

# THE DONCASTER NATURALIST



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# THE DONCASTER NATURALIST

## Volume 1, No. 8

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### EDITORIAL

Our Winter Programme seems to have gone with a swing this year, and many of our meetings have been extremely well attended. This issue of our magazine is the only one since last Spring; perhaps we can aim for an Autumn issue? Articles on your observations, preferably in the Doncaster area; accounts of your forays into the countryside during the Summer months; all will be given a fair chance of publication. Please let me have your contributions before August 31st. so that we can aim to produce a magazine in early October.

The Field Trips which we have arranged are listed on page 228, and we hope for some warmer, sunnier days than we suffered last year. This year we have a change of President; taking over from Mr. M. Hanson we have Mr. G. Mitchell, who is well known in the area as an experienced naturalist, and in particular, an ornithologist.

Dorothy Bramley, Editor  
29, Cantley Lane, Doncaster  
March 24th. 1987

# ON THE TRAIL OF DONCASTER OTTERS

Colin Howes

Up to the turn of the century otters abounded in the numerous rivers, water courses and extensive wetlands of the Doncaster region. Nowadays their old haunts are so polluted, disturbed, drained or clinically managed it is almost inconceivable that these aquatic carnivores were a characteristic feature of our local fauna. Otters inhabited the Don between Bentley and Sandall. C.W.Hatfield, that chronicler of Doncaster's history, recorded that in 1794 two were killed with one shot in a holt situated in the banks of the old course of the Don at Wheatley Park. (Howes 1976).

Like many landed families in the 19th century, the Cookes of Wheatley Park were enthusiastic collectors of mounted mammals and birds, particularly British species. Their extensive collections eventually formed the basis of Doncaster Museum's natural history displays housed in the old premises at Beechfield House, Waterdale. Catalogues show that others were present in the Cooke collection and it is almost certain that some of these animals would have been from the Don, and probably included some of the above mentioned individuals. Sadly almost all the Museum's 12 other specimens are without data so none can actually be proved to have been taken locally.

Recently the Museum acquired its first authenticated local otter, so no longer do we have to rely for proof of our wildlife heritage on ancient published records and anglers' recollections. The fine mounted specimen, reputedly preserved by a local taxidermist, is positioned holding a roach under its right front paw and is set amongst tussocks of Phragmites Reed and Jointed Rush. This handsome trophy, housed in a glassfronted case and generously donated by Mrs P.L.Metcalf of Cleethorpes, was shot near Thorne in about 1923 by Mrs Metcalf's grandfather Mr Joseph Richardson of Thorne. The precise locality of the otter was never recorded, the family folklore being no more specific than to ascribe it to the Thorne area. Mrs Metcalf, however, recalled that her grandfather had

worked as a gamekeeper for a farmer with the unusual name of Bletcher. Researches using the Thorne Rating Assessments for the 1920's (housed at Doncaster MBC Archives Department) revealed that Mr G Bletcher owned property at Grove House, Red House, High Banks Level and Sandhill, all on Thorne High Levels. Significantly these sites are all linked by a major water course known as the Boating Dyke, pinpointing at last where the otter must have been encountered.



Otter hunting 1793

The Dirtiness Drain and lower reaches of the Torme (the 'three rivers'), into which the Boating Dyke flows, both harboured otters in the past, indeed otter signs in the form of flattened bankside vegetation and kill remains of roach and bream were found along the Dirtiness Drain near Crowle 5/6/71, and in 1976, also near Crowle, anglers knew of otters in the 'three rivers'.

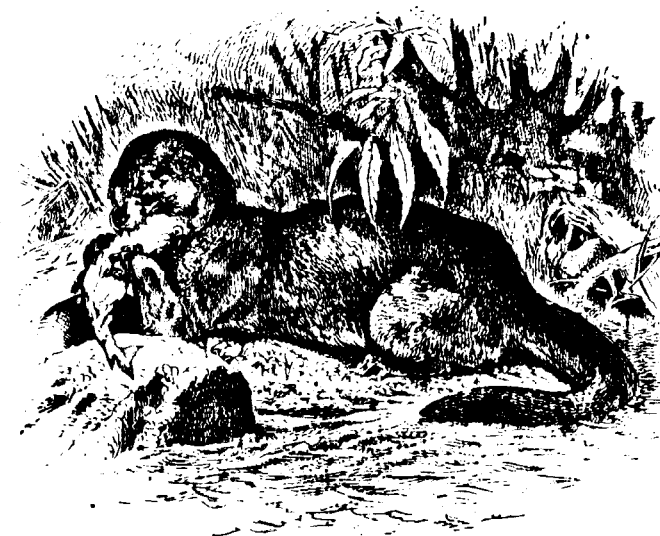
Otters were also known to occur on and around Thorne Moors, about 4 km to the north. On the circular for the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union excursion to Thorne Moors 11/7/1907, Dr Corbett noted that 'otters...still abounded in the neighbourhood'.

They were known to be present in the 'old canals' area of the peat moors during the late 1930's, in Swinefleet Warping Drain in 1947, Thorne Waste Drain in about 1963 and during the spring and autumn of 1972 footprints were regularly seen in the clay from the newly excavated drains along the southern edge of the 'old canals'. (Limbert 1979).



About 4 km to the south of the High Levels, Lindholme Lake and the drains on the eastern side of Hatfield Moors were known to have been visited by otters during the 1930's when Mr J Lyons of Lindholme Hall remembered seeing them on several occasions. He also remembered one being shot (Marshall 1986). Since the period and locality are close to those for Mr Robinson's trophy, it is tempting to speculate that Mr Lyons' recollection may relate to the same animal. Lindholme Lake was hunted by the Buckinghamshire Otter Hounds up to the 1950's and in 1976 anglers knew of otters in the nearby Wroot section of the River Torne.

Quite by accident two more pieces of the otter jigsaw have recently fallen into place. A hunting trophy in the form of an otter paw mounted on a wooden shield was offered for sale at an antiques fair held at Doncaster Airfield 15/9/1985. This item, the work of the famous taxidermy firm of Spicer and Son of Leamington, was according to documentation on the shield from a 26lb specimen killed by the Buckinghamshire Otter Hounds in the Ryton at Scrooby 5/8/1928



Fascinating insight into the history of our local fauna and changes in our countryside can be gathered by examining museum specimens and old sporting trophies. However, some of the above examples show that the old sporting adage of 'What's hit is history and what's missed is mystery' only holds true if whatever has been hit retains its full documentation.

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Lapwing (17):47.

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## OWLS SEEN IN AND AROUND DONCASTER, OBSERVATIONS IN 1985

Shirley Thorpe

January 3rd

SPROTBROUGH FLASH

Little Owl. I named it 'Cocoa' because of its brown colour, sat all fluffed up against the cold after a night of keen frost. Large and round like a Christmas pudding.

January 11th

NURSERY LANE, SPROTBROUGH

Two Tawny Owls, each one on a telegraph pole on opposite sides of Nursery Lane, having a dispute over territory rights. Low hooting mostly, decided they would both go for a young rabbit which had frozen in the middle of the road because of an oncoming car. Both owls took off from their perches, with claws and legs outstretched. They both turned away at the last minute, a car missing them by inches. The rabbit fled to the safety of the hedge, after being missed by the car wheels and the Tawny's claws.

January 19th

CADEBY ROAD

Little Owl sitting on a sapling stake in a row of large elms, it then flew down into a farmer's field in the hope of finding a few worms, which the farmer may have unearthed after ploughing his snow covered field.

January 30th

DENABY INGS

One Barn Owl flying low over Car Park in Nature Reserve and then into the fields beyond. The owl battled against a very strong wind but it did not seem to worry it that much. The owl just flew on, being tossed around like a leaf on the wind.

February 3rd

SPROTBROUGH WOOD

Better night weatherwise, mild with no wind and cloudy with a low mist in places. At least seven Tawny Owls took advantage of the mild night by hooting all over the area. Then, for some strange reason, all the Tawny owls came together in one place. All hooting Kee-wicking and low mewing as if they were holding a Tawny seminar. It seemed very eerie in the mist that shrouded the trees and the river.

February 15th

DENABY INGS

One Long Eared Owl seen at dusk flying low over the lake towards hides in search of a meal. It flew very silent and low over the undergrowth, gliding up to a wood post to warch and wait.

Three Short Tailed Voles seen earlier were enjoying our left-over Brazil nuts from Christmas.

March 16th

POTTERIC CARR

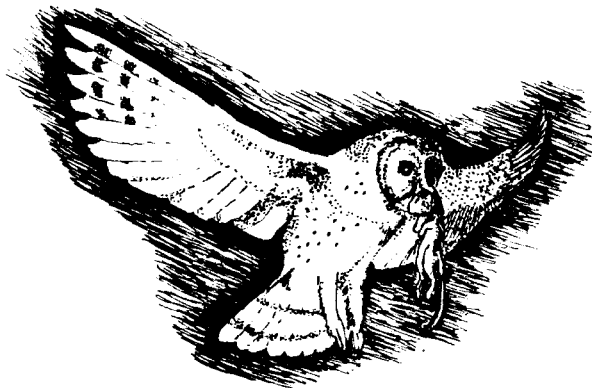
One Little Owl sat on a post in the middle of a snow covered field, watching rabbits run round the bottom of the post. The owl was very interested for a while, then lost all interest and flew off.

March 19th  
POTTERIC CARR

One Short Eared Owl perched on a fence post at the side of a dyke. This owl was really pale for a short eared, white breast and face with a light brown back. It was a big bird, we thought it was a female short eared. It had large yellow eyes and was very wary-it would not stay long when we wanted to watch. I decided to call this owl 'Elusive' for so it was. It would glide and hover over the dykes, the hovering was the more spectacular. It was like a large moth silhouetted in the night sky. The pale bird moved its wings, not fast, but gently backwards and forwards with its head bent downwards - a really lovely sight.

March 20th  
NEAR POTTERIC CARR

One Barn Owl seen resting on a fence post, all fluffed up and eyes closed. I tried for a photograph. The owl, though, was not keen on its picture being taken as he turned his back on us! Also seen was one Short Eared, darker than Elusive and smaller, dark brown back and head with light breast and heavily streaked. We hoped this would be a mate for Elusive. I called this one 'Scan' as his head was like a scanner, he was very fast at turning his head. We had seen them hunting and perched together many times though we never knew if these had any young. I would have liked to see the young owls' colours. Scan was not as wary as Elusive, he would stay and watch you, then carry on with his hunting. Short Eared Owls have really lovely eyes, big, wide and yellow which gives them a surprised look.



April 22nd  
FINNINGLEY

Two Short Eared Owls seen hunting over rough ground near the airfield, in the middle of the afternoon. Despite being mobbed by numerous mixed crows, they glided down into the long grass where they were well camouflaged - a perfect blend between the colour of the owls and the straw-coloured grass.

April 26th  
THORPE MARSH

One Little Owl sitting on a fence post quite near the road. It had grey and white markings, but the most prominent feature of this owl was its white eyebrows. I named this owl 'Smokey', because of its colour and because its home was near Thorpe Marsh Power Station.

May 3rd  
POTTERIC CARR

The Little Owl seen tonight was my favourite, the markings were perfect. It had a chestnut back that looked as if it had been flicked with drops of white paint. It had pure white feathers around its legs and its breast was a lighter brown, very heavily streaked with dark brown markings. There was no paleness on the body part at all and it had a dark brown head. There was no trace of paleness on the face at all, though it had very dark eyebrows, which gave the yellow eyes a disapproving expression or a frowning look. This Little Owl would either totally ignore you or would be totally curious and would watch every move. We took a good photograph of this Little Owl in one of its curious moods. This Little Owl earned the name 'Evil Eyes' because of the looks you would receive from those dark yellow eyes with their dark eyebrows. In fact, it looked as if it was wearing a Balalaclava Helmet.

July 1st  
FINNINGLEY

Three Little Owls, two adults and juvenile (there may have been more young but only one was seen).

Both adult Little Owls were brown and white mottled, pale eyebrows, yellow eyes. The juvenile was very pale grey with the largest greenest eyes I have ever seen., a lovely owl. Both parents were bringing mice back so if this juvenile were the only one then it was being fed well.

July 4th  
MELTON BRAND

One Long Eared Owl sat on a fence post by the cross roads, watching the world go by. It was a very long, slim owl, quite dark faced, tufts of feathers well up on the top of its head, like two pointed ears.

July 21st  
POTTERIC CARR

Two Long-Eareds were seen.

One Long-eared Owl was hunting up and down the dykes and in the long grass at the side of the road. The owl stopped now and again to hover over something that needed further investigation then flew on to go hunting elsewhere.

One Long Eared Owl sat on a fence post, then it started hunting the grass very opposite. It flew from the fence post to the grass verge, catching quite a few voles and mice throughout the evening. The first one caught, the owl took back to the fence post to eat itself. The next one was taken into the field and placed on the ground. The Owl walked round it once then left. After doing this, the owl flew back to the post and started to hunt again. This time the owl took the prey into Crackwillows, then returned again - a supreme hunter.

July 30th  
POTTERIC CARR NATURE RESERVE

One very dark Long Eared Owl sat on a tree stump near the dyke on the nature reserve. It then flew into the dyke, attacking a Wading Heron; the poor Heron made an alarm call, then took off and flew on to the lake. The Long Eared Owl made sure the Heron went, by escorting it all the way!

August 2nd  
POTTERIC CARR AND MELTON BRAND

One Long Eared Owl at Potteric Carr.  
Two Little Owls at Melton Brand.

The Long Eared Owl was seen hunting off the fence posts, not having much luck. It kept flying from the post, hovering over the grass, then flying further down the fence to settle once again. It would then fly off again along the edge of the embankment to hunt; this went on for the length of the fence. The owl then started hunting up the other embankment with the same procedure.

The two Little Owls seen at Melton Brand were very car shy, as soon as they saw the car headlights they flew off into a farmer's field. They might have been going there to hunt moths as there are plenty of moths there in the summer time.

August 11th  
LEVITT HAGG

A Tawny Owl sitting on a tree branch turned round to face my husband, after he had asked the Tawny to move so that he could get a better photograph, and gave us a good hoot in the face. It then flew off into a dense part of the wood where it continued to hoot for a while. (Photograph taken of a very obliging Tawny!).

August 24th  
POTTERIC CARR, LEVITT HAGG MELTON BRAND

One Long Eared Owl seen at Potteric Carr, sitting on a fence post all fluffed up, very content. (Fluffed up Long Eareds can easily be mistaken for large, fat cats with a squint eyes expression).

One Tawny Owl on Levitt Hagg was sitting on a branch overlooking the road, but it flew off as a car got near.

A Little Owl at Melton was sitting on top of a telegraph post and as the car passed the cheeky owl started bobbing up and down and making a laughing noise. It had gone when we went back.

An unidentified owl was also seen at Melton, flying across the road, although it was too dark for us to see what it was.

September 7th  
LEVITT HAGG

Five Tawny Owls heard on Levitt Hagg, four Tawnys hooting and mewing. One, which sounded like a juvenile, was heard Kee-wicking. It sounded as if they were disputing territories.

One Tawny was heard hooting in Flash, really good! Another Tawny was heard Kee-wicking on Flash. Plenty heard, none seen.

September 19th  
SPROTBROUGH FLASH MELTON BRAND

One Barn Owl seen in the Flash, flying around, hunting. One Barn Owl was also seen flying over fields at Melton, thought to be looking for easy prey in the short grass stubble left from harvesting.

A Little Owl was heard calling at Melton - he too had seen the Barn Owl.

October 15th

LEVITT HAGG AREA

At the roll call tonight (dusk) eight Tawny Owls were heard. There were some lovely hoots, Kee-wicks and mews, all in different places. One Tawny Owl was hooting in a tree and I walked up to the tree to see if I could see it, but it was too dark. The Tawny stopped hooting while I was near the tree, but carried on when I walked away. A night of the hooting Tawnys!

October 31st

POTTERIC CARR

A Little Owl was seen running around on the ground. It was a pale little owl, thought to be a juvenile. The same owl was sitting on a solitary post in the middle of a field later, all fluffed up, quite like a snowball.

November 8th

A Barn Owl was seen flying up and down the dykes hunting. It was a very windy night, the owl had trouble flying against or even with the wind. It even tried hovering, but it was far too windy. It then started to rain, so the Barn Owl flew off to find shelter.

November 17th

SPROTBROUGH FLASH

One pale Short Eared Owl sat on the edge of a hawthorn bush in bright sunshine. The owl was being mobbed by some magpies and two Jays. The owl ignored the noise of the magpies. Then one bold Jay worked its way down the bush until it was above the owl's head, which it then pecked! In the commotion that followed the the magpies and one of the Jays flew away across the wood, whilst the owl appeared to drop a prey item into the grass. The noise from the Jays and the magpies ceased and with no sign of the owl one of the Jays returned. It dropped into the grass beneath the bush and flew away with a small black creature maybe a vole or a shrew. It was limp so it must have been freshly killed.

December 1st

POTTERIC CARR LEVITT HAGG

One Little Owl was seen at Potteric, sitting very high up in the top of a hawthorn bush, looking like a bauble on a Christmas tree. One Barn Owl was seen also - it was all fluffed up and kept falling asleep. He did not even bother

about watching us or us watching him. This was a much larger Barn Owl, more orange buff underparts than the smaller owl seen earlier, it also had very black eyes. A Tawny Owl was seen at Levitt Hagg, sitting on a branch over some boggy ground. After a while it flew further into the wood.

December 26th

LEVITT HAGG POTTERIC CARR

Two Tawny Owls heard at roll call (dusk) on Levitt Hagg. Keewick was answered by a hoot.

A Barn Owl was perched on usual fence post at Potteric. Three Long Eareds were seen in different places, all sitting on fence posts.

Little Owl seen sitting on a fence post.

A Short Eared was seen flying up dykes at Potteric, then coming to rest in a hawthorn bush. Later it was seen resting on a fence post.

All these owls looked very content and well fed.

All full from their Christmas Dinners!



# WHAT'S IN A NAME: BALBY LITTLEMOOR

Mick Brown

As a local resident who has lived all his life in the area now known as Littlemoor Lane, I have for some years been intrigued by that name. For this reason, I have carried out some research to find out whether the area was a heath/moor-like habitat in the distant past and, if so, what now remains of that habitat after almost one hundred and fifty years of industrial use.

The area now comprises the Balby First School and its grounds, also a small area of abandoned allotments; what is known locally as the 'Old Wagon Works' and the housing on the northern side of Littlemoor Lane and the whole of Orchard Street. I have not included this housing in the records, except to say that some of the flora recorded may be accepted as being garden escapes. The whole area lies on the Bunter Sandstone on the 50' contour (Map Ref:Se 566024)

In 1773 the area was open common, held by the Burgesses of Hexthorpe with Balby and a report in the Township Book records that on April 12th 1773, cattle were impounded for grazing on the Common on Littlemoor. With the Enclosure Award of 1785, an allotment of some eight acres was held by the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of Hexthorpe with Balby Township and the rest by Mrs.Katherine Aldam, Mary Massey, Ruth Smith, Mr.W.Edington and the Lordship of Doncaster. This area of some 14 acres was bounded ( and in some parts still is) by the public road known as the Littlemoor Road; an ancient lane known as the 'Outgang'; and the old Spansyke Dyke which bisected the Common on a line near the parish boundary between Balby and Doncaster (see map).

By 1830 the Moor was fields and orchards, hence the name of today of Orchard Street. On 10th January, 1851, it was agreed that a Mr.Rhodes should, in the name of the surveyors of roads for the Parish of Balby, attend a sale of land at the Reindeer Hotel for the purpose of purchasing a close of land belonging to Mr.Hutchinson of Doncaster "with a view to investing in such purchase a sum of £200 accruing from

the sale of a piece of land held by the Parish of Balby which had been awarded to the South Yorkshire Railway Co."

After the construction of the railway line which now connects Doncaster with Sheffield, the Moor was cut in half and the start of the industrialization of the Moor had begun.

In August 1866 a request was made to the South Yorkshire Railway Co. to remove 50 yards of fencing from Littlemoor Lane and the matter was still unresolved in 1870 when a meeting was held regarding the encroachment on the Lane by Mr.Ellis and Mr.Pybus, both employees of the S.Y.Railway Co. Mr.Pybus was asked to pay 5/- a year for the occupation of "the field".

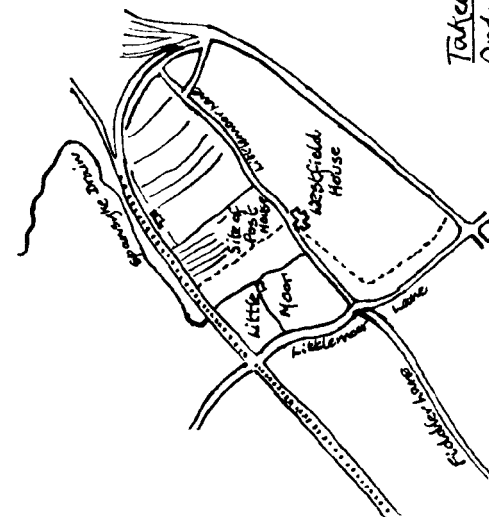
Throughout the mid to late 1870's meetings were held to hear of the stopping up of roads and pathways across the Moor and the objections to the building of a wall by the Railway Co. throughout the length of the Moor on both the Balby and Hexthorpe sides of its boundaries.(This wall still forms a boundary with the site of the old Wagon Works and Orchard Street and also appears in the school playing field)

In 1876 the Manchester/South Yorkshire/Lincolnshire Railway Co. made application to build a rail siding on the Moor. The siding was by 1900 forming part of the Doncaster Central Wagon Co. and the Stevens Wagon Works. The area to the south east of the boundary wall was in 1870 used by Balby Township for sand and gravel extraction and so it remained until 1953 when the Doncaster Corporation used the site for landfill. This action may account for some of the trouble experienced by some residents of Littlemoor Lane, when after heavy rainfall their rear gardens fill with water. The landfill affected the Spansyke dike and with the closing of the Wagon Works in 1962 the dike was again blocked on the railway side of the boundary wall and this turned the allotment gardens in that area into a swamp and so they were abandoned as unworkable. This then is a brief background history of Littlemoor over the past 200 years.



Taken from Enclosure  
Award Map. 1785

(Dotted line added to show study area)



Taken from the  
Ordnance Survey  
Map. 1854.



established throughout the area along with *Torilis japonica* (Hedge Parsley) and *Echium-vulgare* (Viper's Bugloss) with the grasses *Alopecurus-pratensis* (Meadow Foxtail) and *Anthoxanthum odoratum* (Sweet-vernal Grass) being much in evidence. The western side of the area bounded by the present Railway Depot (as is all the western area) is one of the places to find *Achillea-maritima* (Sea Wormwood).

#### Area C

This is at the northern side of the site and bounded on its east and west sides by Bunter Sandstone banks some ten to twelve feet high. It is partially covered by scrub of Sallow and Birch and still has what may be remains of a heathland flora with *Lotus corniculatus* (Bird's Foot Trefoil) *Hippocrepis comosa* (Horseshoe Vetch) and *Juncus effusus* (Soft Rush). The dominant flower of this area, however, is the Russell Lupin but these are reverting back to their wild blue state (These were garden escapes from the Wagon Works Office site which was situated in the area). The eastern bank also contains *Sedum acre* (Biting Stonecrop), *Sedum reflexum* (Reflex stonecrop) and *Saxifraga spathularis* (St. Patrick's Cabbage), which are also presumed to be garden escapes. Fungi such as *Lycoperdon perlatum* (Common Puffball), *Agaricus campestris* (Field Mushroom) are found in a good summer. The whole area is rich in fungi, no doubt due to the fact that with the closing of the works a large amount of timber (Oak, Beech and Pine) was left on the site and this encouraged fungi growth (See list).

#### Area D

In my opinion this is the most important as it is the wettest and richest in minerals. This site still retains what is left of the ancient Spansyke Dike and the whole site dips south to north to these remains and it was, until 1983, untouched since the Work's closure. In the spring of that year, the local Council incorporated part of the site into the school playing fields and what is now left is some 100 square yards which is within the school boundary but excludes the Dike. This area, in the vicinity of the Dike did, until the closing of the Works contain *Menyanthes-trifoliata* (Bog Bean), *Lemna-minor* (Lesser

Duckweed), *Callitriche stagnalis* (Water Starwort), *Najas* — *Phragmites-communis* (Common Reed), *Nardus stricta* (Matt Grass) and *Epilobium hirsutum* (Great Willow Herb) make up its flora but it is home to *Rana-temporaria* (Common Frog), which breed in it. The main flora on the rest of this site is that associated with more calcareous habitats and one species (*Anacamptis Pyramidalis* (Pyramidal Orchid) is almost unknown growing off the limestone (Ref. Lee's Flora, West Yorkshire). This, with *Dactylorhiza majalis* (Broad Leaved Marsh Orchid), *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, (Common Spotted Orchid) and in 1983 *Ophrys apifera* (Bee Orchid) make this area the most interesting.

I think I have shown that Littlemoor is reverting back to its original self with regard to its flora, with the additional interest of unusual and perhaps unique plants, which have found suitable conditions due to the nature of the minerals which have been introduced.

The area, because of its close proximity to a high urban population, is always under threat. (Three times in the past two years fires have been started which have done much damage). It is an area which is always being looked at with a view to redevelopment and, as is always the case in our modern age, wherever there is spare ground it is a "Dump it" site for people too idle to take their rubbish to the proper place.

In my opinion, this site is well worth protecting and preserving, containing species which are not only of local interest but of county interest also. When the school grounds were expanded over half the area containing orchids was destroyed, but a count made in 1985 produced a figure of over 280. To me it would seem that the school has a first class teaching aid on its own doorstep, if the pupils can be encouraged to help to preserve what is there.

With the ending of the S.Y.C.C. and its keen interest in the environment, I hope the Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council can take on the mantle locally and help to preserve this unusual and unique area, and take some

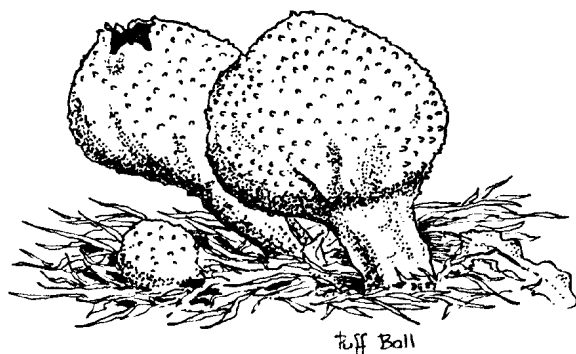
action which will afford it a degree of protection.  
 In conclusion, I would like to say that my observations have been made as an interested amateur over a good number of years and I hope this report will help to preserve something in an urban district which has lost a lot environmentally over the years.

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## HARES IN THE LANDSCAPE

D. Parker

#### Introduction

Over the years I have become interested in Britain's wild mammals, particularly those common or garden types you stand a chance of seeing within walking distance of your own back yard!  
 During my regular walks in the attractive, though increasingly arable and hedgeless terrain of the Bentley/Arksey area, I frequently catch glimpses of the spectacular though apparently little known native mammal, the Brown Hare, (*Lepus capensis*). In trying to learn more about this animal I found excellent accounts of its general biology and natural history in the HANDBOOK OF BRITISH MAMMALS (Corbet G.B. and Southern, W.N.(1977) Oxford) and YORKSHIRE MAMMALS (Delaney M.T. (1985) Bradford University). However, despite the high standard of these books, the authors admitted a paucity of research and could throw little light on my particular interest - how do hares utilise the ever increasingly unnatural landscape created by intensive arable agriculture? Perhaps here was a chance for the amateur naturalist to add to scientific knowledge.

#### Aims and Methods

My aim was to investigate the distribution, population and habitat preferences of the brown hare in the Bentley/Arksey area and Thorpe Marsh (SE/50). My field methods were simply to record every sighting during walks along the networks of public rights of way, taking special note of the date, exact locality, habitat and number of animals. The survey was undertaken from 26th May to 12th October, 1985.

#### Results

The present report concentrates on habitat preference and distribution; other aspects will be dealt with in subsequent studies.

Habitats available in the study area were: rough grassland, enclosed pasture, hayfields, woodland and scrub, marshland, hedgerows and verges and of course extensive arable land managed for cereals and root crops.

Hares were sighted on 36 occasions, most occurred singly though up to three were seen together, and most were feeding. The number of sightings in each habitat is shown in Fig.1 which indicates that the majority (69%) of recorded appearances were in pasture and rough grassland. Hayfields were also attractive to hares but there were fewer sightings in woodland and scrub and the arable areas only produced one sighting. None were seen in hedgerows or marshy areas.

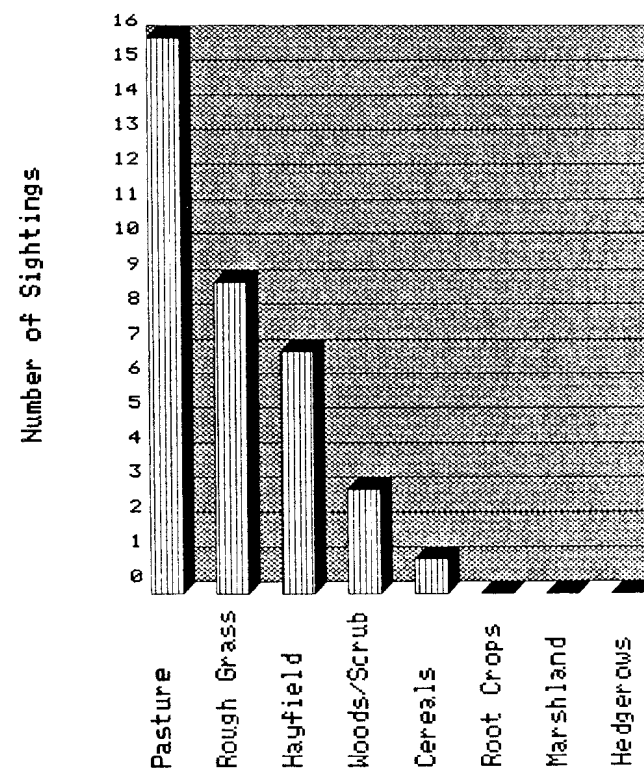
Fig.2 shows that of the sightings in enclosed pasture half were in fields not occupied by farm stock. Hares were seen in fields with cows on six occasions and horses on only two occasions. It was noticeable that when occupying the same field as farm stock, hares would keep well away from them.

#### Conclusions

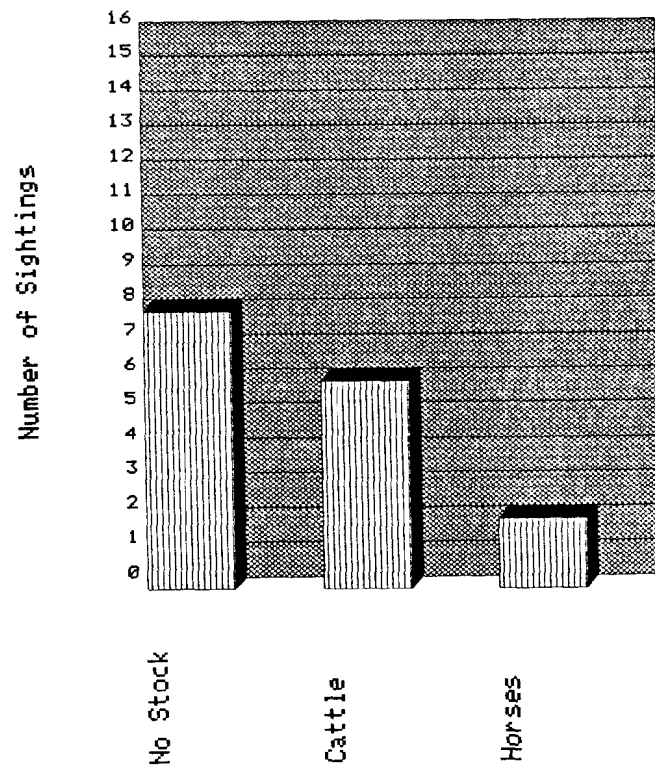
The pattern of habitat distribution and therefore of hare distribution was markedly affected by soil type. The alluvial areas, subject to intensive arable management were only infrequently used by hares, whereas the heavier clay soils, less suited to tilling and used for grazing land, and hay crops, were much preferred. The apparent pattern of habitat preference tended to concentrate animals on to unploughed river washland and flood embankments, adjacent hayfields and particularly the rough grassland of the Thorpe Marsh area.

Farm stock did not appear to affect the desirability of grazing habitats. Hares were just as likely to be found in fields with stock as without them. The higher number

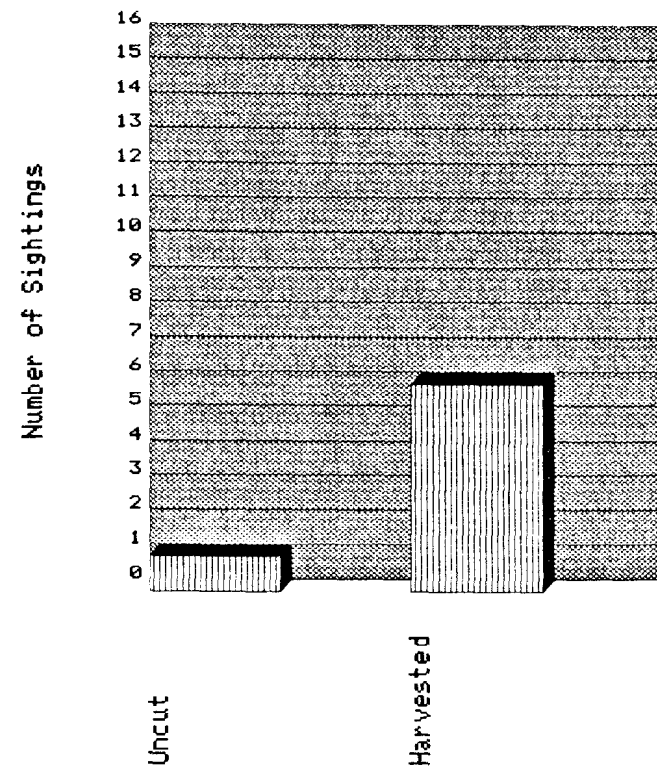
Hare Sightings BENTLEY Area May-Oct '85  
Fig. 1 Habitat Preference



Hare Sightings BENTLEY Area May-Oct '85  
Fig. 2 Preference in Pasture



Hare Sightings BENTLEY Area May-Oct '85  
Fig. 3 Preference in Hayfields



of records or hares sharing fields with cows than with horses probably tells us more about the relative frequencies of cattle and horses in the study areas than indicating any preference for the company of cows.

The apparent preference for hayfields after the removal of the main hay crop possibly suggests that hares take advantage of new herb growth during high summer when grass elsewhere is getting old, woody and perhaps less nutritious. However, the observations may also be telling us something about concealment and camouflage rather than habitat utilisation and feeding strategies - hares are simply more difficult to see amongst tall herbage. This may also explain the scarcity of sightings in well grown arable crops, woodlands and hedgerows.

The brown hare, traditionally regarded as a specialist of open arable land may now be finding this once favoured habitat undesirable and, even in their traditional Yorkshire strongholds, they are apparently undergoing a steady decline (Delaney 1985). In the Bentley/Arksey/Thorpe Marsh area they evidently prefer pasture, hayfields and rough grass land to intensively cultivated arable land - perhaps intensive farming is getting too intensive for them?

#### Acknowledgements

Throughout this project I have received constant encouragement and help from Doncaster M.B.C. Museums and Arts Service and I would particularly like to thank Mr. C.A. Howes for advice on conducting and writing up this study.

## THE CAMBERWELL BEAUTY IN DONCASTER

Keith Rich and Colin Howes

At 3 p.m. on 12th August 1982 a Camberwell Beauty Butterfly (*Nymphalis antiopa* L.) was seen by Keith Rich in the garden of 15 Belvedere, Balby, Doncaster (SF/55808) where it flew into a pet tortoise pen and, on being released, settled on a stag's horn surmac tree.

According to records on file at Doncaster Museum this represents the second local occurrence this century though with the breeding and releasing of non-local and exotic lepidopters becoming a popular hobby, records of this nature are difficult to interpret.

Periodically, under favourable weather conditions, influxes of this spectacular migratory species reach Britain from Scandinavia and northern Europe usually during the months of August and September.

Rev. F.O. Morris (1876) noted 1819 as an influx year and the researches of J.H. Duddington (1978) show that influxes also occurred in Britain in 1789, 1793, 1846, 1872, 1880, 1900, 1947 and 1976. Particularly notable years were 1872, with about 400 British records and 1976, with slightly less than 300. In South Yorkshire, during the 1872 invasion, John Harrison recorded six specimens around his home town of Barnsley, two of which are now preserved in the G.T. Porritt collection at Huddersfield Museum. Harrison also recorded it at Edlington Wood in 1875 and John Grassam of Sheffield recorded it from Doncaster pre 1883 (Porritt 1883). Other South Yorkshire historical records are from Leavygreen Road, Sheffield, pre 1884 and near Deepcar, Sheffield, around 1876 (Garland 1981).

Specimens were seen and caught in many parts of Yorkshire during the 1976 invasion and large influxes were reported from Lincolnshire (Duddington loc.sit.) and East Anglia (Guardian 22/9/1976).

Whiteley (1976) with the help of publicity from Radio Sheffield and 'The Star' received no less than 16 records, principally from the Sheffield/Rotherham area. The only Doncaster area record was one seen in a garden at Tickhill 14-15/9/1976 (Bill Ely pers.comm.), though to the east, Duddington (loc.sit.) reported three on the western outskirts of Scunthorpe during October.

Requiring cold dry winters in which to hibernate, few immigrants are able to survive through the relatively mild conditions usually experienced in Britain. However, 17 survivors from the 1976 invasion are known to have overwintered, two being Yorkshire examples - Abbeydale Park Rise, Sheffield, (Garland loc.sit.) and Burley-in-Wharfedale 1/5/1977 (Kydd 1977).

Most British records conform to the late summer influx and spring post-hibernation pattern though sporadic occurrences may be attributable to specimens being imported with timber from Scandinavia. This may be the basis of F.O.Morris's comment 'The neighbourhood of Rawmarsh near Rotherham, Yorkshire, is one of the most uniform for this rare insect that I am aware of'.

1982 has certainly been an exciting year for the butterfly and moth enthusiast with numbers of orange tip, wall butterfly, red admiral, painted lady, peacock and small tortoiseshell exceeding the experience of many observers. Occurrences of white-letter hairstreak and speckled wood have also added to the excitement, though initial optimism over the wild status of privet hawk moth, caught by a cat at Warmsworth 8/6/1982 was dashed when it was discovered that someone living in Mill Lane was releasing specimens! Let's hope that the camberwell beauty was not from a similar stable.

#### References

- Duddington J.H. (1978) The ecological diversity of Lincolnshire and South Humberside, with reference to the macro-lepidoptera. Transactions of the Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union 19,3:117-127
- Garland S.(1981) Butterflies of the Sheffield Area Sorby Record special series No.5 Sheffield.
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- Morris Rev.F.O. (1876) A History of British Butterflies London. Bell.
- Porritt G.T. (1883) List of Yorkshire Lepidoptera Entomological Transactions of the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union Vol.2 Leeds.
- Whiteley D. (1976) The Camberwell Beauty in Sheffield - 1976. Sorby Record. 14: 44-45.



Summer Programme 1987

Sat. May 9th. Roche Abbey...Ian Macdonald...Museum 1.30p.m.  
 " May 16th. Meeting and outing with Royal Entomological Society  
 Sun May 17th. Details see P. Skidmore  
 Sat. May 23rd. Melton Woods Talkabout ....Museum 1.30p.m.  
 Wed. May 27th. Warrington Lane End.....D.M. Bramley.....Museum 6.30p.m.  
 Sat. May 30th. Y.N.U. Austwick  
  
 Sat. June 6th. Idle Stop .....M. Hanson.....Museum 1.30p.m.  
 Wed. June 10th. Conisboro' Northcliffe & Castle.....P. Skidmore...Museum 6.30p.m.  
 Sat. June 13th. Y.N.U. Sprotborough  
 Sat. June 20th. Sutton Bank, Gormire etc....D. Bramley...Museum 9.30 a.m.  
 Wed June 24th. Anston Stones Wood..Ian Macdonald .... Museum 6.30p.m.  
 Sat. June 27th. Chee Dale, Derbyshire...D.M. Bramley.....Museum 9.30 a.m.  
  
 Sat. July 4th. Y.N.U. Thornwick  
 Sat. July 11th. Bentley Tilts and Castle Hills...M. Hanson & H. Ackroyd..Museum 1.30p.m.  
 Sat. July 18th. Lound Nature Reserve ...D.M. Bramley....Museum 1.30p.m.  
 Sat July 25th. Y.N.U. Richmond  
 Wed. July 29th. Barrow Hills....P. Skidmore.....Museum 6.30p.m.  
  
 Wed. Aug 5th. Auckley....H. Ackroyd.....Museum 6.30p.m.  
 Sat. Aug. 15th. Gall Workshop...Denaby Ings...J. Pearson...Museum 1.30p.m.  
 Sun. Aug. 23rd. Y.N.U. Bridestones  
  
 Sat. Sept. 5th. Fungus Foray ...R. Taylor....Museum 1.30p.m.

Notes:- For all Y.N.U. Meetings; if you are interested to go..please contact  
 D. Bramley for details. Tel:- Don. 535246

Officers of the Society 1987

President: Mr. G. Mitchell

Secretary: Mrs. V. Daniels

Treasurer: Mrs. G. Chapman

Assistant

Secretary for Conservation and Public Relations : Mr. D. Gagg

Programme: Mr. D. Bramley

Minutes: Mr. H. Ackroyd and then for next winter,  
 Mr. D. Allen

Recorders

Arthropods..... P. Skidmore  
 C. A. Howes

Ornithology..... M. Hanson

Freshwater Biology... H. Ackroyd

Geology ..... D. Bramley

Botany ..... D. M. Bramley  
 I. Macdonald

Mollusca ..... P. Skidmore

Other Vertebrates.... C. A. Howes

Mycology..... R. Taylor