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The British Wildlife Centre

During a weeks' holiday in the area, Debbie and I decided to visit the British Wildlife Centre near Lingfield in Surrey.

The centre is only open at weekends, extending to the whole week during school holidays. We were in the area outside the school holidays, so we visited on a Sunday.

The centre is home to native British Wildlife with various mammals, birds and reptiles (many of which are part of captive breeding programmes). This is a little different to, for instance, the Chestnut Centre in Derbyshire where there is a mixture of exotic and native species.

We had some amazing views particularly of rarer or little encountered mammals such as Polecat, Red Squirrel, Scottish Wildcat and Pine Marten. The Red Squirrel enclosure is

arranged so that you can pass though gates (closing them quickly!) and be in with the animals and maybe, as I was, be mistaken for a tree by a squirrel with it leaping on to my arm and climbing down me! (I wasn't expecting that!)

The otters were at times, particularly active both in and out of the water.

There were some great photo opportunities during the day and a few of these can be seen on further pages in this issue.

The place is certainly well worth a visit if you find yourself in the area.

www.britishwildlifecentre.co.uk
info@britishwildlifecentre.co.uk

Dave Alston

DMG Twitter account @DerbysMammals

Keep up to date with Derbyshire Mammal Group's Twitter account!.

The account went live on 12th April and now has 161 followers!



Unusual Mammals

I recently acquired a copy of the Octopus World Guide to Mammals which contains several species that I had not been familiar with before.

The yapok or water opossum of Central and South America is the only aquatic marsupial. With webbed feet, rounded head and dense fur it resembles an otter and hunts for food, mainly crayfish, along and in waterways. The young are born in December and stay in the pouch until well furred. A strong muscle closes the pouch so tightly that it is waterproof so the young are not drowned when the female dives. Incidentally the male also has a pouch, into which he retracts his scrotum.

Nail-tail wallabies are quite small marsupials intermediate in size between the hare wallabies, which are hare sized and rock wallabies which are about a metre tall. The "nail-tail" name comes from the fact that the tail is tipped with a horny nail. The only other mammal

species to share this feature is the lion.

There are two species of linsang. The spotted linsang lives in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and China. The banded linsang is found on the Malay peninsula and in Borneo and Sumatra. Both are arboreal and the most catlike of the Viverridae, the family which includes civets, mongooses and genets. Nocturnal and solitary they prey on birds, small mammals and insects.

The tayra, *Eira barbara*, is a South American mustelid similar to a pine marten and is an agile climber. Like a pine marten it has a buff throat patch, the extent of which varies with the individual.

The two species of grison are also mustelids living in South America and have strikingly patterned grey, black and white fur. They are sociable, foraging in groups when they trot along in single file.



From top to bottom:

Water Opossum, or Yapok
Northern Nail-tail Wallaby
Banded Linsang

John Bland

The Little Cat Hunt

In May 2015 I travelled with my sister to the Tibetan Plateau in search of the localised birds and mammals. The first morning in Qinghai province we travelled to a forested area to start acclimatising to the altitude, in the snow. For the next 2 weeks we would be over 4000m most of the time, and the weather varied from very cold and windy to sunny and warm enough to remove 3 layers of clothing. On the third day we arrived at a high pass at lunchtime and climbed to a vantage point overlooking a horseshoe valley to scan the grey rocks for a grey cat. After 3 hours we had seen a few distant Black-lipped or Plateau Pikas, some migrating snow finches and several Lammergiyers.

After our first night in distinctly rustic hotel we were due to set off for the day at 04.30. First my alarm clock failed and then I realised after breakfast I could not possibly climb the mountain and stay out all day, it was too high at 4500m (my acclimatisation was not good enough). We left the intrepid 4 to scale the heights and scan for the elusive cat. I spent the day walking by the river and sat in the car park alternating between sun and shade, the first too bright and the second too cold. For entertainment we had red-billed chough, mountain buzzard, black redstart and various snow finches and other migrants. We had an excellent lunch at the local café, tomato omelette and chips, made a wonderful change from sticky rice and?????

The following morning we set off for the pass where yesterday glimpses of 4 cats were seen. I think, to make me feel better, someone said they had only seen a tail. We had our usual picnic breakfast and scanned the hillside for about an hour. Then someone saw a little grey shadow on a distant (about 1 mile) hillside. Through the scopes we all had a good view of Pallas' cat. Our guide noticed this was on the ridge above the pass so we could drive to be much nearer. A quick scamper down the hill back to the cars and we arrived at the top of



the pass and the cat disappeared over the top. Another scramble around and we could see the little beauty walk up the hill and sit behind a boulder with head peering over for a few minutes before disappearing again.

It may have been a short view but it made whole trip worthwhile. I saw 22 species of mammal and 199 species of bird.

A real once in a lifetime adventure.

Shirley Cross

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Events in 2016

Events coming up next year could include the following:

Small mammal live-trapping between May and September in Edale, Pleasley, Wingerworth, Old Tupton and Wessington

Harvest Mouse Survey

Dormouse box checks

Mountain hare walk

An expert guest speaker

Bat walk

DMG Picnic

More details available soon in the 2016 events programme.

Museum Exhibit



On display in the museum at Derby is a skeleton of a *Hippopotamus amphibius*, known as the 'Allenton Hippo' which was discovered in 1895 during works to dig a well at the Crown inn. Other bones found at the same time were identified as those of elephant and rhinocerus.

Web site changes

Derbyshiremammalgroup.org.uk is now active. The .com version of the website will continue to be available until May 2016, but may not be updated. Everything should be as it was on the .com website, but please let me know if there are any problems.

A new style web site will eventually replace the current version (which was designed in 2011). This will be easier to use on smartphones, tablets etc. some web pages have already been converted and I will be testing them out 'live' soon.

From The Doctor

I recently acquired a copy of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary, or at least a modern selection from it by E.L. McAdam and George Milne. It is said that when the dictionary was first published a lady congratulated Johnson on not including all those rude words. "Madam" he replied "To know that you must have looked for them." However some of the entries do contain material which must have been risqué at the time and some are just quaint.

Camelopard Tall as an elephant but not so thick named because he has neck and head like a camel and is spotted like a pard, but his spots are white upon a red ground. The Italians call him giaraffa.

Elephant is defined as the largest of all quadrupeds...extremely long lived....naturally very gentle but when enraged no creature is more terrible. He is supplied with a trunk or long hollow cartilage, like a large trumpet, which hangs between his teeth and serves him for hands. In copulation the female receives the male lying upon her back, and such is his pudicity that he never covers the female so long as anyone appears in sight.

Hyena – an animal like a wolf, said fabulously to imitate human voices. The dictionary quotes a verse from Dryden's Fables...

A wonder more amazing would we find;
The hyena shows it, of a double kind:
Varying the sexes in alternate years,
In one begets and in another bears.

Beaver, an animal otherwise named the castor, amphibious and remarkable for his art in building his habitation. A strange quote from Hakewell's On Providence " The beaver, being hunted, biteth off his stones, knowing that for them only his life is sought.

John Bland



Mammals of Derbyshire



More than 430 copies of the Mammals of Derbyshire publication have now been sold (out of DMG's share of 600 books).

Photographs from the British Wildlife Centre



Linked Names

Flicking through a dictionary I noticed that whilst some mammals have more than one name, some names may relate to more than one species. I found this "chain" interesting.

Galago is the rather unfamiliar name for a bushbaby. The most widespread of the five species is the Senegal bushbaby which has a round head with large eyes and a short muzzle. An angwantibo looks like a cross between a bushbaby and a kitten. The name probably comes from the West African word angwan which means cat. The angwantibo is related to the loris whose name comes from the Dutch word for clown.

A close relative of the loris is the potto *Perodicticus potto* which lives in African rain forests. The name probably derives from a Guinea dialect. Potto is also an alternative name of the kinkajou *Potos flavus*, a relative of the panda which lives in central American and the northern parts of South America. The name kinkajou comes from the French quincajou, which was derived from a North American Indian language.

A similar word kwingwaage is the Algonquin Indian name for the glutton, a name which comes from the Latin gluttire, to swallow and gluttus, greedy, which is appropriate as it is said to eat more than any other carnivore. It is also known as the wolverine, a name that derives somehow from the same root as wolf. I think that comes from the "woof" sound which a wolf's descendants make.



Galago
matschiei

John Bland



Potto

The next newsletter will be published around April. Please send any articles to Dave Alston.

Email:

newsletters@derbyshiremammalgroup.org.uk

Thank you to all those who have contributed to this newsletter.

Apologies to anyone who sent something to me but hasn't had it appear in this issue. It will be used in the next issue in the spring.

Dave

www.derbyshiremammalgroup.org.uk

Chair: Debbie Alston

01773 821804

debbie@debbiealston.co.uk

Secretary: Jo Bissell

07708 248776

Jo.ian@live.co.uk

Treasurer: Shirley Cross

crosssk@btinternet.com

Group Recorder: Debbie Alston

01773 821804 (evenings)

alston@debsndave.plus.com

Web site Admin: Dave Alston

webadmin

@derbyshiremammalgroup.org.uk