



Derbyshire Mammal Group News

Spring
2013

(Issue 21)

Forthcoming Events:

Wednesday 17 April 19:30
DMG Annual General Meeting
Horse and Jockey, Wessington
Contact: Jo Bissell

Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 April
Mammal Society Spring Conference and AGM
University of Exeter
Contact: The Mammal Society

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www.derbyshiremammalgroup.com

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Derbyshire Mammal Group AGM

The Derbyshire Mammal Group AGM will be held at 19:30 on Wednesday 17 April, at The Horse and Jockey, Wessington.

The pub is on the main road between Matlock and Alfreton (A615).

Agenda:

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2012 AGM
3. Chairman's Report
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Recorder's Report
6. Derbyshire Mammal Book Report
7. Newsletter
8. Publicity and Web Site
9. Election of Officers

Current Officers:

Chair:	Dave Mallon
Vice Chair:	Liz Lonsdale
Treasurer:	Steve Lonsdale
Secretary:	Jo Bissell

10. AOB

Steve Lonsdale

The Mammals of Derbyshire

Well, the long awaited and much talked about The Mammals of Derbyshire book is finally finished and published !

Almost ninety people attended the book launch on Friday 15th March at the Medway Centre, Bakewell. The three authors (Dave Mallon, Debbie Alston and Derek Whiteley) gave short talks on different aspects of the book.

Derek Whiteley began by giving a tribute to Dr Derek Yalden (see below), who had died suddenly on 5th February. Dr Yalden was president of the Mammal Society, and was an expert of the wildlife of the Peak District, including Mountain Hares and Red-necked Wallabies. He had viewed the majority of the text of the book and had written the Forward. Val Clinging, Sorby Natural History Society's mammal recorder, read out the book Forward.

Debbie Alston gave a presentation on the various ways we gathered the information and mammal records for the book, including how we tried our best to increase recorder coverage especially of our more common species.

Dave Mallon concluded by presenting a few facts and figures about our discoveries, and a few case studies of Derbyshire's mammals.

The Mammals of Derbyshire



Thanks were given to everyone involved in the book, including the data providers and recorders, those who helped create the maps, wrote sections or commented on the text, raised funds or provided photographs. Some of the best photographs were shown continuously in a loop throughout the evening.



The Mammals of Derbyshire contains almost 200 pages of information, distribution maps and photographs. It is the result of over four years of mammal recording and a collation of previous data, with a total of over 85,000 records. The book is a comprehensive account of Derbyshire's mammals (past, present and possible future). It is jointly published by the Derbyshire Mammal Group and Sorby Natural History Society.



John Bland and Sue Jones raised much of the Mammal Group share of production costs.



Derek Whiteley, Dave Mallon, and Debbie Alston

The book costs £10 (or £12.50 inclusive of p&p) and is available at a number of talks and events throughout the year or by post by sending a cheque for £12.50 (made out to Derbyshire Mammal Group) to Steve Lonsdale at 31 Caroline Close, Alvaston, Derby, DE24 0QX. Orders can also be taken using either debit or credit cards (for more details e-mail publications@derbyshiremammalgroup.com or ring Jo Bissel on 07824 521468).

It is hoped that a number of local bookshops and visitor centres will also stock the book. A list of these will be shown on the DMG website in due course.

Debbie Alston

Derek Yalden 1940-2013 – A Personal Tribute

It came as a huge shock to hear that Derek had died in his sleep on 5th February 2013 on holiday with his wife, Pat, in the Forest of Dean. I had spoken to him only a few days earlier to discuss dates for the launch party for The Mammals of Derbyshire and to confirm that he would be happy to say a few nice things about the book at the event. As always, he was delighted to be asked.

Sadly, he never made it, and he never saw the finished book, but he did see and comment on the near final draft, and he wrote the Foreword, and he was excited about the book. Instead of Derek's personal appearance at the launch party, there was a short tribute to his life and work, and Val Clinging read out his Foreword, followed by hearty applause.

Dr Derek William Yalden was a zoological polymath combined with an ecologist. He looked at the distribution of birds and mammals in the Peak District and then examined limiting factors such as sheep grazing, disturbance by dogs, disturbance by people, altitude, changes in vegetation, extreme weather and a host of other parameters. His combination of skills and knowledge was quite unique and he is simply irreplaceable.

His early life and education were spent in the South-east, where he met Pat Morris, recorded mammals for the London Natural History Society and the first Mammal Society national atlas. He went on to University College London, graduating in 1962 with one of the few first-class

honours degrees in zoology awarded by UCL in those days. He studied the carpal bones (wrist bones) of mammals at Royal Holloway College under Percy Butler, obtaining his PhD in 1965.

He came to Manchester University in 1965 as a lecturer and later became Reader, then following retirement in 2005, Honorary Reader. He adopted the Peak District as his local research area and set about exploring its fauna, flora and ecological history at weekends, evenings, and spare time. He generated thousands of records from his personal observations and freely made them available on an annual basis to anyone who asked for them.

Within a few years he had gathered enough data to publish a paper on Mountain Hares (Naturalist 1971) –the first modern account of their distribution and ecology. He went on to publish more papers on Mountain Hares –in 1984 making an attempt to estimate their population. His late winter estimate of around 735 I thought was rather low, and with some trepidation I challenged him. He enjoyed the scientific argument and some years later, following Phil Wheeler's work, the estimate was revised to at least 7000.

Derek was exceptionally generous acknowledging others. In the early 1970s he suggested to me that we pooled all our records of small mammals and publish something, as we were both collecting huge amounts of data. The resulting paper Small Mammals of the Peak District was mostly written by Derek, but he insisted on putting my name first ("No, no it must be alphabetical order"). For a young graduate just starting his career this was a great boost. (Thanks, Derek). He also had a fabulous sense of humour. Who else could have written a serious scientific paper on the contribution made by his black Labrador bitch trained to find dead shrews and small mammal nests? (Chad's Shrews Naturalist 1993).



Derek Yalden (Penny Anderson)

His work in the Peak District covered moorland ecology, moorland erosion, plants such as Labrador Tea, and birds. He published four authoritative papers on Red Grouse, and was an expert on the upland waders particularly Dunlin and Golden Plover, and walked the entire perimeter of the three Upper Derwent reservoirs every year to survey Common Sandpipers. His interests extended to archaeology and history, particularly bones. Derek worked with the late Don Bramwell of Bakewell, expert on bird bones, and also studied mammal bones in Peak District caves and archaeological sites, and published a number of important papers. He once reconstructed the wildlife of Cheshire 1,000 years ago from hints and clues in the Domesday Book and other sources. He was able to show that the White-tailed Eagle was once widespread in Britain. He also elucidated the mystery of why the Pygmy Shrew but not the Common Shrew is found in Ireland: the former is more at home in wet, peaty environments, which would have characterised the short-lived land bridge between Britain and Ireland.

Ever on the look-out to make things easier for the rest of us, he spotted a niche in the market for a simple cheap user-friendly guide to The Analysis Of Owl Pellets. This little book has now gone through four revised editions and is the desk top guide for students, mammalogists, ornithologists and anyone else who dabbles with bones. He also pioneered the standard technique for the careful analysis of Kestrel pellets (Bird Study 1985) with special attention to their insect and earthworm contents.

In the Peak District he did detailed surveys of Red Deer in Staffordshire and the Goyt Valley, black Fallow Deer around Stanton, Badger setts, abundance of Field Voles, Water Voles and pioneering work on bats in lead mines in the days before bat groups, and did regular Otter spraint surveys in the days when Otters were very rare indeed.

Derek was active at national and international levels. President of the Mammal Society from 1997 to his death, and Editor of Mammal Review from 1980 to 2002, he was a great ambassador and promoter of the Mammal Society (he joined in 1961). A regular speaker at conferences and symposia, tutor at Mammal Society training courses and driving force behind Mammal Society surveys and training initiatives, such as Look Out For Mammals. At the international level he was an acknowledged authority on the mammals of Ethiopia and Eritrea and two endemic species from that region carry his name - the tree-frog *Leptopelis yaldeni* and the mouse-like Yalden's *Desmomys*, were named in recognition of his work there.

Back home he is perhaps best known for editing and producing (with Stephen Harris) the 4th Edition of the Handbook (Mammals of the British Isles) in 2008. This is the seminal work, a bible, for mammal workers running to 800 pages of solid facts, and will remain so for years to come.

But for me, his *The History of British Mammals* takes some beating for readability, clarity bringing together palaeontology, archaeology, written history and zoology. As a natural history book it is simply outstanding. The book review in *The Naturalist* noted "This is a truly mighty work, a life's work, written with the care and inspiration of a born teacher and with the vigour of an enthusiast with an infectious curiosity about the biodiversity of the British Isles".

One of his last jobs was to write up the final chapter in the story of the Peak District Wallabies. Over 40 years he made hundreds of careful observations but he asked us to keep his records confidential until "I have published the end of story". It came as a happy surprise to many of us when British Wildlife popped through the letterbox literally a few days after his death with the very paper that we thought was unwritten. Derek's little joke I thought at the time.

So, we are going to miss the tall, likeable, zoological polymath and celebrity. To whom will we turn to inspire us, to check our facts and opinions, to write Forewords, to give talks and help the next generation? We are going to need at least four or five replacements.

Derek Whiteley

Moles – Ancient and Modern

Brian Gough, a Derby Natural History member lent me a book called 'Nature Parade' which is full of interesting "facts" and anecdotes. It was first published in 1939 and uses information from earlier writers, so some of the items seem a little odd, compared to modern ideas.

A French writer is quoted as stating that a mole will occasionally hide itself at the top of its mound of soil with only the tip of its long red snout protruding. It will then wait until a bird mistakes its snout for the head of a juicy worm. When the bird pecks at the bait the mole leaps up, grabs the bird and pulls it into its tunnel to be devoured.

On the day when I read that item I also saw in my newspaper that scientists at the University of California believe star-nosed moles could hold the key to beating chronic pain. The mole's snout is fringed with 22 sensitive tentacles which the mole uses as its "eyes" to feel out worms and grubs. It can detect, catch and eat food faster than the human eye can follow. The centre of the snout has 100,000 nerve endings so it is thought to be the most sensitive patch of skin on any mammal. The scientists believe they have pinpointed the genes in the mole that control touch and pain in its nose. They think that if the same mechanism is found in man it could be used to develop new treatments for pain.

Moles are described as fossorial, ie adapted for digging. Their front paws have an extra thumb called the prepollex, whose single sickle shaped bone develops from a transformed sesamoid bone in the wrist. Male hormones are involved in this development and may account for the unusual reproductive equipment of female moles. Their gonads include both ovarian and testicular tissue. They have rudimentary male features such as Cowper's glands and a two lobed prostate.

In 1702 William III (William of Orange) died of pneumonia after a fall from his horse Sorrel. Because the horse had stumbled in a mole's burrow many Jacobites toasted "the little gentleman in black velvet" who had brought about their enemy's demise.

It is a well known fact that the mole
Spends most of his life in a hole.
Of course there's the toil
Of pushing up soil,
But its not a bad life on the whole.

The name mole is a contraction of the old name mouldywarp. Mould meant soil, as it does in the mouldboard of a plough and warp meant to throw, so the mole was the soil tosser. It is easy to see the link between mouldywarp and the modern German name for mole which is maulwurf. The Latin for mole was Talpa which is now the genus name for mole. It is also the name in Italian, while the Spanish name is topo and the Portugese is toupeira. The French have adapted it to taupe, which is also now the name of a colour defined as grey with a tinge of brown. It is supposed to be the average colour of French moles – you know, the ones that stick their noses out of their molehills in order to catch birds.



John Bland

Mammal Society Owl Pellet Survey

The Mammal Society National Owl Pellet Survey has been running for around 15 years and has gathered a huge amount of data thanks to the efforts of all our volunteers!. We need more volunteers to help analyse the owl pellet samples. You would need to be able to receive samples, analyse them and submit the results to us on a regular basis. Pellets help us to answer questions such as:

- What, when and where does it hunt?
- How much does it eat?
- Does its diet change with the season?
- What part does the owl play in the food chain?



To get involved, email surveys@themammalsociety.org for more information.

The Mammal Society

The next edition of this newsletter is planned for Summer 2013. Please forward any articles (on any mammal or DMG related subject) to Steve Lonsdale (Lons57@gmail.com).

Opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the individual authors, and may not represent the views of Derbyshire Mammal Group.

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