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Chairman's report – 2008.

Jon Traill

As with previous years, 2008 has been as busy as ever, largely due to the committed 'team' who continue to organise, arrange and carry out the behind the scenes work. Thanks as always to all those involved, both committee members and others.

As well as the varied talks, the group has attended events, held practical sessions and carried out field trapping work across the region. On top of this, a committed team has continued to monitor the dormouse release sites, as well as becoming involved in the third North Yorkshire dormouse release.

2009 promises to be just as successful and it is here that I sign off the chairman's report for the last time. Due to ever increasing 'other' commitments, I am stepping down as chair and taking a back seat from the group. I have enjoyed my time at the helm and would like to thank all committee members past and present who have made my role very easy.

Here's to 2009 and the new chair.

Once again I thank all those that have contributed to this issue of Imprint. I am particularly grateful for the excellent photos sent to me. I only wish that you could all see the originals rather than the greyscale reduced versions that eventually get published – one of the perks of being Editor.

Mary Youngman - Editor

Mountain hares in the Peak District – YMG join Sorby Naturalists for the annual mountain hare census.

Ann Hanson and Rob Mashedor

Every March, come rain, snow or sunshine, Sorby Naturalists head out of Sheffield into the Peak District to carry out their annual mountain hare census. These moorland-dwelling mountain hares (*Lepus timidus*) are the only population still found in England, with their main strongholds in the British Isles being the Scottish Highlands and Ireland, where they are known as Irish hares. The mountain hare is part of our native fauna, unlike the more familiar lowland-dwelling brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*), which was most probably introduced to Britain by man several centuries ago. Mountain hares do get quite large, but have shorter ears than the brown hare, giving them a “big bunny” appearance. However, in winter their coats turn white, or at least go blotchy brown and white, making them far more difficult to see on a snowy moor, but much more easy to see against snow-free heather and upland grasses. Mountain hares tend to favour areas of moorland managed for red grouse, as regular strip burning of the heather promotes new growth, just as tasty to mountain hares as it is to the grouse.



*Mountain Hare - Broomhead Moor
Photo: Ann Hanson*

Sunday 30 March 2008 dawned sunny but bitterly cold and we made the long journey across to the edge of the Peak District, where we met up with

Bob Croxton of Sorby Nats in a lay-by near High Bradfield. The plan was to join up with the rest of Sorby Nats, who had started out onto the moor earlier in the morning, and help with the annual mountain hare census. Our circular route was to take us up onto the moors, through prime mountain hare country and back down to the cars by early evening - a round trip of about 15 miles.



*Mountain Hare Habitat - Peak District
Photo: Ann Hanson*

The 2007 mountain hare census had counted a record 262 hares, so we had high hopes of getting some good views of these often elusive animals. Once up on the moors we spread out in a long line and began what can only be described as a “hare drive”. The reason for this is that the natural reaction of hares when danger (ie: a person) approaches is to lie low in the heather and they only leap up and run away when the danger gets too close for comfort. By spreading out we were hoping to disturb as many hares as possible to get a reasonable count of the current population. Many hares could also be counted from quite a distance as their white or semi-white fur stood out well against the brown of the heather. Not double counting the hares was quite a feat, especially when several hares were running hither and thither all at once!

Early on in the day hare numbers were a bit disappointing, probably due to the cold wind making them keep their ears down, but later in the afternoon the wind dropped and the hares bounced out into the winter sunshine in good numbers. The final count was 178 hares (plus 10 corpses – they don't all make it through the winter), which, although not quite as impressive as 2007, was still the fourth highest count since the hare walk started in 1973. In addition to hares we saw numerous moorland birds, such as golden plover, lapwing, skylark, meadow pipit, curlew, red grouse, peregrine and buzzard, as well as several common lizards basking in the sun out of the wind, a pygmy shrew and a couple of northern egg moth caterpillars marching determinedly along a moorland track.

I have to admit the last part of the walk became a bit of a slog as darkness fell and we found ourselves clambering up and down huge, water-eroded grips and stumbling into hidden bogs, but the exhilaration of such a fantastic day up on the moors and seeing so many hares completely outweighed the brief discomfort of damp, peaty feet! The high spot of the day was definitely reaching the top of Margery Hill late in the afternoon and the amazing view from our vantage point, with Lincoln Cathedral in the far distance and lots of little mountain hares dotted throughout the heather all around us.



Many thanks to Sorby Nats for letting us join them on this year's walk, especially Bob Croxton, Val Clinging and Derek Whiteley, and to Bob for kindly rescuing two lowlanders from a treacherous moorland bog! And of course thanks to the hares, for being there...

*Mountain Hare - Broomhead Moor
Photo: Ann Hanson*

Mammal Detectives in Wetherby, 5 June 2008.

Robert Masheder

To liven up a Thursday night in June, mammal group members were invited to track down mammals in Wetherby, but all was not as it may at first have seemed. A series of cunning clues had to be followed by our intrepid teams. We started in the car park of the sports centre next to the River Wharfe and within minutes were looking for a “weired sign, promising a fishy descent” and “nineteen steps” leading to the “first mammal track”. The track was discovered after much searching, but what had made it? Clearly some members hadn’t watched enough CSI (is that possible?) and took to wild guessing, whilst others followed the evidence. The mystery was solved (but only if you were there) and it was on to the next clue. There followed a list of mammal clues which led to the wild – bats and moles; the domestic – dogs and bulls; the bizarre – a lion and a unicorn; and ending in the ultimate whale experience, the original Wetherby Whaler. It might not be politically correct, but the fish and chips were jolly fine.

The East Riding of Yorkshire Country Mile Project -
training in small mammal identification and survey
methods.

Ann Hanson

Introduction

The East Riding of Yorkshire Country Mile Project provides training for local volunteers to aid with the conservation of roadside habitats and wildlife. Previous training has included grassland verge surveys and hedgerow surveys, and YMG were asked to run a workshop on small mammal identification and survey methods. The project is run by David Renwick, Biodiversity Officer with the East Riding of Yorkshire Council, and part-funded by the East Riding of Yorkshire LEADER+ Programme.

The workshop was run over a weekend in July 2008 in the village of Rudston, near Bridlington, with a classroom session on small mammal ecology, identification and survey techniques, followed by live trapping sessions along the Gypsy Race (a Local Wildlife Site) and Rudston Verge Nature Reserve. Grid references: Gypsy Race Local Wildlife Site – TA 096675; Rudston Verge Nature Reserve – TA 098667. The Gypsy Race is a small chalk stream which runs through the village of Rudston, and Rudston Verge Nature Reserve is a wide and botanically species-rich road verge located alongside a country lane to the south of the village.



*Weighing a shrew, Country Mile Project
Photo: Ann Hanson*

Methods

Twenty Longworth traps were placed on the banks of the Gypsy Race in the middle of Rudston and twenty-eight were placed in Rudston Verge Nature Reserve. Traps were baited with wheat, peanuts, sunflower seeds, carrot and blowfly pupae, and had a ball of hay for bedding.

Trap locations:

1. Banks of the Gypsy Race – traps were placed at regular intervals along an undisturbed bank of the stream. Ground cover varied from dense great willowherb, nettles and coarse grass to patches of hawthorn scrub with little ground flora. Several traps were placed close to the water's edge in an attempt to catch water shrews. Habitat beyond the stream bank was permanent pasture. (20 traps).
2. Rudston Verge Nature Reserve – most traps were placed at regular intervals about 1 – 2m in from the road edge along this wide, floristically diverse verge. Six traps were placed under the old hawthorn hedge at the far side of the verge. All trap locations had very dense ground cover. Nearby habitat was mainly arable land. (28 traps).

Traps were set on the evening of Saturday 19 July and checked on Sunday 20 July from 9.00am onwards.

Results

Summary of small mammals captured alongside the Gypsy Race and in the road verge.

	Gypsy Race	Rudston Verge NR
Wood mouse	1	-
Bank vole	5	-
Common shrew	1	1

Appendix I shows a comprehensive table of results for this trap.



Verge Survey- Country Mile Project Photo: Ann Hanson

Discussion and conclusions

Three different species of small mammal were caught along the banks of the Gypsy Race in Rudston, including one wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), one common shrew (*Sorex araneus*) and five bank voles (*Clethrionomys glareolus*). Rudston Verge NR, despite looking extremely good for small mammals with numerous field vole (*Microtus agrestis*) runs in the thick grass, yielded only a single common shrew. This rather disappointing result may have been due to the heavy overnight rain stopping animals from venturing too far from their burrows. Also, field voles, which are likely to be the most abundant small mammal in such habitat, can be somewhat trap shy and a single night's trapping may not be long enough for them to become used to the presence of the traps.

Thanks are due to David Renwick of the Country mile Project and Rob Masheder of YMG, for helping with this survey. Thanks also to all the local volunteers who turned out and took part in the small mammal workshop with great enthusiasm, despite the fact that it coincided with their annual open garden event!

Appendix I

Table of results: small mammal survey along the Gypsy Race and Rudston Verge Nature Reserve, July 2008.

Weather: Heavy rain overnight and previous day; morning warm and fine with a light breeze.

Site	Species	Sex M/F*	Age A/SA/J*	Weight (g)
Gypsy Race (1)	Bank vole	M	SA	21.0
	Bank vole	F	A	22.0
	Wood mouse	M	A	21.0
	Common shrew	?	A	8.0
	Bank vole	M	SA	21.0
	Bank vole	M	A	25.0
	Bank vole	F	A	29.0
Rudston Verge (2)	Common shrew	?	A	9.0

* M = male; F = female; A= adult; SA = subadult; J = juvenile

Small mammal trap at Filey Dams Nature Reserve -
9th and 10th August 2008.

The Dennis Aspinall Memorial Trap 2008

Jack Whitehead

The Yorkshire Mammal Group has held small mammal trapping sessions at this Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve on the outskirts of Filey since its establishment in 1985. On this occasion 52 Longworth traps prepared with a seed mix, pupae and bedding were set to trap on the evening of 8th August. These were inspected from 9.30 the next morning, reset in the evening and inspected again from 9.30 on 10th. Conditions could best be described as “mixed”, with cool nights, breezy days and heavy rain in the afternoon.

Traps were placed mainly in pairs in a range of habitats: mature woodland, hedgerow and ungrazed grassland, *Juncus* and *Glyceria* marshland and willow carr. The first session started badly with empty traps, a few false drops, and after half an hour we had trapped two wood mice and lost four cows (a gate having been left open!). We decided to move out of the grazed area of the reserve and for next day’s session nearly half the traps were repositioned in more promising locations. Apart from monitoring the mammal populations we hoped to raise the profile of the reserve and of the Mammal Group by encouraging members of the public to attend. This

was successful and some children and their parents turned up for both sessions and were thrilled to have close encounters with four species of small mammal.



*Rather damp Fox at Filey
Photo: Nigel Stewart*

Animals were aged and sexed and some of the females were noted as pregnant or lactating. The results were as follows:

Saturday 9th	Wood Mouse	15	
	Bank Vole	5	
	Common shrew	1	(Juvenile dead in trap)
Sunday 10th	Wood Mouse	22	
	Bank Vole	4	
	Common Shrew	1	
	Water Shrew	1	

Wood mice were found in diverse habitats, both wet and dry. The bank voles came from hedgerows as did the water shrew; the wetter sites producing very little. After the trapping sessions we checked for evidence of water vole activity, recent sightings indicating an increasing presence, and found signs of fox, which bred successfully again on the reserve this year. I am grateful to Ann Hanson and Rob Mashedor for their help with the event.

The small mammals of Cromwell Bottom Local Nature Reserve, West Yorkshire – a return trip.

Ann Hanson

Introduction

Cromwell Bottom, previously known as Elland Gravel Pits, is a lovely urban nature reserve, situated between Brighouse and Elland in deepest, darkest West Yorkshire. Grid reference: SE 127222. The reserve is an ex-industrial site, bordered on one side by the Calder and Hebble Canal and on the other by a steep wooded hill, and with the River Calder curving through it. Habitats include willow carr, birch scrub, open grassy meadows, reed beds, ponds, lagoons and even a very small lowland sphagnum bog.

YMG carried out a small mammal trap at Cromwell Bottom back in 2001 with a local group of volunteers called the Friends of Cromwell Bottom (see Imprint no. 28, 2001). Since then the site has been designated a Local Nature Reserve and is now managed by Calderdale Council, helped by local volunteers. We were invited back by the council, who advertised the event to the general public so they could come along and meet some of the local wildlife!

Methods

There are three main areas on the reserve lying within the loops of the River Calder. North Loop does not currently have any public access, Brookfoot Loop is quite wild and has limited public access, and Tag Cut Loop has paths which are well used by local people. In 2001 traps were placed at various locations within Brookfoot Loop and Tag Cut Loop, whereas most of the traps on this occasion were placed in locations within Tag Cut Loop.

Fifty Longworth traps were placed in a variety of habitats. Traps were baited with wheat, peanuts, sunflower seeds, carrot and blowfly pupae, and had a ball of hay for bedding.

Trap locations:

- 1 Rough grass adjacent to woodland edge, next to the Calder and Hebble Canal (5 traps).
- 2 Wet woodland with silver birch, hazel, oak and brambles (10 traps).
3. Tussocky grass adjacent to a small pond (10 traps).
4. Stands of reed canary-grass in a large area of dry grassland (5 traps).
5. The edge of a small pond with rushes, yellow flag iris and willow scrub (10 traps).
6. Bramble patches and reed canary-grass stands close to ponds along the line of the old canal known as Tag Cut (5 traps).
7. Pond edge and associated wetland along Tag Cut, with fairly dense rush and great willowherb (5 traps).

Traps were set on the evening of Friday 12 September and checked on Saturday 13 September from 9.30am onwards.

Results

Summary of small mammals captured at Cromwell Bottom.

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7
Wood mouse	4	6	1	1	3	1	
Bank vole						2	3
Common shrew	1		1				

Appendix I shows a comprehensive table of results for this trap.

Discussion and conclusions

Three different species of small mammal were caught in a variety of habitats at Cromwell Bottom, including wood mice (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), bank voles (*Clethrionomys glareolus*) and common shrews (*Sorex araneus*). Wood mice were caught in all the habitats sampled apart from the final wetland area along Tag Cut. Bank voles were only caught at the two sites sampled along Tag Cut and common shrews were caught in the two areas of rough, tussocky grass. The 2001 survey recorded the same three species and also one field vole (*Microtus agrestis*) caught in an area of dry grassland. It was hoped that less common small mammals, such as water shrews (*Neomys fodiens*) and harvest mice (*Micromys minutus*), might be present on the reserve, but none were caught on this occasion. Subsequent harvest mouse nest searches and bait tube surveys for water shrews at Cromwell Bottom have also drawn a blank, but suitable habitat exists for both species and who knows what the future may bring!

Thanks are due to Hugh Firman and Chris Sutcliffe of Calderdale Council, and Mary Youngman and Rob Mashedor of YMG, for helping with this survey. Thanks also to Ian and Tina for their enthusiastic mouse juggling and bravery when faced with the local press and a very large camera lens...

Appendix I

Table of results: small mammal survey at Cromwell Bottom, September 2008.

Weather: Heavy rain previous evening; morning warm and overcast with sunshine later.

Site	Species	Sex M/F*	Age A/SA/J*	Weight (g)
Rough grass (1)	Wood mouse	M	SA	24.0
	Common shrew	?	A	8.0
	Wood mouse	M	J	11.0
	Wood mouse	M	SA	17.0
	Wood mouse **	?	?	?
Wet woodland (2)	Wood mouse	F	A	28.0
	Wood mouse	F	J	12.0
	Wood mouse **	F	A	?
	Wood mouse	M	SA	16.0
	Wood mouse	F	A	27.0
	Wood mouse	M	A	28.0
Tussocky grass (3)	Wood mouse	M	SA	17.0
	Common shrew	?	A	10.0
Reed canary-grass (4)	Wood mouse	F	SA	16.0
Pond edge (5)	Wood mouse	M	A	23.0
	Wood mouse	F	A	20.0
	Wood mouse	M	SA	19.0
Bramble/reed canary-grass (6)	Bank vole	M	A	22.0
	Wood mouse	F	A	27.0
	Bank vole	M	A	18.0
Pond edge/wetland (7)	Bank vole	F	A	20.0
	Bank vole	F	SA	15.0
	Bank vole	F	A	18.0

* M = male; F = female; A= adult; SA = subadult; J = juvenile

** Escaped during handling

The New Zealand Whale-Watching Experience.

James Mortimer

Whale watching by boat

It was 6.45am, early for me, but I had a good reason to be out of bed. We were in Kaikoura, New Zealand, where we hoped to see sperm whales. We had booked ourselves on a whale-watching boat trip. Taking local advice, we had not booked the first boat of the day, but the second. Apparently the first boat may take a while to find where the whales are, so you could spend a lot of time watching nothing but waves until they are spotted. The second boat, which leaves about half an hour after the first, can head straight out to where the whales are, because the first boat has done all the hard work in finding the whales!



Physeter macrocephalus - sperm whale
Photo source Wikipedia

The sea was choppy, and I was hoping that my breakfast would stay down. Sitting at the front of the boat wasn't helping, so I moved to the back. I had to pity one poor woman, who spent most of the trip in and out of the toilet.

Once we had spotted the whales I instantly forgot about how ill I felt. Magnificent animals, like submarines without the conning tower. The whale-watching guide told us all about the whales, and helpfully warned us when they were about to dive, displaying their tail flukes (a great photo opportunity). Sperm whales are normally found further out to sea in deep waters (where they feed on giant squid), however at Kaikoura the edge of the continental shelf is much closer to shore than usual, so they come within a few miles of the coast. They seemed very close to the boat, though they weren't really, they were just very large. Seven sperm whales were sighted altogether, and then we headed back to shore.

Swimming with dolphins

Akaroa is famous for its Hector's dolphins. This is one of the rarest dolphins in the world, restricted to the oceans around New Zealand. Wet suits on, we boarded the boat. Once out to sea we spotted a little blue penguin, bobbing along. Several Hector's dolphins appeared soon after, so the boat stopped and one by one we lowered ourselves into the water. I was first in, and was perhaps a bit too keen. I'd forgotten how nervous I was about swimming and so it was a bit of a shock, and very cold! The dolphins disappeared (they are usually quite shy) but a few minutes later their curiosity got the better of them and they re-appeared. It was hard to see them approach when in the water – the waves kept getting in the way. People would shout from the boat “over there... one coming your way!”, then by the time you've turned yourself around to see, it's gone again. I had heard that swimming with dolphins was supposed to be one of the most relaxing and uplifting things you could do, but this was more a mixture of excitement and confusion! They glided through the water so effortlessly: we must seem very clumsy to them. One passed by me only a few feet away, and another swam underneath my feet. Earlier on, a disposable water-proof camera had seemed like a good idea, but we soon discovered that the dolphins were very quick and the waves many, so that getting photos that actually had dolphins in proved extremely difficult. I found that even with the wet suit on, I became too cold to stay in for more than half an hour, so I got out and watched the last 15 or 20 minutes from the boat, trying to warm myself up with some hot chocolate.

Whale-watching by plane

On a return trip to Kaikoura a week later we decided to try 'Wings Over Whales' – whale-watching from a small aeroplane. Due to poor weather, take off was delayed by about two hours, but finally it cleared enough for take-off. About ten miles out to sea sperm whales had been spotted recently, so that's where the pilot took us. After what seemed like a long time searching the waves for large dark shapes I was beginning to think we were not going to see any, when down to my left a whale appeared! I shouted to the pilot, who turned the plane around so that everyone could have a look. It was fantastic to see it from such a different viewpoint. After a few minutes this sperm whale dived, and we continued searching. The rolling motion of the plane as the pilot banked left and right was enough to turn you green, perhaps even worse than being on the boat. Before long, it was time to start back to shore. Then, on the way back, another whale appeared (or perhaps it was the same one). By this time I was feeling a bit worse for wear, so it was a relief to get my feet back on the ground.

Whale-watching in New Zealand is great fun and I would recommend it to anyone, even though it can leave you feeling sea sick, air sick or very very cold!

Imprint - a brief history.

Mary Youngman

The first issue of Imprint, the Yorkshire Mammal Group Newsletter was published in June 1983. The formation of a newsletter for the group was very much due to the vision and enthusiasm of Barrie Smith, the first editor. It was envisaged that the newsletter would be a permanent record of the group's activities, but it also aimed to inform and entertain the readers. Volume 1 was a simple creation, just 12 hand typed A4 pages. Articles and illustrations were arranged with the help of copious amounts of sellotape, the whole was then photocopied and pages stapled together. Imprint was initially biannual - volume 2 was published in December 1983. For volume 3 the format was reduced to A5 size but it was still hand typed and photocopied. Articles in these early issues of Imprint

report the group's increasing involvement with bats. Amongst the other activities reported are outings to search for dormouse signs and members' advice being sought about the provision of a badger tunnel under the soon to be constructed northern York ring road. Intriguingly in volume 4 (winter 1984) there is mention of a proposal to release red squirrels into York's parks.

The untimely tragic death of Barrie Smith happened in 1985, but Angie Hibbert stepped up to take on the mantle of editor from volume 6. Imprint was moving forward, sponsorship provided by the Vincent Wildlife Trust from volume 7 to volume 11, enabled the newsletter to be professionally printed for the first time. Of historical interest in volume 7 is a report by Edna Shann of her visit down to the south east to see what was believed to be the last remaining mouse eared bat (*Myotis myotis*) in the UK in his hibernation tunnel. When this individual died in 1990 the species was declared extinct in the UK. However there have subsequently been records of single individuals, (one elderly female in Bognor in 2001 and a young male near Chichester in 2002).

With volume 10 editorship passed onto Dean and Nicola Wise, they held the post for three issues. Then Kate Fuller took on the task for the next seven issues (volume 13, 1989 to volume 19, 1992). During this time Imprint was produced using a word processor, but still involved time consuming typing up of handwritten manuscripts. Kate tells me that at the time being unable to touch type herself this onerous task fell to her husband - good spot of delegation Kate! The newsletter continued to record the Group's activities, including small mammal trap reports, the long term study at Leeds University Farm, and our continued search for the elusive dormouse.

In 1993, the publication's 10 year anniversary, the decision was made to change Imprint into an annual publication. This was accomplished under the editorship of Beryl Cronin. Imprint appeared with a newly designed cover featuring a fine photo of an otter provided by Gordon Woodroffe, and with a fresh look inside. Imprint was looking more and more professional.

Rushing through the following fifteen years, Geoff Oxford became editor in 1998 and I took on the challenge in 2004. Of the numerous articles published in Imprint during this period of particular note are Colin Howes' article on YMG's contribution to thirty years of small mammal trapping

studies in Yorkshire (No. 26, 1999) and, for the YMG's 30th anniversary Michael Thompson, a founder member, provided an article on the origins and subsequent history of the Yorkshire Mammal Group (No. 28, 2001).

With computer technology (hurrah for the spell checker) and digital photography, production of Imprint has become much simpler, though occasionally frustrating with some software seeming to have a mind of its own. To date the newsletter has continued to fulfil its proposed functions in reporting the Group's activities, the studies of individual members and their mammal sightings both local and abroad. On the whole I think Imprint's original editor Barrie Smith would be satisfied with the growth and development of our Yorkshire Mammal Group Newsletter. Hopefully Imprint will continue to report and entertain well into the future.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Ann Hanson for updated information on the status of *Myotis myotis* in the UK.

The Original Dormouse Reintroduction – Tenth Anniversary.

Geoff Oxford

The history of dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) in Yorkshire was summarised by Howes in 1985 (see also Oxford, 1999). There were a few tantalising records from the 1950s and 1960s, and even into the late 1970s, but as far as I am aware, no substantiated evidence has been produced indicating an extant, remnant population over the past 30 years. As a consequence, the first re-introduction of dormice in Yorkshire took place in a wood near Helmsley, North Yorkshire, in the summer of 1999 – a decade ago. This was one of a number of continuing releases under the auspices of Natural England's Species Recovery Programme, which aims to re-establish dormice in counties with historical records but no current populations (Oxford, 1999). Subsequent to this release two further Yorkshire populations have been re-introduced, one near West Tanfield in

2004 (Beer, 2004) and the other in Freeholders Wood, Aysgarth (Yorkshire Dales National Park) in 2008.

The progress of the Helmsley population has been reported annually in *Imprint*, and the results up to 2006 summarised by Oxford (2007a). The wood contains approximately 140 nest boxes, which are checked monthly between May and October, inclusive. The National Dormouse Monitoring Programme's standard index of dormouse population levels is expressed as the mean number of animals (weighing 7 g or more) per 50 boxes during the October box check. The first years for the Helmsley population were encouraging, with means between two and seven. However from 2005 onwards this number has fallen to below one and in two years, 2006 and 2008, was zero (Figure 1).

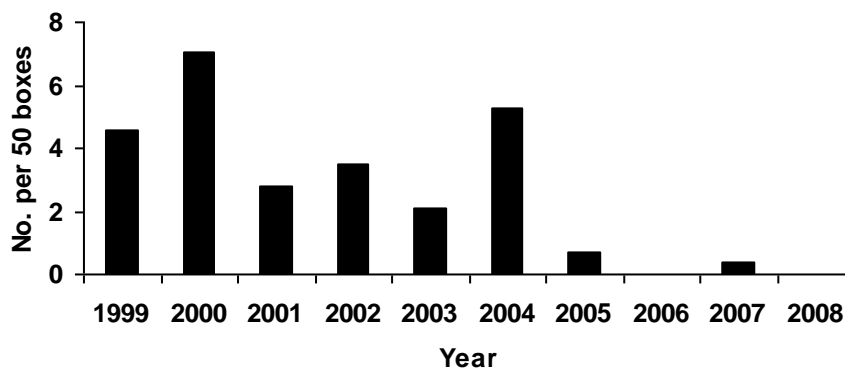


Figure 1. Average number of dormice weighing ≥ 7 g recorded per 50 boxes during the October check each year (1992 – 2008).

In 2008 one juvenile dormouse (female, 17.5 g) was seen in May (Figure 2), and that was it. However, there were other signs indicating dormouse activity. In October 2007, three definite dormouse nests were recorded (not including one of grass, which was possibly made by a wood mouse). One (in box 110) was recorded again in May 2008, in rather a sad state, but those in boxes 21 and 130 had disappeared completely – both boxes had had their lids knocked off over winter, probably by deer. Three new nests were noted in boxes 39, 59 and 120 in May 2008, but no additional ones were made during the rest of the year.



Figure 2. The sole dormouse found in 2008, with interesting haircut

Although Figure 1 shows an apparent decline in numbers after 2004, it explicitly relies on the number of animals that happen to be found each October, and there must be a random element to that. Figure 3 plots the total number of animals (including young in litters) seen in boxes, summed over all box checks within a particular year. Although this total will almost certainly contain a proportion of multiple-counts of the same animals seen in successive months it does perhaps provide a better indication of ‘dormouse presence’ over time. It suggests, as do the October data on their own, that the population may have declined quite sharply between 2004 and 2005. Indeed, the last evidence of breeding in boxes was in September 2004.

In 2004 August was extremely wet, after some relief in September, October was also wet (Branson, 2004a, b). There was, however, a bumper crop of hazelnuts, beech mast, and all manner of berries that autumn, so food appeared not to be limiting (Oxford, 2004). The following winter months were generally mild (Branson, 2005a, b). The combination of a wet autumn and a mild winter probably does not suit dormice or, indeed, any hibernating mammal. The sharp fall in numbers between 2004 and 2005 wasn’t just a localised phenomenon. It is possible to glean October box-count data for other, geographically widespread, sites for 2004 and 2005 from reports in the *Dormouse Monitor* (Spring 2005 and 2006).

Extracting these data involves measuring the heights of bar charts so will not be terribly accurate, but errors should be relatively small and not biased in any particular direction.

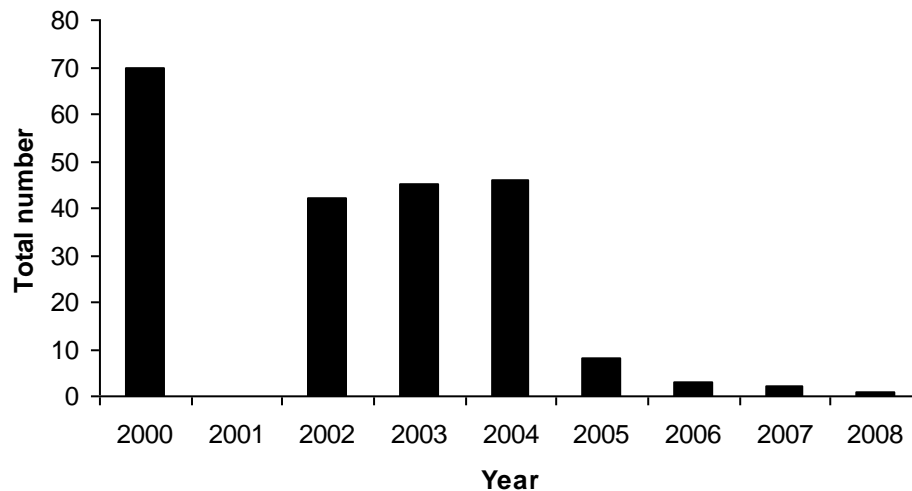


Figure 3 Total number of dormice (including litters) counted in monthly box checks in each year. Foot and Mouth Disease precluded all but the October count in 2001.

In total 50 monitored sites are common to both years. If years were equally good, one would expect on average about 25 of the sites to do better in 2004 than in 2005 and 25 to do worse, just by chance. However, 35 sites had higher counts in 2004 than 2005, and only 15 *vice versa*. The deviation from the expected 25:25 ratio is statistically significant ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 8.00, 0.01 > P > 0.001$). The mean population count (per 50 boxes) across the 50 sites was 7.94 in 2004 and 4.56 in 2005. These mean values are also significantly different ($t_{(98)} = 3.14, P = 0.002$), indicating an average drop in population size of 43% between the two years (Figure 4). Viewed in this wider context, it is clear that the Helmsley population was just following a national trend, albeit in a rather drastic manner – a trend from which it apparently failed to recover. It is possible that for a population ‘on the edge’ in North Yorkshire such a juxtaposition of unfavourable climatic conditions may have been the last straw (Oxford, 2006, 2007a).

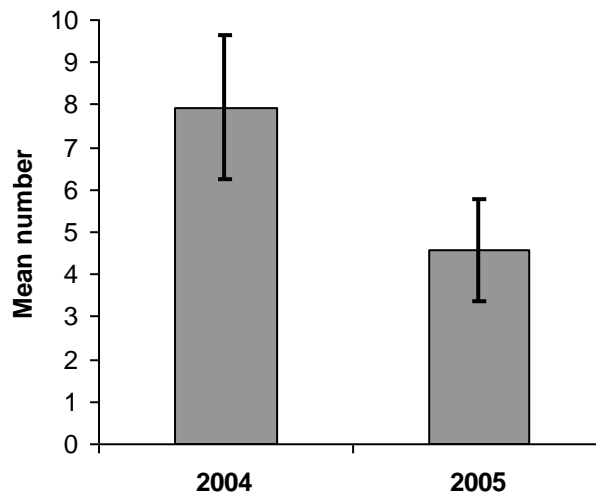


Figure 4 Plot of October co count data (numbers per 50 boxes) for 2004 and 2005, averaged across 50 sites. Data were extracted from the *Dormouse Monitor* (Spring 2005 and 2006). Error bars show the 95% confidence intervals of the means.

This view might be too pessimistic though. It is clear that there are still some dormice in Helmsley wood, but apparently at much lower densities than before. Dormice may not be making use of boxes for three reasons: (a) the population may be on the brink of extinction, as discussed above, (b) there is now a greater abundance of natural nest sites so boxes are no longer favoured, or (c) animals have dispersed away from the monitored area. Explanation (b) seems unlikely given the relatively young nature of the wood, and the rather sudden decline in dormouse density by whatever measure is used. The last explanation (c) will be tested early in 2009 when we put up 50 nest tubes, kindly supplied by Ian White (PTES), in likely habitat adjacent to the release wood. This is not the first time tubes have been used around the core woodland. In 2002 or 2003 Fiona Sanderson, a PhD student with Paul Bright at Royal Holloway, deployed tubes in habitats on the periphery of the wood for just one season. As far as we know, she failed to find signs of dormice.

Acknowledgements:

Roma Oxford kindly commented on a draft of the article and Ian White (PTES) provided details about the dormouse tube survey.

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Post script: After writing last year about the exciting potential of using stable isotopes to investigate dormouse diets in different habitats (Oxford, 2007b), I am sorry to say I was unsuccessful in my bid for funds to carry out this work. Thank you NERC! All is not lost however; we may be able to run the samples ‘in house’ at the University of York.

2008 West Tanfield Dormouse Report

Amy Beer and Ann Hanson

Four years in to the dormouse reintroduction at West Tanfield, our regular band of volunteers met on three occasions over the summer of 2008 to check nest boxes. In previous years checks have been made in May, July and September, but we had a suspicion that we might be missing out on recording young of the year by not visiting the boxes in October. So in 2008 the box checks were scheduled for June, August and October.

The June check yielded the usual range of tit, wren and bee nests. 19 boxes showed signs of wood mouse activity, including nests, caches of seeds and cherry stones, and one live animal. Six dead bank voles were also discovered, two in one box and four in another. It's unusual for bank voles to be found in the boxes at all, so the dead voles were rather odd and the cause of death wasn't obvious. The arboreal toad discovered camping out in box R1 in 2007 was still in residence, with his box devoid of slugs and woodlice! Seven dormouse nests were identified, one of which, on the railway section, contained a torpid female (see photo) who weighed in at 20g – a very healthy weight for the time of year.



Torpid Dormouse Photo: Nick Brookes

In August, an adult female with a litter of five young (4 females and 1 male) was found in Heslett Wood. The entire family were distinguished by having a white tip to their tails, a fairly common colour variation in some southern dormouse populations. In addition, eight other boxes contained full or partial dormouse nests. Seven boxes contained signs of wood mice and one contained a common shrew. Another toad was also recorded, this time in box R2 - possibly the individual from box R1 trying out a new home?

The weather in early October was damp and chilly and the final check of the year yielded 12 full or partial nests in Heslett Wood alone. Several of these were very loosely structured – possibly starter nests built by young of the year? Unfortunately, we drew a blank in terms of actual dormice, although several wood mice did put in an appearance.

One interesting and quite hopeful sign in 2008 was that more dormouse nests were found in areas of Heslett Wood away from the block of woodland which was most affected by tree felling in 2007 (also the block the dormice had most favoured up to that point), indicating that the dormice are perhaps starting to exploit new, less disturbed areas of habitat.

2008 was a good summer for fruits and berries, and good crops of blackberries in particular were available well into late September. The nut crop however, was very poor. This may have forced dormice to hibernate early, and does not bode well for winter survival, in particular for young of the year.

In addition to the regular box checks, we made two additional visits to the site over the summer. Ann Hanson and Ian White (PTES Dormouse Project Officer), in an event organised by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, took a small group of farmers and landowners to the site in September, by kind permission of the owners of Heslett Wood. The weather was a bit damp and had been extremely wet for quite some time beforehand, so the boxes were looking a bit soggy and sorry. However, we did manage to find a handful of pygmy shrews and finally one juvenile dormouse to the delight of everyone present. The dormouse was one of the juveniles discovered during the August box check (still in the same box), and in the intervening 3 weeks he had doubled his weight. As his mother and sisters had left the nest, we can only assume he had also become impossible to live with – teenage dormouse syndrome?

Then in July, Amy Beer was approached by Paul Greenan, a producer for the BBC regional documentary programme *Inside Out*. The show was covering the reintroduction of dormice to Freeholders Wood near Aysgarth (see page 27), and the idea was to give viewers an insight into future of the project by visiting a more established population. Amy showed Paul, presenter Chris Packham, and the cameraman around the site and searched in vain for an obliging dormouse, but found only a few nests along the railway section.

Many of the boxes are beginning to look very tired, several have lost their catches, some have lost bottoms and a few were found on the ground having been dislodged from the tree. Several show fairly extensive gnawing damage and many boxes are very damp, black on the inside or covered in white mould. Millipedes, earwigs and woodlice seem to love them, and many were an inch or more deep in frass by October. We have requested some new boxes the People's Trust for Endangered Species, and a visit to the wood to carry out general repairs, early in the spring of 2009 before the dormice wake up, would be useful. We also have 40 or so dormouse tubes to put up in the hedges radiating out from Heslett Wood. These can then be checked for dormouse nests in the autumn of 2009 to see if the dormice are starting to move out of the reintroduction site and look for new woods to colonise.

Freeholders Wood 2008 dormouse release.

Laura Hurt

Conservation Officer, PTES

Reproduced with permission from: www.ptes.org

The 2008 dormouse reintroduction took place at Freeholders Wood in the Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP) in June this year. It was the 16th release as part of the Species Recovery Programme. The release proceeded without a hitch, and 35 dormice (19 from London Zoo and 16 from Paignton Zoo) were released into 15 cages; some in pairs and some

in triplets (one male with two females). There was a larger than normal crowd present due to the presence of a BBC film crew, a photographer and several YDNP volunteers. Everybody pitched in to help with filling water bottles, making up the food and carrying crates of dormouse nest boxes. The woods were lush and green, very different to when I last visited in early April this year when there was still snow on the ground! The dormice were quite active for a summer afternoon but this allowed us great views of them scampering around their new surroundings.

A soft-release method was used where dormice were fed for the first 10 days before cage doors were opened so that they could leave to forage and explore their new environment. Food will be replenished less often until eventually, when there are no signs of dormice feeding at the cages, it will stop altogether and the dormice will fend for themselves, fattening up for hibernation on their natural diet. We hope that a good proportion of them will reproduce and that their offspring will double the numbers emerging from hibernation next spring.

Freeholders wood is in active hazel coppice management on a rotation of 15 years. This is ideal for dormice as it gives the hazel a chance to maximise nut production before being cut. It is the only semi-natural woodland within the YDNP being managed in this way. There is a privately owned newly-planted woodland adjacent to the release site which is hoped may be used by dormice in the future. There is a good network of local volunteers from the YDNP who will monitor the dormice over the coming years.

There have been two previous reintroductions in Yorkshire which have been very successful so far. Release sites are usually located either in counties with no known natural populations, which are adjacent to counties within the core range and are within the known historical range of the dormouse or counties with isolated populations, which require strengthening.

I would like to thank everyone involved including Tim Thom and the wardens and volunteers from YDNP for providing and managing the release site and to the Tanner Trust for helping to fund the release.

“Ever decreasing circles” – a report of YMG mammal recording walks 2008.

Ann Hanson (Expedition Leader) and *Rob Mashedor* (Navigator)

Hunting the harvest mouse around Little and Great Ouseburn, near Boroughbridge – 17th February 2008

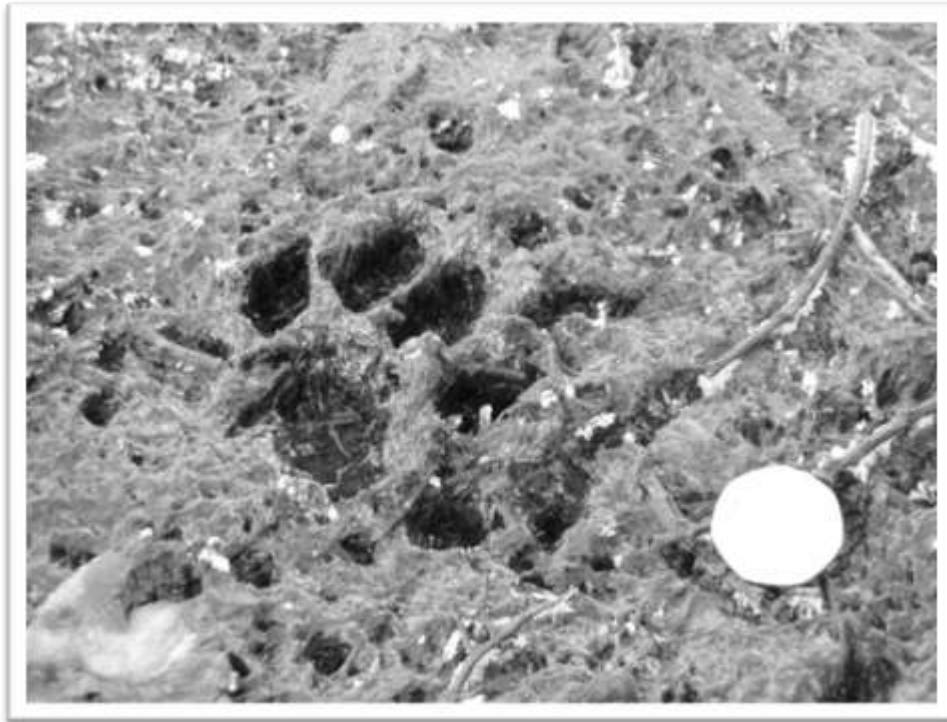
Back in 2007 two eagle-eyed YMG members noticed some promising harvest mouse habitat next to Little Ouseburn Bridge, between Little and Great Ouseburn, near Boroughbridge. As our mammal records were a bit slim in this part of North Yorkshire, a walk in the area to hunt for harvest mouse nests and other mammal tracks and signs seemed like a good idea. Little were we to know that this would turn into one of the most productive YMG walks ever!



Harvest mouse nest in cocksfoot
Photo: Ann Hanson

A small, but very keen, group of YMG members met in Great Ouseburn on a bitterly cold but beautifully sunny February morning. Pausing only to record rabbits and molehills in fields next to the school in Great Ouseburn, we headed straight off towards Little Ouseburn Bridge to hunt for harvest mouse nests in the long vegetation beside Ouse Gill Beck. And before

long, bingo, a perfect little nest was located in a clump of reed canary grass. Meanwhile, other members of our party had discovered water vole footprints and droppings, fox prints, roe deer slots and what looked suspiciously like otter tracks in the soft mud beside the beck.



Otter print
Photo: Ann Hanson

Rabbits were frolicking in the churchyard at Little Ouseburn and Back Lane had a good crop of molehills along its verge. Rat droppings were found alongside a wet ditch on the outskirts of the village. The droppings were an interesting blue colour which turned out to be from rat poison – worth remembering when handling droppings and slightly worrying with water voles in the vicinity. Walking through open farmland, four big brown hares were spotted in Ouse Gill Field, and an owl pellet collected from beneath a hedgerow tree was later found to contain one common shrew, one pygmy shrew and a bank vole.

Further along, a track alongside Brunsell Field gave us signs of moles (hills), rabbits and rats (droppings and burrows), and a fox (smell!). Molehills were recorded again in fields near Lylands Farm, as were fox droppings, confirming our earlier “smelly” record. Heading towards Moor Farm, two more owl pellets were found under hedgerow trees when we stopped for lunch on a sunny bank. These were later found to contain

three wood mice and a lot of rabbit fur and bones (perhaps the rabbit “pellet” was actually a bit of fox dropping?).

After lunch, Moor Lane yielded more molehills in a field and another harvest mouse nest in cocksfoot grass on a ditch bank alongside a track leading to a small patch of woodland called the Dale. The same track gave us a live rat (eek) and more molehills...



Fox
Photo: Mike Youngman

Once in the Dale we recorded two grey squirrels and some fox droppings, as well as a huge badger sett. Back on the Roman road we found a fairly freshly killed roe buck with three pronged antlers and yet more molehills. A field just before Carr Side Road revealed a few rabbits being hunted by a black moggy and a rather fine fox

The large arable field next door contained five hares having a very amusing, but slightly early, mad-March hare chasing spree, which kept some of us entertained for a good while.



Brown Hare
Photo: Rob Mashedor

The final part of the afternoon found us having a quick look round Upper Dunsforth Carrs, a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve consisting of damp meadows and wet woodland. Here we recorded molehills in the grassland and grey squirrel dreys in the woodland before yomping back to Great Ouseburn before darkness fell!

Red squirrels(?) in Raincliffe woods, near Scarborough **19th April 2008**

Raincliffe Woods are located at the top end of the Forge Valley just to the west of Scarborough. In the summer of 2007, several local people reported seeing red squirrels in a plantation of pine trees close to an area of open meadow in the middle of the woods, which had recently been partly

planted up with trees by the Woodland Trust. Scarborough Council's rangers had found squirrel nibbled larch cones and dreys in the area, but had yet to find any positive proof of red squirrels rather than grey. Historic records of red squirrels do exist in the surrounding area, specifically from Castlebeck Woods about 6 miles from Raincliffe Woods, but modern records are pretty non-existent. Another possibility is that someone had deliberately introduced a small number of red squirrels into the wood, although their chances of survival would be pretty slim in an area with a thriving grey squirrel population. The Mammal Group were called in to investigate...

We started off from Raincliffe Gate car park, where Alan Tomlinson from Scarborough Council and the local ranger met us and showed us the exact location of the possible red squirrel sightings. This was an area of mature pine and larch plantation adjacent to the more open meadow, and we quite quickly found a couple of squirrel dreys and some nibbled larch cones, but no squirrels of any colour were out and about to see. We did however spot some molehills in the meadow.

Not to be deterred we went for a walk around the woods, keeping a sharp eye out for squirrels and any other mammal records. A walk along Lady Mildred's Ride located roe deer droppings, badger footprints and the strong smell of a fox. We found more squirrel dreys in another area of pine at the top end of Lady Mildred's Ride, but still no squirrels. Coming back along Middle Road we found a patch of moschatel and sanicle, two ancient woodland indicator plants, growing alongside the track, which slightly made up for the distinct lack of squirrels.

A post-walk trip to a tea-shop in Pickering cheered us up further, but the mystery of the Raincliffe Woods red squirrels remains – unless you know better?

A walk along the Rye Valley, near Helmsley – 16th November 2008

A small, but enthusiastic, group met in the car-park of a Forestry Commission plantation (apparently with no name, but located on Rievaulx Moor) a couple of miles north-west of Helmsley.

First records of the day were some very large deer tracks, possibly red deer(?), along a woodland track near the car-park. Next we headed west,

down into the valley, and found molehills in the fields near Fair Hill Farm and a rabbit skull in the edge of Tup Hag Wood. A quick scrabble around under some hazel coppice alongside an old track near the farm revealed hazel nuts nibbled by wood mice, bank voles and squirrels (presumably grey). The banks of the same track also had plenty of rabbit burrows and droppings. We crossed the River Rye at Shaken Bridge, but despite a serious spraint hunting session found no signs of otters, but there were a few molehills in the fields near the river. Some more hazel coppice near Shaken Bridge Farm yielded bank vole and squirrel nibbled nuts, and a quick lunch stop near the farm recorded more molehills and a grey wagtail flying by.

After lunch, we had a walk back through Tup Hag Wood, where we saw roe deer and grey squirrels, confirming our earlier squirreled hazel nuts.



Grey Squirrel
Photo: Ann Hanson

The day ended with a really excellent tea-shop in Helmsley and it sold hand-made chocolates!

Many thanks to everyone who came on this year's tour of tea-shops – sorry, highly scientific mammal walks. Seriously though, the records we collected will all contribute to the North Yorkshire Mammal Atlas, so thanks again for your help, companionship and good humour.

Mammal news snippets.

Harp Seal recorded in Northumberland

In January 2008 a harp seal was sighted at Blyth, Northumberland, not a Yorkshire record, but not far off. The animal caused some excitement as it was only the second time that a harp seal had been recorded in Northumberland. The last occurrence was at Lindisfarne in 1995. Indeed since 1880 there have only been 31 records of this species on the British coast.



*Harp Seal, Blyth, Northumberland
Photo: Ian Fisher*

References:

Evening Chronicle News. Newcastle
Wikipedia

First otter reaches Farne Islands

Staying north of Yorkshire, in November this year the BBC reported that for the first time an otter had taken up residence on the Farne Islands, on Brownsman Island. The island is three miles offshore, a fair old swim, even for an otter. Although at the time of the news release the otter itself had not yet been sighted, the otter's presence was revealed by extensive tracks in mud found by the island's Head Warden.

Mammoth tusk found at Spurn Point, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Reserve.

In Yorkshire, there was a remarkable find on Spurn Point this year back in April. The discovery was a partial mammoth tusk, weighing more than 30kg. (60lb) The mammoth which could have been the size of a double-decker bus, may have grazed the land off Dogger bank in the North Sea. Mammoths became extinct about 2000BC. The tusk has been sent for preservation but will hopefully be returned to Spurn Point for future display.

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'Reintroduction' beavers arrive in UK

Four families of European beaver (*Castor fiber*) have arrived this autumn in the UK from the Telemark region of Norway. European beavers are a species native to the UK but they became extinct in Great Britain in the sixteenth century. These beavers will take part in a six year trial reintroduction located in Knapdale Forest, Argyll, Scotland. Next spring if all goes to plan the beavers will be tagged (so that their wellbeing and movements can be monitored) and then released into the Forestry Commission Scotland forest. You can see details of the trial reintroduction at www.scottishbeavers.org.uk