

AMPHIBIANS AND MAMMALS AT THE EYES

AMPHIBIANS

Since the first article on amphibians in last year's Report there have been several important events in the life of the pond excavated on No. 3 bed. Unfortunately it has proved impossible to keep water in the pond in the summer months when, despite heavy rain last year, the water table obviously falls below the pond bottom. In addition it has proved very difficult to eradicate the reed grass sufficiently to allow other plants to colonise the area.

On the credit side, however, there are some happy events to report. Both Crested and Smooth Newts bred last year, using the polythene-lined ditches that have been dug near the pond. There are now four of these ditches; each 6' x 2' x 1½' deep. An interesting point is that the newts bred in separate ditches, although in other situations they breed in the same pond without much conflict. I was able to confirm that one ditch held 25 juvenile Smooth Newts, and another two juvenile Crested Newts. As young newts are delicate I did not search too vigorously, but I feel sure there were more young Crested Newts in their ditch.

I should like to thank everyone who brought in bucketfuls of frog spawn. You will be pleased to know that the area was inundated with tadpoles, most of which turned into froglets, able to mature in a safe environment. If anyone can obtain toad spawn this spring I should be most grateful, but please remember that no spawn or young or adult amphibians may be collected unless their site is endangered.

In the long term it is unlikely that the pond on No. 3 bed will survive in its present form, and it is hoped that a new one, or possibly two, will be dug nearer the water. This should ensure that there is always water in the pond even in summer, and if so the animals will be transferred from the old pond to this more suitable environment.

MAMMALS

Most visitors to the Eyes probably do not realise the amount of mammal activity that occurs in and around the Reserve; in itself this is not unusual as most animals are, after all, either very shy or nocturnal.

Rabbits, for example, are not particularly numerous, and are found in only two localised areas, sometime indicated by the protective strips around the bases of some trees! One of their control factors, amongst several, is probably that of the wide-ranging Fox, although its diet is primarily that of smaller prey and the inevitable carrion found amongst concentrated numbers of wildlife.

Mink, until recent times, were seen more often than was felt desirable, particularly during daylight hours. It could well be that they have reverted to their nocturnal habits for they are rarely recorded now and certainly do not appear to cause any undue harm or damage.

Stoats and Weasels, as expected, are fairly common, and if the opportunity arises can be fascinating to watch. They are inquisitive creatures and unless startled will usually reappear for another look at you. They frequent all four beds, which reflects the amount of available food, usually in the form of Mice, Voles, Shrews, nestling birds and

rabbits. It would be interesting to hear from anyone who has had any encounters with either animals at Woolston - remember the Stoat is the larger and has a black-tipped tail.

Of the smaller mammals Common Shrew and Short-tailed Field Vole appear to be quite common, especially on No. 3 bed where, due to management work there is more disturbance. The Woodmouse is, however, seldom noted and indeed of the two I have seen, one was taken by a Kestrel. Water Voles have been observed, among other places, in front of the Hide on No. 3 bed on several occasions by both Wardens and Permit Holders; it is a vole and not a 'Water Rat' as it is often called. It is a very endearing creature as it unhurriedly swims by or is seen weaving itself around the stem of a tasty reed. Brown Rats are not normally seen on the Reserve, but are confined mainly to the Ship Canal and adjacent buildings.

The status of Hedgehogs on the Reserve is not clear, it is after all mainly a nocturnal animal by habit, which may explain why very few have been noted. The only one I have seen was on No. 4 bed where all that remained of it was the skin, which smelt strongly of Fox!

Two unidentified species of Bat hunt along the River Mersey and around the Reserve. I suspect that they are Pipistrelle and Daubenton's but if anyone can positively identify them I should be pleased to hear, and if possible also where they might roost.

Lastly, it takes only a few seconds to jot down a mammal record and where the animal was seen; all such records are valuable indicators and much needed.

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David Edwards

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WINTER WILDFOWL COUNTS 1985

	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mar</u>	<u>Sep</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>
Mute Swan	3	-	1	1	2	-	3
Canada Goose	-	-	-	-	34	26	-
Shelduck	-	2	-	3	1	-	-
Wigeon	-	2	-	6	7	8	4
Gadwall	-	2	4	12	40	10	15
Teal	913	1600	200	500	540	500	1500
Mallard	536	541	96	263	200	200	147
Pintail	42	106	15	8	23	30	91
Shoveler	109	110	52	367	510	141	120
Pochard	245	140	255	82	177	244	418
Tufted Duck	88	60	84	49	19	61	41
Goldeneye	1	5	5	-	-	4	1
Ruddy Duck	3	17	73	125	179	81	19
Scaup	-	6	-	-	-	1	-
Great Crested Grebe	-	3	-	-	-	-	1
	1940	2594	785	1416	1732	1306	2360