursday evening with a small but enthusiastic group from Open Country. It was explained beforehand that we didn't really expect to catch many animals as most small mammals tend to be more active at night and our traps had been set during the day. It soon became evident that no-one had explained this to the bank voles of Moorlands.

Trapping results are shown in the table below.

Site	Species	Sex M/F*	Age A/J*	Weight (g)
Bramble patch	Bank vole	M	J	17.0
	Bank vole	F	A	20.0
	Bank vole	M	A	24.0
	Bank vole	F	J	11.0
	Bank vole	F	A	21.0
Long grass/ferns near pond	Bank vole	F	A	18.0
	Bank vole	M	A	19.0
Rhododendrons	Common shrew	?	A	8.0
	Bank vole	M	J	17.0
	Common shrew	?	A	7.0
	Bank vole	M	A	18.0
	Bank vole	F	J	15.0
	Bank vole	M	J	15.0
Long grass/woodland edge	Bank vole	M	J	14.0
	Bank vole	F	J	14.0
	Bank vole	M	J	14.0
	Bank vole	F	J	13.0
	Bank vole	F	A	18.0
	Bank vole	F	A	20.0
	Bank vole	F	A	20.0
Rhododendrons	Wood mouse	M	A	21.0
	Bank vole	M	A	22.0

\* M = male; F = female; A = adult; J = juvenile.

Nineteen bank voles (*Clethrionomys glareolus*) were trapped in all, with two common shrews (*Sorex araneus*) and a single wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) just for a bit of variation. Previous traps at Moorlands have yielded

mainly wood mice, but traps were set overnight in the past and wood mice are predominantly nocturnal. On this occasion the traps were set during the hours of daylight and the bank voles were evidently very active, especially in areas with dense cover.

Thanks are due to Kerry Felber of Open Country, Rob Masheder for helping to set the traps and to everyone who came along for managing to stay enthusiastic about bank voles - even by moonlight.

## Mammals in March

*Geoff Oxford*

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2002 began inauspiciously with strong winds, grey skies and intermittent showers. None-the-less, six YMG stalwarts gathered on The Green, in Sinnington for a circular, mammal-spotting amble along the beautiful valley of the River Seven.



The River Seven near Sinnington  
*Photograph: David Mayston*

Before heading upstream towards Appleton-le-Moors, we checked under the bridge taking the A170 over the river. Despite heavy rain and snow on the North York Moors during the previous few days, the water level of the river was still comparatively low, exposing a wide mud bank beneath the bridge. Here we found numerous prints of one, possibly two, otters plus spraints and a classic scrape. Gordon Woodroffe, our leader for the walk, pointed out the characteristics of otter prints, with indications of five toes clearly visible. Interspersed among the otter prints were those of water voles. Not a bad start to the day.

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Retracing our steps through the village we followed the River Seven into Bishop Hagg Wood. Just before the wood we spotted a mole hill expertly decorated by a rather old but unmistakable fox scat. Inside the wood, the muddy path revealed a number of badger prints with their lozenge-shaped rear



Inspection of the roe deer  
*Photograph: David Mayston*

pad and five toes arranged approximately in a row. The prints were rather small, suggesting a cub, yet the young of the year are not expected above ground until April (Corbet & Harris, 1991). Possibly, then, a small juvenile from the previous year. As we emerged from Bishop Hagg Wood into open pasture, a wonderful brown hare shot past. Here we detoured from the right-of-way to take a look at a

riverside rock platform where Gordon had previously recorded mink. On our way to the river we stumbled over a young roe deer, very dead and with signs that scavengers had been at work. I offered to do a quick post-mortem but as it was still pre-lunch I was persuaded to put away my Swiss Army knife! The deer had probably been shot – but alas we will never know. The rock platform revealed no signs of mink or otter (but did have a rather nice ammonite) although a little further upstream we found what might have been more otter prints on a sandbank.

Returning to the path we walked up to Appleton-le-Moors, startling the hare once more. Even Appleton revealed a mammal record – a dead bank vole lying on the verge where it had probably been dropped by a local felon (aka a domestic cat). After a short rest in the village, when some of us had to repair to the local pub and others sat around talking or catching large house spiders (as one does), we headed down to rejoin the river. The way across the river at Appleton Mill Farm was, until a few years ago, a ford. Happily, the North York Moors National Park Authority have now built an aesthetically pleasing

footbridge, so our feet remained dry(ish). Under the bridge we discovered many extremely clear footprints of badger, otter and water vole, another otter scrape and more spraints. Sheltered from the rain by the bridge, this is certainly a place to check on future occasions. We turned south and headed up into Cropton Banks Wood. The path to the wood revealed numerous, and very well filled, badger dung pits. Presumably the path formed the dividing line between two badger group territories - latrines are known to be concentrated along such boundaries (Corbet & Harris, 1991). Once into the wood we rested and had lunch, with a well formed squirrel drey the only mammal sign in sight. This large ball of leaves was situated, unusually, along a branch rather than next to the main trunk.



Gordon Wooroffe examining otter prints  
 Photograph: David Mayston

Our trek through Cropton Banks Wood was delightful until the near calamity of our leader slipping off the path. Split-second reaction by David Mayston saved the day. Unfortunately, David had the only camera so this heroic act was not captured on film – suggestions of an action replay to record the event for posterity did not meet with universal approval. Emerging from the trees we had a wonderful view of three roe deer racing across a field towards the wood after being put up by a dog walker. The remainder of the walk back to Sinnington was totally uneventful except, that is, for a sudden force ten gale and a monsoon with attitude. The day was rounded off admirably with refreshments *chez* Woodroffe.

Very many thanks to Gordon for planning the route and acting as our knowledgeable (and witty) guide, and to Gordon and Lorna for the most welcomed tea and cake. Others who enjoyed this walk were Derek Cates, David Mayston, Geoff Oxford, Marion Shorter and Mary Youngman. Finally, a morsel of sage advice for David – never be separated from your lunch!

## Reference

Corbet, G. B. & Harris, S. (1991) *The Handbook of British Mammals*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Blackwell Scientific Publishers, Oxford.

## The Second Great Nut Hunt – The Continuing Search for the Yorkshire Dormouse

*Ann Hanson*

The common or hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) has never been especially numerous in Yorkshire, being at the northern edge of its range, and numbers have continued to decline over several decades until it is now debatable as to whether it still exists here at all (excluding recent reintroductions).

However, the Yorkshire Mammal Group has steadfastly refused to give up on the elusive dormouse and, despite finding no positive sites in the first Great Nut Hunt in 1993, we were game to have another go...

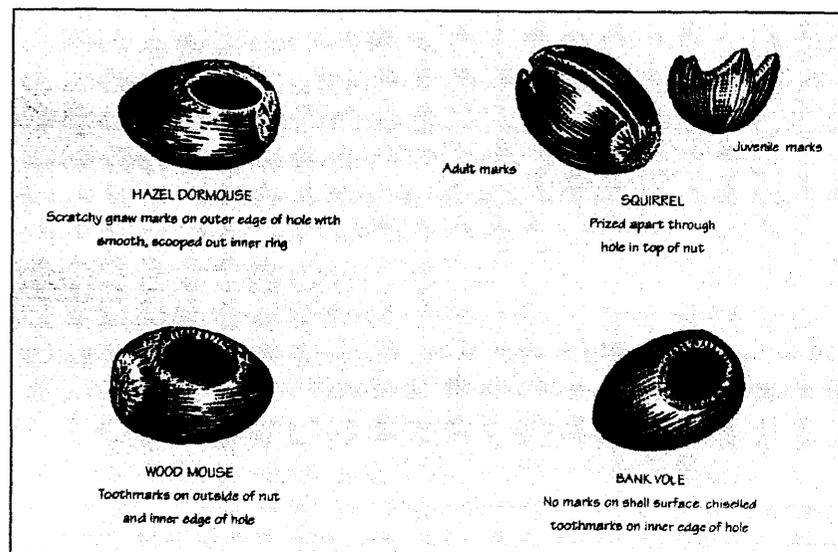
The second Great Nut Hunt took place over the autumn and winter of 2001/2002 as part of the National Dormouse Survey and had four main aims:

1. To find more sites where dormice still occur in England and Wales.
2. To revisit sites where dormice were found to be present in the first Great Nut Hunt and see if they are still there.
3. To locate potential dormouse reintroduction sites.
4. To show the importance of the dormouse as an indicator of the health of woodlands and hedgerows.

A simple, non-invasive way of looking for dormice in an area is to hunt for nibbled hazelnuts, as small mammals open these nuts in distinctive ways (Fig. 1). Any results were to be reported back to the National Dormouse Survey HQ, along with a short woodland management survey for each area examined.

We decided to hunt for nuts in Crag Cliff Wood in the North York Moors National Park, and on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2001 seven intrepid nutters met in nearby Grosmont on a cold, but vaguely promising, winter morning. Unfortunately, two other nutters misread their newsletter and proceeded to carry out an alternative nut hunt in woodland near Goathland, but at least it meant that another site was surveyed!

Figure 1



Crag Cliff Wood did indeed contain plenty of coppiced hazel of varying ages, but it soon became apparent that we were faced with a disastrous “nut year”. After much scrabbling in the leaf litter, we found only 6 nibbled nut and these had all been opened by squirrels. We completed what would have been a circular walk through the woods if a bridge over the river hadn’t fallen down many years ago, played chicken with the steam trains on the North York Moors railway and entertained ourselves sliding around in extremely mobile mud. Apart from getting some fresh air and exercise, the high point of the expedition was rescuing a sheep that had become hopelessly entangled in brambles – our good deed for the day. We also managed to fill in the woodland management survey, so all was not lost.

Typically, 2002 is proving to be a much better “nut year” and, whenever I find myself in the vicinity of hazel coppice, I just can’t help but have a quick nut hunt. I know for a fact I’m not alone in this strange obsession, so do let me know if any of you nutters out there find anything interesting.

## The Small Mammals of Bramham Crossroads

*Ann Hanson*

Surrounded by arable fields and not too far from both the A1 and the A64 is an area of about five acres which was once inhabited but is now effectively a haven for wildlife. Parts of this site have not been cultivated for forty years or more. The varied habitat ranges from calcareous grassland (the bedrock of the area is magnesian limestone) with scattered hawthorn scrub to old orchards, bramble and raspberry patches, deciduous woodland, a cob-nut grove and a derelict market garden.



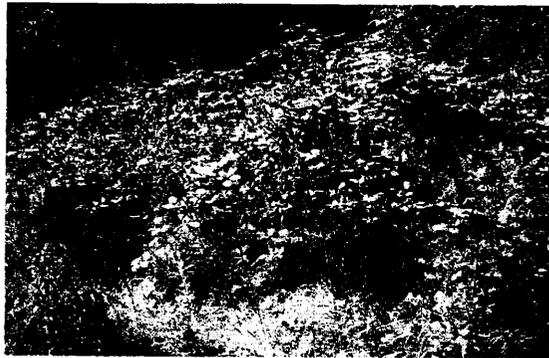
Limestone grassland and hawthorn scrub,  
Bramham crossroads  
*Photograph: Ann Hanson*

Many mammal records already exist for the site, including badger, roe deer, fox, grey squirrel, wood mouse, house mouse, brown rat, bank vole, field vole, harvest mouse and common, pygmy and water shrew (despite a distinct lack of water in the area). The first small mammal trap was carried out from 31<sup>st</sup> August to 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2002, with traps initially being set on the evening of 31<sup>st</sup> August and checked at twelve-hourly intervals thereafter.

Thirty Longworth traps were set in groups of five in several different habitats, including bramble patches, long rough grassland, scrub edge and an extensive

raspberry patch. Traps were baited with wheat, peanuts and blowfly pupae. The weather throughout the trapping period was warm and sunny, with cooler dry nights.

The results are shown in Table 1. In all, 12 bank voles (*Clethrionomys glareolus*), 4 common shrews (*Sorex araneus*), 2 wood mice (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), 1 field vole (*Microtus agrestis*) and a rather excited weasel were



Bramble patch, Braham Crossroads  
Photograph: Ann Hanson

caught. The lack of field voles was quite surprising, especially in the areas of long rough grass, as their runs could be seen everywhere and they seem to be the staple diet of all the local predators, including our own cats. The resident badgers also seemed to take an interest in our trapping exploits and dragged away for closer inspection two traps which were placed close to one of their runs! Perhaps future traps will reveal the more elusive small mammals known to occupy the site, such as pygmy shrews and harvest

**Table 1**

1/9/02 (am)

Site	Species	Sex M/F*	Age A/J*	Weight (g)
Brambles/scrub edge	Wood mouse	M	A	20.0
	Bank vole	F	A	15.0
Brambles/field edge	Field vole	M	A	33.0
	Bank vole	M	A	18.0
	Common shrew	?	A	8.0
Long rough grassland	Bank vole	F	A	22.0
	Common shrew	?	A	9.0

1/9/02 (pm)

Site	Species	Sex M/F*	Age A/J*	Weight (g)
Brambles/field edge	Common shrew	?	A	7.0
	Bank vole	F	A	17.0
	Bank vole	F	A	17.0
Raspberry patch	Bank vole	F	J	12.0
Long rough grassland	Weasel	?	A	?

2/9/02 (am)

Site	Species	Sex M/F*	Age A/J*	Weight (g)
Brambles/scrub edge	Bank vole	M	J	12.0
	Bank vole	M	A	18.0
Brambles/field edge	Bank vole	F	A	18.0
Long rough grassland	Common shrew	?	A	9.0
	Wood mouse	M	A	26.0
	Bank vole	M	J	13.0
	Bank vole	M	J	15.0
	Bank vole	F	J	12.0

\* M = male; F = female; A = adult; J = juvenile.

mice. One pygmy shrew spent a whole summer living behind the back steps of our house and was seen on several occasions foraging in the cat food bowls, while a harvest mouse was trapped during a road verge survey along the lane in October 2000.

Once again, thanks are due to Rob for his help with the trap and for demonstrating a rare talent for weasel juggling.

## Anyone seen a House Mouse?

### YMG Annual Mammal Recording for 2002

*Michael Thompson*

Has any one seen a house mouse? A flippant statement maybe, but it has a serious content. The YMG recording scheme, using The Mammal Society's *Look out for Mammals* programme, has been going since 1995 and, so far, I have received only one record of a house mouse, and that was from Slingsby where I live. It may be that house mice are so common, that YMG members do not think it is worth recording or that the lack of records indicates that it is becoming increasingly rare. To date, sixteen individuals have submitted records to me, and, of these, three are members of the Ryedale Natural History Society and the rest are members of the YMG. Tony Lane, a YMG member, turns in records mainly from East Yorkshire, but the main emphasis of the recording scheme is directed at North Yorkshire.



The house mouse, *Mus musculus*

During the year I received 693 records, of which I have entered 212 into the database, leaving 481 records to enter. Entering a record takes a little longer now, as I am tending to add more details, including, when provided, age of mammal, habitat, sex and death on the road (dor). Each record has a 'card number' and is easily accessible, and, according to the entered coding system, a picture of a record can be built up. Since 1995, I have entered 1552 records compared to 1335 by last year (Thompson 2000). All of them are printed out on record sheets, together with a tetrad map, in the blue Records Book that I hold. In all, thirty three mammal species have been recorded; no new ones were added to this total during the last year. A break-down by Orders is as follows:-

Order	No. mammal spp.	No. records
Insectivora	5	440
Chiroptera	6	147
Lagomorpha	2	312
Rodentia	9	232
Carnivora	8	357
Artiodactyla	3	64
<b>Totals</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>1552</b>

Except for the bats (Chiroptera) and the deer (Artiodactyla), there seems to be an even spread of numbers. Some Orders, however, are dominated by certain species, such as rabbits (Lagomorpha), mole and hedgehogs (Insectivora), brown rat and grey squirrel (Rodentia), badger and foxes (Carnivora) and roe deer (Artiodactyla). All these mammals are more easy to see and detect in the wild. The bat records are mostly my own, the majority of bat records are held by John Drewett. Some species, such as the smaller rodents and shrews, are under-recorded, whereas for others (e.g. fallow and red deer) the numbers of records have not gone up at all. Otherwise there has been some increase of records for all species. The tetrad maps are beginning to fill in, but are still skewed towards the eastern part of North Yorkshire.

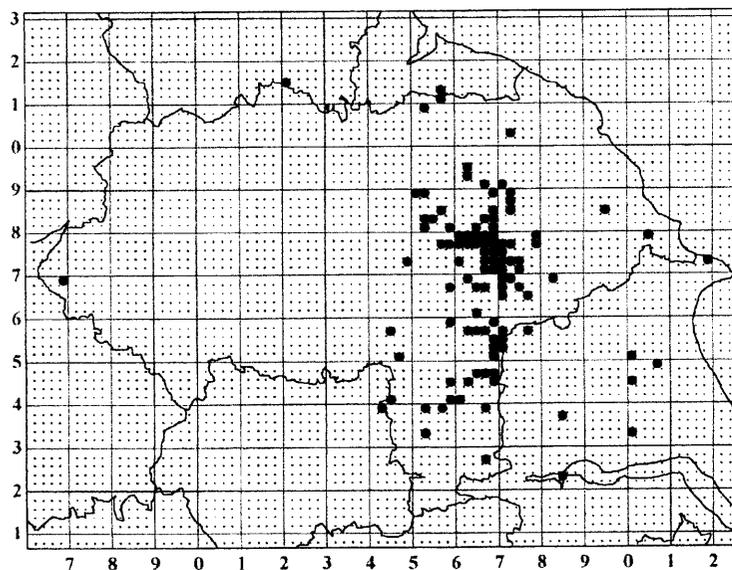
In preparing an article for the North Yorkshire Moors Association's magazine *Voice of the Moors* on pine martens, I received a number of possible sightings of this mustelid from Dr. Johnny Birks of the Vincent Wildlife Trust. Of the 37 sightings for the decade 1990 onwards, he told me only seven appeared to be authentic, based on an analytical confidence scale. Persistent records come from the north-facing escarpment of the North York Moors at Ingleby Greenhow, an area in which Charles Critchley unearthed a skeleton of a pine marten in 1993. (Jefferies & Critchley, 1994). Because of their confidentiality, I have not added these records to the Yorkshire Mammal Group's scheme. They continue to be held centrally.

One of the reasons for not adding the numerous records that have been submitted to me is that there still appears to be an incompatibility between the *Look out for Mammals* programme and *Recorder 2000*. Adding records to our scheme is time consuming and it is important that they are also held by the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC). The Centre, based on St. William's College, York, uses *Recorder 2000*. I am, therefore, progressing slowly pending the outcome of solving this problem. James Mortimer, a member of the YMG, is currently trying to sort out the incompatibility.

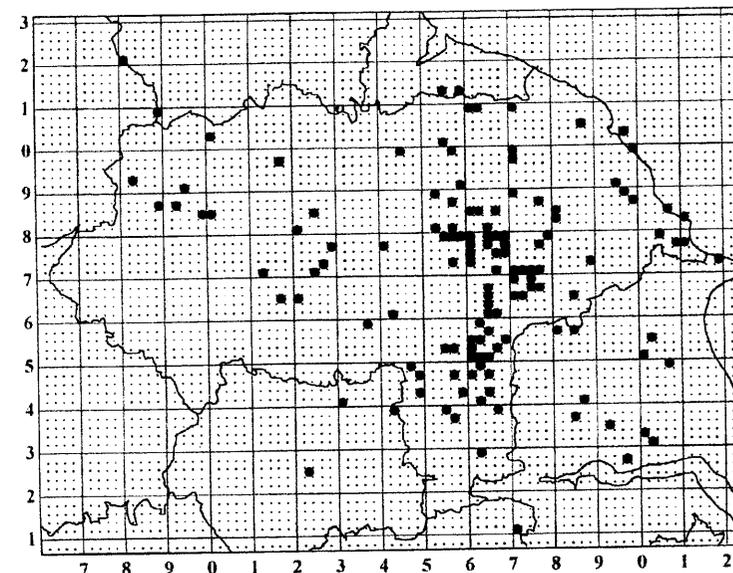
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### Brown Hare



### Rabbit



## Otter Mortalities in North Yorkshire

*Gordon Woodroffe*

Six dead otters have been found this year, five in the Derwent catchment and one on the river Esk. Five of them were road casualties but the sixth was found emaciated and had died from wounds inflicted by another otter. Since the release programme was initiated in 1990, the numbers of dead otters found and reported total 31 although the real number of deaths is likely to be much higher.

While road deaths continue to be the major category of casualties it has to be remembered that animals dying from natural causes are less likely to be discovered. However, there have also been some disturbing trends. In 1992 two male otters were drowned in illegally-set eel fyke nets. The ensuing prosecution by the Environment Agency failed dismally after an extremely



Becky

Photographs: Jean Thorpe / David Dunne

badly presented case by the Agency's solicitor. In June 1994 we know that two otters were killed on the river Riccal by a gamekeeper, one skull was found half buried by one of the pheasant release pens. This, of course, was denied but when another otter, the victim of a snare, was found dumped on the banks of the river Rye, near Helmsley, followed by one at the side of the road, peppered with lead shot, it does raise a few questions. The same gamekeepers operate in these areas! Unfortunately one can only speculate.

Still all is not doom and gloom. On Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> February I received a telephone call from workmen at Pickering Station. "We found a baby otter on the banks of Pickering Beck. We've got it in a box and the RSPCA told us to put it back and its mother will collect it".

When I asked how big it was and they said "tiny" I told them to hang on until I got there. Well, it certainly was tiny but in excellent condition. It had most likely been washed out of a holt. The workmen had, in fact, done exactly the right thing in rescuing it. The river was rising rapidly, and the otter cub was unweaned and exposed to the cold conditions. It is extremely doubtful whether the mother would have come for it. Cubs do get lost in these conditions and some are just deserted by their mother. When I got it home it started piping loudly, a shrill whistle echoing through the house, as the otter called for its mother. The otter, a female, was only 45cm from head to tail, weighed 750g and fitted quite easily on our kitchen scales. Fortunately help was at hand. Jean Thorpe, who runs Ryedale Rehabilitation Centre at Malton collected the cub from us the same evening. She had it feeding from a bottle within no time. Contact was also made with Pauline Kidner, of Secret World, Somerset, an organisation which has some experience in rearing orphaned otter cubs. Consequently, on Sunday, the cub was transferred to Secret World. Within days she had put on weight and was doing extremely well. Becky, as she was called, now resides at a Wildlife Centre, in the New Forest. She has

a mate and both of them are being kept away from the public to prepare them for subsequent release into the wild when they reach maturity, perhaps early next year.

## An Initial Survey of the Small Mammal Population of a site near Great Ayton, North Yorkshire

*Derek E. Capes*

### Introduction

The present project was stimulated by a personal natural curiosity to establish a more accurate picture of the small mammals present in the vicinity of my home in Great Ayton, a village some 10 miles south of Middlesbrough and situated just below the north-western escarpment of the North York Moors. A number of streams drain the moorlands and find their way into the River Leven which flows through the village on its course to the River Tees. The lower land use is mainly agricultural with both semi-natural and commercial woodland on the hillsides and in some valleys.

The need to carry out the work was given further impetus when, on joining the Yorkshire Mammal Group (YMG) in May 2001, I found that mammal records from the northern parts of North Yorkshire were few in number (compared with the York area), and Michael Thompson was making persistent pleas for more mammal records. I learned that YMG would loan Longworth traps to members for such purposes and so, armed with a dozen traps, I embarked on my first solo small mammal-trapping expedition.

A dummy run confirmed the presence of a wood mouse in the garage, a suspect in the long-term theft of sunflower seed used to feed the birds. A larger scale trial in the garden served to show that cat food (casters not being readily available) used as the protein component of the bait will undoubtedly attract the neighbouring cats, to the detriment of the study of the small mammals in my garden.

My principal concern was to ensure that I didn't lose any of the £500 worth of traps in my care. To address this concern I decided to conduct my initial surveys on private land to reduce the risk of any of the traps being removed.

### Description of site

The site chosen was a naturalised part of a large garden in a rural location situated on a north facing slope leading down to a small shallow stream, perhaps 2m wide. The bed of the stream was stony and the banks were covered by a thick undergrowth of grasses, meadowsweet, brambles, nettles and umbellifers, with some rhododendrons. At a higher level sycamore, ash and alder bordered the stream, and the adjacent northern boundary of the site comprised a tall cypress lawsonii hedge in a neighbouring large garden. The eastern side of the trapping site was a hawthorn hedge about 5 feet high intermixed with small ash, sycamore, dog rose, elder and apple growing through a ground cover of meadow grass, docks, nettles and goosegrass. Beyond the hedge was a further area of grassland. At the western side, the site was bounded by a high stone wall which was part of the construction of an embankment to support a minor road above.

A description of the locations of the traps is given in Table 1 and their positions on the site are shown in Fig 1. Traps were not laid out to any particular pattern, grid or line but positions selected according to the different habitats present on the site.

### Method

The traps were checked to ensure that the trip mechanisms were fully functional although, due to my inexperience in these matters, no attempt was made to check the weight required to release the door mechanism. Hay bedding was placed in the nest box, together with carrot, muesli, sunflower seeds and blowfly pupae as bait. A sample of the bait was placed both in the trap tunnel and on the ground outside the trap entrance. No pre-baiting was carried out and the traps were set to catch on the evening of 24<sup>th</sup> June 2002 and checked morning and evening for a period of 48 hours. During the course of the two days the weather was dry and warm, except for a slight shower of rain during the final afternoon.

**Table 1. Description of trap locations**

Area	Trap No.	Description of trap location
Wooded	1	Alongside stone wall
	2	Among tree roots
	3	Under vegetation
	4	Under vegetation
Stream side	5	Against stone wall leading to bridge
	6	Against stone wall leading to bridge
	7	Under vegetation
	8	Under vegetation
Meadow	9	Next to mixed hedge in thick vegetation
	10	Next to mixed hedge in thick vegetation
	11	Between stone wall and pear tree
	12	Next to stone wall, at edge of shrubs

### Discussion

The complete results are given in Table 2. The effectiveness of the technique and selection of trap stations may be gauged by the fact that 22 mammals were captured from a potential maximum of 48 over the two day period. Five different species were caught – 12 bank voles, 4 wood mice, 3 field voles, 2 water shrews and 1 common shrew.

The two daytime period trapping sessions resulted in 2 and 7 captures respectively, and the two conducted during the night periods produced 5 and 8 animals respectively.

The most productive of the three areas on the site was the more open hedge-side and wall-side next to meadowland with long grasses, where 8 bank voles and 2 field voles (and 2 large slugs) were caught. The least productive was in the more shady area under the tree canopy at the far side of the stream. Here,

3 bank voles, a field vole and a common shrew were trapped. It was in this area too, that the only trap of the twelve which failed to register a capture was located.

The four traps set by the side of the stream produced 7 animals (and 2 more slugs) but interestingly was the only station to feature wood mice. Water shrew was a very pleasant surprise to the author who, it will be recalled, was undertaking his first solo trap. It was with further great surprise that the next time the same trap was opened, water shrew was again caught and I was given the opportunity to show the catch to one of the owners of the land (who did show slight concern that they would be overwhelmed with the mammal equivalent of twitchers!). The question was raised as to whether it was the same animal caught consecutively in the same trap. For the purposes of meeting the objectives of the exercise, it was not necessary to know, because I was trying to establish the species present, not their population, but it would make another interesting future investigation.

Again, because it was required only to identify the species present, no handling of the animals, which may have caused undue stress, was necessary and because no suitable balance was to hand, neither were any animal weights recorded. In addition to the small mammals caught in the Longworth traps, moles and grey squirrel can also be added to the list of mammals recorded for this site.

### Conclusion

An initial exercise in recording the presence of small mammals using Longworth traps at a site at Great Ayton in North Yorkshire has shown the presence of five species, namely :- bank vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*), wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), field vole (*Microtus agrestis*), water shrew (*Neomys fodiens*) and common shrew (*Sorex araneus*).

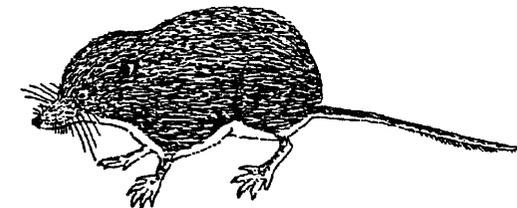
### Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to the site owners, Dr & Mrs I. Pearce for offering their garden as a survey site, and to the Yorkshire Mammal Group for the loan of

the traps for the first of what I hope to be a series of surveys over a period of time.

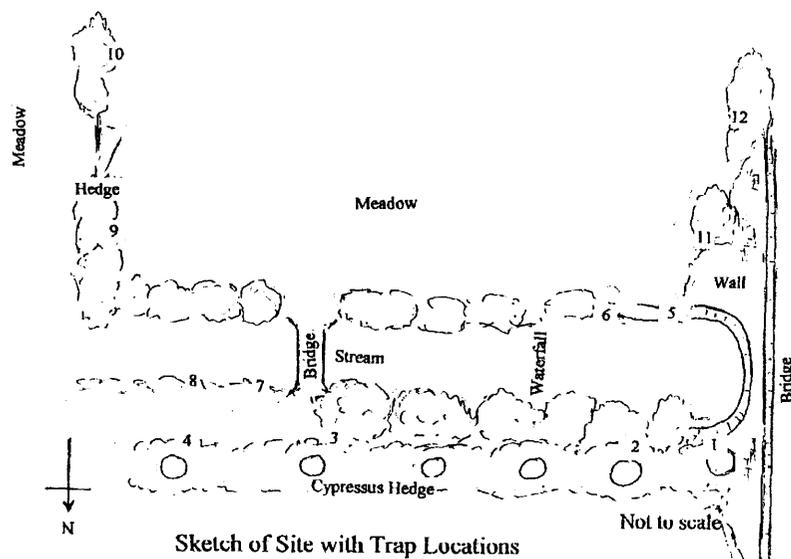
**Table 2.**  
**Results of Longworth trapping at a site near Great Ayton,**  
**June 2002**

Trap	Trap opened			
	Day 1		Day 2	
	am	pm	am	pm
1	bank vole	-	-	-
2	-	-	bank vole	field vole
3	-	-	-	-
4	-	-	bank vole	common shrew
5	-	-	wood mouse	wood mouse
6	wood mouse	-	wood mouse	-
7	bank vole	-	-	-
8	-	-	water shrew	water shrew
9	bank vole	field vole	field vole	bank vole
10	-	-	bank vole	bank vole
11	bank vole	bank vole	-	-
12	-	-	bank vole	bank vole



Water shrew, *Neomys fodiens*

Figure 1. Sketch of site with trap locations



## Homer's Odyssey : Part 2

Barry Wright

[Barry continues the saga of **Homer** *et al*, wood mice who set up home in his loft during 2001. They were caught, fur-clipped and released at increasing distances from his house. The last we knew, **Homer** had returned to the loft after being displaced 260m]

The first part of the saga (Wright, 2001) ended on the 25<sup>th</sup> November with **Homer** being released at 310m. Did he come back or was he just the appetiser for a hungry Kestrel? Sad to say **Homer** didn't come back, but good old **Barney** came home from his 260m drop-off point on 28<sup>th</sup> November. Then things changed yet again, on 29<sup>th</sup> November, when I caught another little rascal, nicknamed **Bart**.

As can be seen from Table 1, I continued to increase the distance of release for both **Barney** and **Bart**. **Barney** finally gave up at 440m on 5<sup>th</sup> December. But little **Bart** went on all over Christmas (we were kind to him on 22<sup>nd</sup> December and only released him 210m away because it was snowing and we felt sorry for him). Eventually he decided that we really didn't want him to stay the winter in our attic when I took him over a kilometre away. **Bart** now holds the record for making an unsupported attempt on my attic from 860m away. Can anyone top that?

November will soon be upon us again and all I can do is wait and see if I get disturbed again in the wee small hours. If I do fall victim to Apodemian squatters again this year I will post bulletins on our web-site ([www.ainstyconservation.org.uk](http://www.ainstyconservation.org.uk)) for anyone to follow the antics of one of my personal favourite small mammals.

[Editor's comment: In a footnote to Barry's previous article, I recorded that the furthest homing distance for a wood mouse I could find in the literature was 73m. In that study, mice failed to return when released 1km away from 'home'. Barry's data support this, but have extended the successful return distance considerably]

Table 1. The release distances of three Wood Mice caught in the attic at 130 Prince Rupert Drive, Tockwith Nov 2001 - Jan 2002.

Figures in the table give the displacement distances from which mice returned

Date	Homer	Barney	Bart
6 Nov. 2001	Traps set	Traps set	Traps set
7	210	-	-
8	210	-	-
9	210	-	-
10	210	-	-
11	210	-	-
12	210	210	-
13	-	260	-

14	210	-	-
15	260	-	-
17	-	260	-
21	260	-	-
24	310	-	-
28	-	360	-
29	-	-	210
1 Dec 2001	-	-	250
2	-	410	-
4	-	-	310
5	-	440	-
12	-	-	440
16	-	-	575
19	-	-	660
22	-	-	210
9 Jan 2002	-	-	690
13	-	-	860
15	-	-	1030

## Reference

Wright, B. (2001) Homer's odyssey. *Imprint*, 28: 25-27.

## European Beavers – Then and Now

*Geoff Oxford*

The European beaver (*Castor fiber*) is the largest European rodent with a head and body length of up to 100cm and a further 30-35cm of scaly, flattened tail (Hofmann, 1995). An adult beaver averages about 18kg in weight but a few individuals can reach 30kg. In size and weight, European beavers are virtually identical to the North American beaver, *Castor canadensis* (Kitchener, 2001), which has been introduced into Finland and Eastern Europe (Hofmann, 1995). Beavers are totally herbivorous and eat the leaves and bark of a variety of trees including willow (*Salix alba*), rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and aspen (*Populus*

*tremula*), as well as watermeadow plants such as meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and marsh cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*).

The original range of the European beaver covered the whole of Europe, including Britain (but apparently not Ireland), and central Asia. By the end of the nineteenth century, populations survived in only a few areas of Europe e.g. the Rhone and Elbe valleys, southern Norway, Finland and Poland (Coles, 2002; Hofmann, 1995) and may have totalled only c. 1200 animals (Halley & Rosell, 2002). European beavers have subsequently been reintroduced into parts of their former range, for example southern Germany, Switzerland and France, and are also spreading from their natural refuges (Halley & Rosell, 2002). An example of the latter is their colonisation of steep mountain tributaries in the Rhone catchment. One successful reintroduction comprising ten animals was made to the River Elez in Brittany in 1969, and this population has formed the focus of a detailed ecological study by Coles (2002). The minimum population estimate for the species is now 593,000 (Halley & Rosell, 2002).



Beaver entering a lodge underwater  
(from Kitchener, 2001 - with permission)



The Skipsea beaver dam - note the exposed timbers

Photograph: Geoff Oxford

dam elements are interwoven with smaller branches and green vegetation.

Beavers can have a huge impact on their local environment. They prefer to colonise large, slow-flowing rivers where they occupy holes in the banks – dams are only built when the water is shallow. Dams are constructed using quite large trees which are felled upstream and stripped of all bark (which is eaten) and side branches. These larger

Large stones are transported to the dam and incorporated and, as a result of slower stream flow, the dam also accumulates sediment. Dams can be long-lived, lasting 20 years or more. Indeed, willow used in the dam's construction can take root to produce a living structure. Landscape changes brought about by beaver activity include localised flooding and the development of sometimes extensive reedbeds. This can, of course, impact on other species. In parts of Brittany, for example, frogs have benefited from the presence of beavers in that standing water is now available all year round (Coles, 2002).



Young beaver

(from Kitchener, 2001 - with permission)

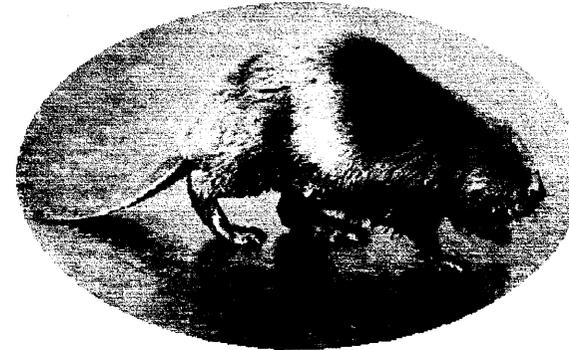
Beavers are also well known as builders of lodges; structures in which they overwinter and also have their young. Lodges may begin as earthen chambers (Kitchener, 2001) but as their dams begin to affect the hydrology of the area and water levels start to rise, animals move their living chambers upwards in order to prevent them flooding. Eventually, in building even higher, they emerge through the ground surface and then

they protect themselves with large piles of sticks and branches – a lodge is born. As water levels rise further, so too do the lodges. Beavers enter their living quarters *via* an underwater entrance (like water voles) and are thus protected from terrestrial predators.

The European beaver was once widespread in Britain and in north-east England there are some 24 archaeological finds relating to past beaver occupation. Of these about 50% are undated but of the rest c.30% are prehistoric, c.1% of Roman age, 9% Anglo Saxon and c.10% Mediaeval. Most of the evidence is in the form of bones but also includes characteristic beaver-gnawed wood, place names (e.g. Beverley), documentation, and various artefacts. One such artefact – a spectacular dam – is readily visible on the east Yorkshire coast at Skipsea (TA184546). The site was excavated by English Heritage in 1993 who thought it might represent a human-built causeway bridging a waterway between two lakes. As the work continued beaver-gnawed wood emerged. English Heritage concluded that the structure was most probably a beaver dam and not a human artefact after all, and so the excavation was stopped. However, some timbers apparently had cut marks

suggesting human activity and it is possible that the structure was initially a beaver dam that was subsequently modified by humans as a causeway. A similar interpretation has been made at the famous Mesolithic site of Star Carr near Scarborough, and it is interesting to note that people currently studying beaver ecology in northern France use their dams as convenient bridges (Coles, 2002).

Beavers have, in the past, been exploited by humans in many ways. Beaver parts, particularly incisors, were included as grave goods from Neolithic times



<http://www.bibermanagement.de>

through to the Anglo Saxon period, and have been found during excavations at, for example, Duggleby Howe, Painswick Wold and Langton. Beaver incisors were used as early dice and their claws turned into necklaces. Lower jaws were sometimes modified to form a multi-purpose tool – the incisors served as a scraper/gouge and the cheek teeth as a rasp. The meat and fur of beavers were long used for food and clothing, respectively, and bones turn up in excavations of kitchen middens. Because of their scaly tails, the Church during the Mediaeval period regarded beavers as fish which meant they could be eaten during lent when, of course, 'real' meat was off the menu. The anal glands of beavers produce a pungent secretion called castoreum, used by the animals to mark their environment. This secretion was much prized by the Romans who used it as a medicine to cure headaches, among other ailments. Beavers eat large quantities of willow bark and the salicylic acid contained in the bark is secreted in the castoreum. This smelly exudate can therefore be regarded as the predecessor of aspirin.

In Britain the beaver survived into the Mediaeval period but was probably extinct in Wales by 1200 and in Scotland by 1600 (Yalden, 1999). The reasons for the demise of beavers in this country are not known for certain. They may have been overexploited – as intimated above virtually every part of a beaver has been used in some capacity, at some time, by humans (Halley &

Rosell, 2002). In addition, or alternatively, they may have been merely hunted out as pests when their water-meadow habitats were 'invaded' by a burgeoning human population looking for productive land to drain and cultivate (Coles, 2002).

In recent years, the possible impacts of reintroducing some of the mammals driven to extinction in Britain during historical times have been given careful consideration. One of the species concerned is the European beaver (Kitchener & Conroy, 1996; Kitchener, 2001). At the end of his recent book, Kitchener (2001) notes that Scottish National Heritage plan to release beavers from Scandinavia into Knapdale Forest, Argyll in spring 2003 as a trial reintroduction<sup>1</sup> (but see also this issue, p.6) Indeed, in summer 2002, six animals were reintroduced into a large (53 ha) fenced enclosure at Ham Fen in Kent<sup>2</sup>. If all goes well, other releases will surely follow and, once again, these huge and fascinating rodents could grace appropriate parts of our countryside.

#### Acknowledgments

Thanks to David Astley for alerting me to the beaver dam at Skipsea, Briony Coles for a most stimulating lecture, and Annabel Whittet for permission to use some illustrations from Kitchener (2001).

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#### Web pages

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.bigcats.org/esa/europeanbeaver.html>
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.kentwildlife.org.uk/beaver/project.html>.

### Under the Greenwood Tree – Annual Update on Yorkshire's Reintroduced Dormouse Population

*Geoff Oxford*

In 1999 a dormouse re-introduction scheme was launched at a wooded site in North Yorkshire (Oxford, 1999). The progress of this population is monitored annually by checking c.150 nesting boxes, distributed in an approximate grid through the wood, on a monthly basis between April/May and October. Results for the latter half of 1999 and for 2000 have been reported elsewhere (Oxford, 1999, 2000). The year 2001 was dominated by the foot and mouth disease epidemic which seriously curtailed fieldwork. The boxes were only checked once, on



Dormouse in nest

Photograph: Dirk Heaton

October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Four boxes were occupied with, respectively, 1 male, 2 males + 2 females, 1 male + 1 female and 1 male, a total of eight animals. Lack of earlier check in 2001 meant that many of the boxes were full of old wren and bluetit nests. These have normally been removed once the chicks have fledged

to free up the boxes for dormice. It is not known how bird nests influence dormouse occupancy although as a dormouse nest usually completely fills the box cavity they are probably a deterrent.

Table 1 shows the comparison of numbers of nests and dormice for the two years with full records, 2000 and 2002. Note that wet and soggy nests are removed and so the numbers of nests in each month reflect a small degree of turnover.

There were many fewer nests in 2002 compared to equivalent months in 2000, and the numbers of animals were also generally lower. This might have been a result of a cold, wet first half of the year; similar effects were recorded elsewhere e.g. in Briddlesford Wood, Isle of Wight (*Briddlesford Update*, September 2002). The first evidence for breeding in North Yorkshire was a month earlier in 2002 than in 2000 (July vs. August), with a nest containing seven young, furred but with eyes closed and weighing in at between 4.5 and 5.5g. This suggests they were born about two weeks earlier (Bright & Morris, 1992) at the beginning of July. Two more nests with young were found in September. One had six individuals, fully furred with eyes open, ranging in weight from 5.5 to 6.5g. The other contained five pinkies, which were not disturbed except for counting.

For comparisons between sites involved in dormouse monitoring, the mean number of animals weighing 7g or more per 50 nest boxes is computed for the October census (*The Dormouse Monitor*, April 2002). For the North Yorkshire population, these figures are, for the years 1999-2002 inclusive, 4.3, 6.7, 2.7 and 3.4, respectively. It is too early to say whether these figures suggest good or bad trends, although the fact that the last two years have lower means than the first two is not encouraging.

In the same issue of *The Dormouse Monitor*, data from all monitored sites (May and June counts) were analysed for long-term trends between 1993 and 2000. There was a gentle decline in numbers from 1995 to 1999, with 2000 showing a slight upturn, but overall numbers changed little. However, when populations from northern and western Britain were analysed separately, the decline from the 1995 high was much steeper and with no sign of a recovery.

**Table 1.**

**Comparison of total number of nests and dormouse recorded in each month during 2000 and 2002**

Month	2000		2002	
	No. nests	No. mice	No. nests	No. mice
May	23	5	6	1 + 1 dead
June	20	4	6	2
July	17	4	6	9
August	24	18 inc. 3 P*	7	5
September	27	19 inc. 5 P	10	14 inc. 5 P
October	33	20	16	10

\*P = pinkies (young without fur)

The figures suggest that in these regions, dormice have declined by almost 50% over the eight-year period since 1993. The reason for this decline is not known, but climatic factors may be partly responsible.

So, current indications for the re-introduced population suggest that it may be struggling, a conclusion consistent with wider, and longer term, monitoring in northern and western populations. It must be remembered that the North Yorkshire population has been established for only four years and discerning any trend over such a short period, for a species that may undergo large inter-year fluctuations in numbers, is virtually impossible. It does emphasise, however, the great value of continuing the monitoring programme so that any long-term trends can eventually be distinguished from annual 'noise'.

#### References

Bright, P & Morris, P. (1992) *The Dormouse*. The Mammal Society, London.

Oxford, G. (1999) Dormice in Yorkshire – the return of the native. *Imprint*, 26: 9-13.

Oxford, G. (2000) The woodlanders – an update on Yorkshire's dormice. *Imprint*, 27: 17-19.

### Dormouse nest tubes – a new survey tool

Pat Morris and Paul Bright have recently come up with an alternative monitoring method that is especially useful in non-traditional dormouse

habitats such as hedgerows and areas of scrub. The nest tubes are square in section and made of corrugated plastic. A separate L-shaped piece of wood slides in to reinforced

the floor. It pokes out at the front to form a platform, while the vertical element closes off the tube at the rear. The tubes are set out in spring and attached to horizontal branches with plastic ties. The advantage of tubes over the normal boxes is that they do not require a substantial trunk for attachment. Dormice may use them for nesting, or as a safe haven for eating hazelnuts. They are checked in autumn for the presence of dormouse signs. This year, the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) positioned a large number of tubes on the periphery of the wood in North Yorkshire which houses the re-introduced population. The intention was to detect any dispersal movements. Sad to say, none of the tubes when checked in September contained evidence of dormice.



## The Minke

*Michael Thompson*

The morning started misty with drizzle, not the sort of conditions for whale watching. However, on listening to the coastguards weather forecast for the area at breakfast, our skipper, David, decided to go to the feeding grounds of the minke whale. On leaving the quiet creek in Loch Sunart, in which we had anchored overnight, the seas became choppy to moderately rough, with gale force winds promised later in the day. For three hours the 60 foot, twin-engined motor cruiser battled with a head wind. Clinging closely to the southern coastline of cliffs, coves and small settlements of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, the most westerly part of mainland Britain, we eventually headed out to sea. After travelling in a westerly direction, we turned north to round the Point of Ardnamurchan, with its spectacular lighthouse. Quite soon we were in quieter waters, although very much aware of the Atlantic swell. To the north were the islands of Rhum and Eigg, the latter with its massive volcanic cliffs; to the west was low-lying Muck. There were a few inland trawlers about.

Over the intercom between various boats, one trawling skipper asked David if

he was looking for minke, for he was surrounded by them. David was well known to the local fishing fraternity for he had been taking wildlife



The minke whale *Balaenoptera acutoroster*  
<http://www.sci.tamucc.edu/tmmsn/29Species/minkewhale.html>

cruises in and around the Western Scottish islands for over twenty years. We headed towards the area in question at 8 knots, keeping a constant eye out for a surfacing whale. By now the clouds had dispersed. Everywhere, there were flocks of guillemots, Manx shearwaters and kittiwakes, with the occasional sooty shearwater, which would often take to the air on our approach. These sea birds were feeding on large shoals of small fish and the whales knew it.

Suddenly, the cry went out, "A whale!". David would redirect the boat slowly to towards the sighting and then cut the engine. The aim was to get within the whales' feeding circle. Drifting silently, we stood on the poop deck and watched. The atmosphere was electric!

Minke whales, *Balaenoptera acutorostera*, according to David, usually surface several times, their blow relatively short and often unobserved. Within a short time the whale surfaced again, this time nearer our boat. All we saw was the black back and a characteristic dorsal fin. At no time did we see its pointed snout nor its yellowish-white baleen plates. Eventually we were able to creep closer and closer and get some idea of the whales' size, for by now we had seen six whales. They were massive. After several blows, the whale may remain submerged for some time and could resurface some way off from the observers. For the most part, minkes are solitary or occur in pairs but on this occasion they had aggregated into a small group for feeding. They would get into a circle, driving the small fish into larger and large shoals or a protective ball. Then one of the whales would charge into the centre, with its mouth open and chase the fish from behind, in what is called lunge-feeding. We were able to observe lunge-feeding but never saw any of them breaching, where the whale comes right out of the water.

Although the smallest of the baleen whales in British waters, minke are large mammals. Some have been recorded as weighing 10 tonnes, but those we saw, so David told us, were between six and seven tonnes. The baleen plates in the lower jaw allow the whale to expand its mouth and throat in catching its prey, which, in British waters, consists mainly of small fish. Throughout the world, minke are common whales, especially in the northern hemisphere. There is another species of minke known as the southern minke, *Balaenoptera bonaerensis*, whose range overlaps that of *B. acutorostera*.

Sea watches and scientific surveys have established that there were about 40 minkes in the waters of the Western Highlands, but more recently their numbers have fallen to 25. Although protected by international law from commercial whaling, the Norwegians continue to take a small number for scientific research. Another possible reason for this decline is the tourist trade. Whale watching has become a popular pastime and day trippers from the mainland often demand to see them. They set off in high-speed boats with noisy engines. Travelling too fast, the boats can potentially collide with a

whale, giving it little time to take avoiding action. The wash and turbulence disturb the fish and the whales, so they simply move off. David's quiet approach is much more conservation orientated, and successful.

The spectacle over, we made for the island of Muck, passing a few harbour porpoises, *Phocoena phocoena*, another common cetacean in the area, on the way. Much smaller in size, the porpoise briefly surfaces, displaying its back and dorsal fin. Unlike the dolphins, which we were unfortunately unable to see, porpoises rarely leap out of the water. So ended one of five days cruising around the Inner Hebrides, a day of high quality wildlife watching.



The harbour porpoise, *Phocoena phocoena*  
<http://phocoena.org/factsheets/harbourporp.html>

## A Pine Marten Too Far

*Gordon Woodroffe*

It can be very misleading to take things at face value. Take the case of the dead pine marten which was found and photographed by Gordon Forrest on a footpath on the edge of Chaddesley Woods National Nature reserve in Worcestershire on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2002.

According to Gordon Forrest, Mervyn Needham and Johnny Birks of The Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT), the pine marten corpse was seen at the same location on the previous day by two dog walkers who had reported the corpse to Mervyn Needham and had placed it nearby for later collection. Unfortunately within 90 minutes the corpse had disappeared and could not be traced despite searching and extensive enquiries. However, Gordon Forrest's photographs were developed and these remain as valuable evidence to confirm beyond any doubt that it was a pine marten. Then, surprisingly, on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2002, after further searching MN found the corpse which was still in the bag

and had been thrown into thick cover a few metres away from the original site.

But, as the authors comment, there are reasons for regarding this as a most unusual record. Although the VWT has gathered sparse but convincing evidence of pine martens surviving in parts of Wales and northern England at the turn of the millennium, there has been no such evidence from Worcestershire. Indeed the only record of pine martens in this area is a report from George Wright (a gamekeeper) who saw one on the Lickey Hills in the period 1897-1907. Even this record is dubious, however, because even at that time the pine marten was regarded as already extinct in the Midlands.

On close examination of the photograph of the Chaddesley marten there are aspects of its appearance which aroused suspicion. For example, the animal appeared to be in its winter coat rather than its mid-summer one. In Britain pine martens start moulting in April, shedding their fluffy mid-brown winter coat by the end of May so that they appear slim and dark by mid-June. Consequently the Chaddesley animal pelage was inconsistent with its mid-June discovery and raised serious questions about when and where it actually died. Other observations suggested that the pine marten's claws appeared rather long for a wild animal (implying that it might possibly have lived in captivity). Another suggestion, prompted by a line in the animal's fur visible in the belly area, is that the marten may have died in a snare. But as the authors say, these observations must be regarded as speculative. The Vincent Wildlife Trust is hoping to extract DNA from the specimen in order to establish whether, for example, the animal might have had a Scottish origin or be derived from a captive stock elsewhere in Europe,

(I would like to thank Johnny Birks for allowing me to use this material which the VWT has been preparing for publication)

## Book Reviews

**Beavers.** Andrew Kitchener. Whittet Books Ltd., London. 2001. 144pp. Price £9.95, hardback. ISBN 1 873580 55 X.



*Beavers* by Andrew Kitchener is another volume in the reader-friendly British Natural History Series by Whittet Books, which aims to inform the amateur naturalist about all aspects of the ecology and biology of the species in question - in this case the beaver. Before I was asked to review this book, I had very limited knowledge about beavers; what I did know was plucked from various research articles that I had come across in scientific journals over the years. I found this book a fascinating read, made easy by the approachable way the information was presented and with the addition of many attractive illustrations by Ruth Pollit. The Eurasian beaver, *Castor fiber*, is the focus of this book, but other beaver species are also referred to throughout the text, and included are topics such as the behaviour, ecology, physiology, history and conservation of beavers.

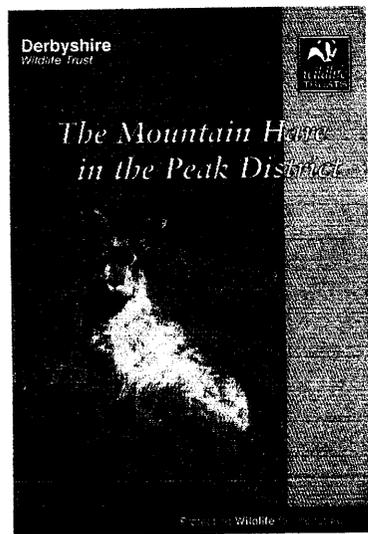
The book is written in such a way that someone with little knowledge of biology would be able to follow and understand; yet it incorporates details of many scientific studies that have been carried out concerning beaver ecology. I found it frustrating, however, that these studies were not listed in the bibliography section and would have preferred a section at the end of the book referring to these. I appreciated the use of occasional humour both in the writing and in the illustrations, which was a light relief from the multitude of facts. Did you know, for example, that beavers' tails act as fat stores? That beavers have a special double claw on the hind foot that acts like a comb when they groom? That Chaucer was a proud owner of a beaver hat? Some of my favourite parts of the book include an amusing description of the origin of the beaver's Latin name, and recipes for the best ways of cooking beaver meat and

for making beaver-tail soup. This book would make a nice addition to any amateur naturalist's bookcase.

*Cara Morgan*

**The Mountain Hare in the Peak District.** D. P. Mallon. Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. 2001. pp.38.

This is a most interesting booklet which draws together survey and research work on the mountain hares of the Peak District as well as giving a brief



natural history of the species. These are the only mountain hares in Great Britain outside Scotland and a small population on the Isle of Man. They are descended from animals released around 1870-1882. It is significant that releases made around the same time into North Wales and the Lake District have since died out.

The 2000 survey shows what can be achieved by combining the efforts of several partner organisations such as the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT), Peak District National Park Authority, the National Trust and the Sorby Natural History Society. It was organised by the DWT's High Peak Group. In fact over

100 people contributed records and virtually the whole area was surveyed. The current distribution of mountain hares was recorded in 332 1-km squares across the Peak District which represents a 35% increase since the last survey in 1984. An estimated 944 animals were counted although as the report acknowledges the accuracy of this figure is limited by the survey techniques. It is, however, most encouraging that the Peak District Mountain hare population has been expanding for over 30 years.

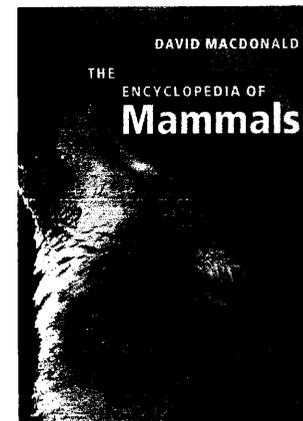
It appears that the principal threats to the hares are adverse winter weather and the small size and isolation of the population. In spite of the fact that the area

of moorland in the Peak District declined during the 20<sup>th</sup> century some of these losses are now being compensated for by a reduction in sheep grazing and replanting. Also, as the author underlines, moorland management for grouse shooting benefits mountain hares by providing a constant supply of young heather and the control of predators.

It is good to see that the pioneering work on the Peak District mountain hares by Derek Yalden and the Sorby Natural History Society has led to the publication of this impressive study. The booklet is attractively produced and is well illustrated with colour photographs of mountain hares and the signs they leave. Highly recommended.

*Gordon Woodroffe*

**The New Encyclopaedia of Mammals.** David Macdonald (ed.). Oxford University Press, Oxford. 2001. 930pp, fully illustrated in colour. Price £35. ISBN 0 19 850823 9

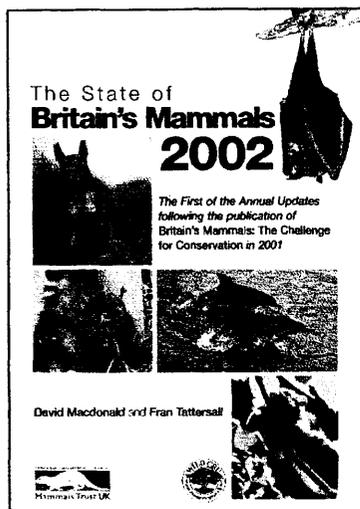


This is a completely revised and updated successor to David Macdonald's internationally acclaimed *Encyclopaedia of Mammals*. Each entry gives a systematic account of a species' or group's form, diet and distribution. Throughout the book, 'Factfile' panels with distribution maps and scale drawings give readers an instant snapshot of key data. It combines a highly readable text, written by leading experts, with the best of wildlife photography. At £35 this book is exceedingly good value and I would recommend it to anyone with an interest in mammals.

However, one word of caution: as one reviewer commented it would be a good idea to make sure your bookshelf has been strengthened.

*Gordon Woodroffe*

**The State of Britain's Mammals 2002.** David Macdonald & Fran Tattersall. Mammals Trust UK, London. 2002. Price £4.00. ISBN 0 9540043 2 9.



This report is the first of a planned series of annual up-dates of *Britain's Mammals: The Challenge for Conservation*, a 295 page report written by the same authors and published to mark the launch of Mammals Trust UK in spring, 2001. The purpose of the up-dates is to highlight what progress has (or has not) been made towards the 47 targets nominated in the 15 Species Action Plans (SAPs) prepared for the 33 'Priority' British mammals. One of the main conclusions of the report is the continuing lack of robust, repeatable and scientifically-based monitoring schemes for the majority of mammals (dormice and some bats species are notable exceptions). In other words, we do not know, in a quantitative way,

just how our mammals are faring – a prerequisite of any conservation strategy. *The State of Britain's Mammals 2002* reviews the progress of each SAP in terms of short- and long-term targets and then picks out a handful of species for particular attention. Progress towards meeting targets is uneven and the report highlights water voles, red squirrels and small dolphins (six species) as species (or groups) that are slipping from our grasps in many area of the country/coastal waters, despite considerable conservation efforts. However not is all doom and gloom. Various monitoring programmes are being trialled (e.g. Mammals on Roads) and, most importantly, the efficacy of volunteer mammal monitors is being rigorously assessed. This is a very attractively produced and well organised A4 booklet, fully illustrated with excellent photographs. It should prove of interest to everyone concerned with, and about, the conservation of our mammalian fauna.

*Geoff Oxford*

## Yorkshire Mammal Group Programme, 2003

- January 8th **Quiz night**
- February 12th **Foraging strategies of bats in a lowland agricultural landscape** Dr. James Aegerter, Central Science Laboratory, Sand Hutton
- March 12th **Quaternary mammals in Yorkshire caves – the value of old collections** Professor Terry O'Connor, Department of Archaeology, University of York.
- April 9th **Otters in urban Yorkshire** Brian Lavelle, Yorkshire Otters and Rivers Project, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
- May 14th **Spatial interactions between badgers in moderate density populations** Geraldine Newton-Cross, Environment Department, University of York
- 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 8th To be confirmed.
- November 12th **Where do our introduced mammals come from?** Dr. Jeremy Searle, Department of Biology, University of York
- December 10th **The making of 'The Life of Mammals'** Dan Tapster, BBC Natural History Unit

Indoor meetings are held in York CVS, The Priory Street Centre, Priory Street (off Micklegate) York (see map on page 52) and start at 7.30pm. All are welcome.

For further details contact: Amy Beer on (01904) 634227

## Yorkshire Mammal Group Committee Members, 2003

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